

12 October 2017

£4.7 million to boost economic growth in the east of England

Universities Minister Jo Johnson has announced today (Thursday 12 October) that the Government is investing £4.7 million to grow the economy through improved productivity in the eastern region by encouraging collaboration between universities and businesses.

The Eastern Academic Research Consortium (Eastern ARC) – comprising the universities of Essex, East Anglia and Kent – has been awarded £4.7 million by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to establish a network that will support business innovation in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Kent.

The Enabling Innovation: Research to Application (EIRA) network will build collaborations with businesses and those partnerships will collectively have access to new funding, training, networking opportunities and collaborative working space.

Vanessa Cuthill, Director of the Research and Enterprise Office at the University of Essex which is leading the project on behalf of Eastern ARC, said: “We have world leading research in the east of England across our higher education sector, but the region scores lower than the UK average for productivity and growth.

“This network aims to change this by harnessing the resources of regional universities and connecting businesses with our expertise, particularly across the areas that Eastern ARC specialises in – artificial intelligence, agri- tech, and digital creative.”

Professor Anthony Forster, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Essex said: “We’re determined to put our research into action to help drive growth in the region and support innovation in businesses.

“This new funding will allow us to transform the relationship between universities and the private sector to deliver on the huge potential of the eastern region by sharing knowledge and expertise.”

Joining the universities of Essex, East Anglia and Kent in the network will be higher education partners the University of Suffolk, Writtle University College, Norwich University of the Arts and Harlow College. Initial partners include BT, South East LEP, New Anglia LEP, Digital Catapult, TechEast and Agri-Tech East.

Fraser Burton, Head of BT University Research, said: “BT is keen to translate research into innovation and useful products and services and we will directly support and collaborate with this initiative and advise on its future direction. EIRA’s research expertise and innovation will not only find application in telecommunications, but will prove useful for many diverse areas of the digital economy, especially in the east of England.”

The funding has been allocated from the £20 million first round of HEFCE’s Connecting Capability Fund which supports universities in working together and with external partners to commercialise research, and contributes to the delivery of the Government’s Industrial Strategy.

Eastern ARC’s EIRA network project was one of just four major projects awarded funding in the first round.

Ends

- Notes to editors –

Eastern ARC members

Achieving excellence in education and research for over 50 years, the **University of Essex** has established a global reputation. With two subjects ranked in the top 100 in the world, we are an international community for original thinkers who believe in challenging convention and seek to change the world for the better. We are Gold-rated in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF 2017) and rank in the top 20 UK universities for research excellence – we are consistently top in politics. Our students have voted us 14th in England for student satisfaction.

The **University of East Anglia** (UEA) is a UK Top 15 university. Known for its world-leading research and outstanding student experience, it was awarded Gold in the Teaching Excellence Framework and has achieved a Top 5 ranking for overall satisfaction in the National Student Survey every year since the survey began in 2005. UEA is a leading member of Norwich Research Park, one of Europe's biggest concentrations of researchers in the fields of environment, health and plant science.

Established in 1965, the **University of Kent** – the UK's European university – now has almost 20,000 students across campuses or study centres at Canterbury, Medway, Tonbridge, Brussels, Paris, Athens and Rome. It has been ranked 22nd in the Guardian University Guide 2018 and 25th in the Complete University Guide 2018, and in June 2017 was awarded a gold rating, the highest, in the UK Government's Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

Partners

At the **University of Suffolk**, we prepare our students for a world where nothing ever stays the same. We embrace change, and our students learn to embrace change too. As the newest university in the UK, we have absorbed the best university traditions and aligned them with a twenty-first century audience and the modern world of employment and entrepreneurship. Our purpose is to change lives- of individuals and communities- for the better. We embrace our role as independent stewards of community life and values; an anchor institution proud of its central ambition of working collaboratively to transform our local communities. We are strongly embedded in the local region. Our unique, integrated partnership with three of the region's Colleges is central to our identity and our vision for the future. We have an attractive portfolio of courses within Arts and Humanities; Children, Young People and Education; Psychology, Sociology and Social Work; Business and Management; Health; and Science and Technology.

Writtle University College is located just outside the city of Chelmsford and has been providing specialist, land based education since 1893. The institution provides courses at various study levels, including apprenticeships and short courses, as well as further and higher education. WUC achieved University College status in 2016.

Norwich University of the Arts is one of the UK's leading institutions for art, design and media education. NUA is ranked in the UK's top 10 for teaching quality by The Times/Sunday Times Good University Guide 2018 and rated gold in the 2017 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). From a historic campus in the heart of Norwich, NUA matches first class teaching with industry-standard resources, working practice, and strong links to business. The university's mission is to be the best specialist institution for arts, design, architecture and media study in Europe.

Agri-Tech East is the UK's first and largest membership organisation for agri-tech, bringing together businesses and academia across different disciplines to help improve the productivity, efficiency and sustainability of UK agriculture and horticulture. Agri-Tech East has become an internationally recognised catalyst for open innovation and entrepreneurship, helping to bring new ideas and thinking to the industry to become a commercial reality.

TechEast is the digital technology cluster body for the East of England. We welcome the creation of an enhanced network of universities, building on the existing Easter Academic Research Consortium (EACH), and businesses that will deliver improved innovation support to the digital and ICT tech sector within the region in key areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Digital Creative. We will help companies in our network understand the range of support available and access it. In particular we recognise the need to support those micro businesses and SMEs which have the potential to become scale-ups in order to achieve increased productivity.

Digital Catapult is a technology innovation centre that unlocks digital growth in the UK economy. It works with companies of all sizes to transform their businesses by accelerating the practical application of digital innovation. We bridge the gap between research and industry, finding the right technologies to solve problems, increase productivity and open up new markets faster. Digital Catapult connects experts with established enterprises, start-up and scale-up businesses, and researchers to discover new ways of solving big technological challenges in the digital manufacturing and creative industries. It provides experimental and testing facilities and access to experts so that new services and applications can be trialled to brought to market faster and we do this across the UK via our five innovation centres. This breaks down barriers to technology adoption for start-ups and small businesses, de-risks innovation for enterprises and uncovers new commercial applications for digital technology in the fields of immersive, connectivity, data and artificial intelligence.

For more information please contact the University of Essex Communications Office on 01206 872400 or email: comms@essex.ac.uk