



Wolverhampton Telford
Technology Corridor

What can WTTC do for you? Find out at the Wolverhampton Telford Technology Corridor Launch Event at the Wolverhampton Science Park on 1st December.

For further information, please contact Jill McCallum on 01902 321748/824289 or email Jill@technology-corridor.co.uk

New £27m technology 'route' offers prospects for regional business

Iron and coal put Wolverhampton and Telford on the economic map, once making them key players in European manufacturing industry.

Special Report

But times change, and now, backed by substantial investment from Advantage West Midlands and European funding the area is turning to technology and innovation as the means to help shape future economic success in the region.

This strategy is centred on the development of the Wolverhampton-Telford Technology Corridor (WTTC), which will help create the conditions and circumstances for small and medium businesses to bring cutting-edge technology and innovative ideas to market. With £27 million behind it, WTTC will offer companies in the 'corridor' including Telford to the west and Wolverhampton and the Black Country to the east, tap into support packages, technical excellence and the experience of others.

"Creating a specific technology corridor makes sense," says WTTC director, Mike Norris, "given the nature, quality and range of technologically-orientated companies we have in the region. Commercially they add high value and spin-offs from them mean there is a ripple effect as they employ more and buy more from within the region. And, by highlighting the presence of these 21st century companies, we really give the region a new and modern identity."

The WTTC, unveiled early in 2003, will officially launch on December 1st at Wolverhampton Science Park where those with an involvement in the region's innovative technology sector will have the opportunity to not only find out more about what it can do for them, but to exploit a useful networking opportunity, something which is very much at the forefront of WTTC thinking.

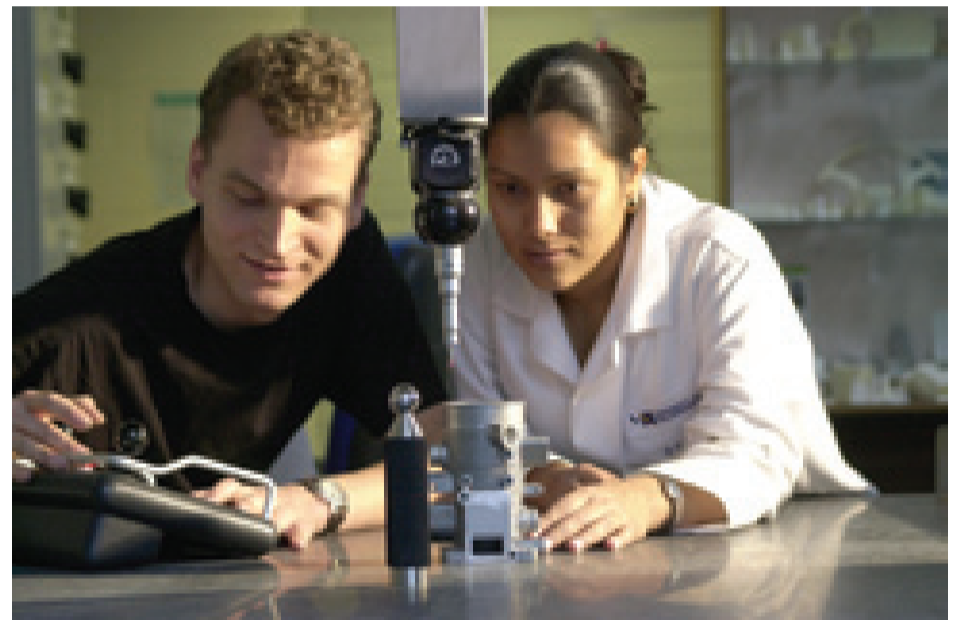
"Connection and collaboration are the key words for us," says Mike Norris, "rather than that other 'c' word, competition. If you bring businesses and people together you create new opportunities as they share information and combine new thinking. And for the smaller company this is can be imperative if you are to find your niche in the marketplace." To illustrate the point you only need look at two elements that fall under the WTTC umbrella, both based on the concept of 'clustering'.

This works on the simple principle that where there is a concentration of expertise you should exploit and expand it by encouraging collaboration between companies and organisations. Do that

and you create new opportunities, recruit more easily and benefit from shared experience. That's better than working in isolation. Indeed, such is the perceived importance of clustering that it was singled out as the most effective way to achieve sustainable regional economic development in the West Midlands Economic Strategy.

In the WTTC there are already two clusters: the Polymer Cluster (with a Centre located in Telford) and the Advanced Engineering Cluster (with a Centre located in Wolverhampton), providing between them a package of support and collaborative opportunities currently for more than 25 companies. Eventually there are likely to be some 200 companies in a cluster, all adding sustainable and high value employment in the region.

Mike Norris said: "The success of two clusters of companies in the area shows



CMM data capture for reverse engineers or for comparison to original design data

the benefits that can be gained for firms working in the same field as their competitors and enhancing their own business without detriment to others. Indeed seeing theirs get stronger too. But they cannot do it alone. Working to build strong alliances together is the way forward as our successes have already indicated.

"We are not just throwing money at the issues. Grants in isolation are not enough. We want to work with people and companies to offer the financial assistance in carefully drawn up strategies and support packages to meet their aims and objectives. The early success stories indicate what can be

CAT scan data from a hospital was used in a collaborative project to produce a life-size replical model using rapid prototyping machinery





achieved in this cluster environment. We want other people and businesses to get involved."

WTTC's commitment to driving the region's forward the region is being further bolstered by the £7m E-innovation centre being set up in Telford, focused

initially on nurturing 35 hi-tech SMEs involved in e-learning and e-business; and the ICT Futures Centre earmarked for Wolverhampton city centre. Add to this, plans for the Integrated Innovation Initiative (I3) to develop the skills of would-be entrepreneurs - recent graduates with innovative ideas for their

At a glance
Other successes have already been documented as the WTTC seeks to expand and promote its reputation in the knowledge-based sector.

- Howell - Tomkins Ltd.** An automotive company diversifying into table giftware. The firm required help in developing a new giftware candle holder range. Continuing support from the Advanced Engineering Cluster including 3D CAD models, rapid prototypes and marketing advice. Support will continue through tooling into production.
- Wulfrun Fabrications Ltd.** A welding/ fabrication firm diversifying into narrowboat building. The Advanced Engineering Cluster will provide a marketing strategy along with an improved production layout for the factory and introduce CAD into the process. There are potential networking opportunities with other welder/fabricators in the pipeline.
- Ditech Ltd.** A company fabricating plastic boxes for the waste handling, automotive and retail industry. Seeking to develop a plastic product for the bulk vegetable market to replace wooden boxes, which cause splinters and are hard to clean. It sought specific help from the Polymer Cluster to consider ways to reinforce and design the plastic box and introduce it to partner companies who can help create the final product.
- Black Country Business Link.** Helped unite three disability nurses with polymer engineering expert Dr Nick Turner at the Warwick Manufacturing Group to help create a teaching aid to help assist in breast cancer awareness. As a delivery partner within the Polymer Cluster, WMG helped create a fibreglass mannequin with silicone rubber implants to help teach in particular, women with learning difficulties, how to self-inspect for breast cancer. The model was launched during Breast Cancer Awareness Month, October 2003.

Sound Advice Leads to Market

A unique device should soon be bringing relief to an incredible one in ten people in the UK. But 'Aurex-3', a handheld device to limit the suffering of people with the constant ear ringing condition tinnitus, almost did not make it past a prototype.

Bewdley-based Carepoint Group first imported the tinnitus relief aid for sale across Europe after director Dr Mark Brenner met its American founder, the late Alfonso Di Mino, in 1998. Dr Di Mino, who developed his device after suffering from the condition, died last year and, after approval from his son Andre Di Mino, Dr Brenner was offered the chance to redesign, manufacture and relaunch the product in the UK. With the aims of reducing the price of the device from £1,200 to £500 and making it both more robust and easier to use, Carepoint teamed up with ultrasound specialists Shrewsbury Medical in a joint venture to source, assemble and package the product for sale across Europe and America.

Organisations in the Polymer Cluster helped provide profiles to reproduce materials used in the original

design, including injection mouldings, and helped in the selection of the internal electrical devices. "We were 80 per cent there but just needed that extra assistance in terms of knowledge-based engineering and design excellence. There's no doubt the cluster offered that joined-up thinking approach to provide a positive channel of expertise to help us succeed. It is definitely the way forward to help other companies achieve their aims," says Mark Brenner.



Director, Mike Norris

own profitable enterprises, and there's a buzz to the Corridor.

"The West Midlands has a strong heritage in innovation and the WTTC can help shape a dynamic environment that



Dr Brenner has helped formulate the new device to bring relief to potentially thousands of UK sufferers.

embraces high technology and in which companies can work together to attain world class economic acclaim for the region," says Mike Norris. "Now its for them to take advantage."



Finding solutions for business... turning ideas into enterprise

Packages of practical help, support and collaborative opportunities are available to companies in the Corridor region. Our Cluster Centres offer help and advice on new opportunities, the latest technologies, new products and markets, research and development, design, rapid prototyping, material selection and testing, manufacturing and training.

- Explore your opportunities for innovation and new product development
- Learn about the latest technologies
- Gain the expertise and contacts to increase your competitiveness

For an informal discussion on eligibility and support, please contact one of our Cluster Champions.

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