HIGH TECH NEWS

LEP to set up £24m investment fund

A £24m fund to boost growth in the region is being set up by the the West of England (WoE) Local Economic Partnership (LEP).

The funds will be available to companies across the region over the next two years and will follow rules set by the European Union Regional Growth Fund. This will allow grants of up to 60% for research and development projects that promote growth in the region as well as smaller proportions for other projects.

The LEP sector groups (page 6) have been feeding back on how they would like to see such a fund run and each group should will have an advisor with information on applying for the funds when the fund is launched.

iNet project looks to next scheme

The South West Microelectronics iNet project is looking at a further two year scheme following the success of the programme.

The Microelectronics project has supported over 200 companies over the last three years and finishes in June.

"One of the first tasks is assessing what worked and what didn't," said Rick Chapman, director of the SW Microelectronics iNet. "We are now shaping a bid across the five iNets for an innovation accelerator," he said. "That is still at the bid phase with UK government. It will be ERDF funded and we are confident as there is a lot of support from the SME community and there is a continued market need for each of these programmes."

"One of the things we'd like to do is have one larger programme across the sectors with one coordinating programme office and delivery," said Chapman. We would like to have the new iNet onstream during 2013 and we are retaining is the bespoke tailored support around a project so it's on-the-ground support. For me the key is the existing iNets and the new Inet will continue to support the SMEs that need to thrive regardless of the national agenda."

See the full interview at www.swinnnovation.co.uk

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In this Issue

"Bristol is now the only city in the UK to have won funding from Government to be both a Super Connected City and a Future City and that gives us a pot of nearly £15m to use"

- Bristol Mayor George Ferguson

Street furniture comes alive in world's first Playable City

Lamp posts, bus stops and post boxes will soon play an even more important role in how Bristol operates as the result of a £30,000 award which will change the way people interact with the city.

The Watershed has announced Hello Lamp Post! as the winner of Bristol's first ever Playable City Award, which attracted 93 entries from around the world. The award has attracted attention across the country, with stories in the Telegraph and Huffington Post.

The new art and technology project invites audiences to tune in to the secret conversations of the city and communicate through lamp posts, bus stops, post boxes and other street furniture this summer. Part game, part story, anyone can play by texting in a unique code found on the city's familiar street objects.

"Hello Lamp Post! is hugely exciting and the University is pleased to support this fantastic initiative which supports Bristol's rightful place on the global cultural map," said David Alder, Director of Marketing and Communications at the University of Bristol which was one of the backers of the Playable City project.

Lamp posts, bus stops and post boxes are so ubiquitous that they have become invisible. The 'smart city' approach is to augment them with technologies like digital displays, but Hello Lamp Post! seeks instead to make them playable, using existing city infrastructure to make an open, hospitable and playful experience which encourages people to interact with what is around them.

The project will use the codes that city councils and public servants use to tell one object from another when a light bulb needs changing or a bus stop is in need of repair. For the first time, city dwellers will be able to use these codes too in order to play a game and tell a story.

The £30,000 commission seeks to create an original, future-facing work, which uses creative technology to explore the theme of the playable city.

www.watershed.co.uk

Universities create GW4 grouping to drive research…

The Universities of Bath, Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter today announced a formal collaboration, to boost research expertise and capability in the South West of England and Wales.

The collaboration will explore and identify opportunities for combined research to address global challenges, while also maximising the impact of and return on investment from research funding.

The group of four research intensive universities, each of which have significant research capabilities and which represent a total turnover in excess of £1,300 million, will be known as the GW4.

Professor Eric Thomas, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bristol, said: "Regional groupings of research intensive universities are a rapidly emerging and important evolution, enabling the sharing of research infrastructure and the identification of thematic areas of expertise. These will be increasingly important in order for universities to address grand intellectual and societal challenges."

Professor Dame Glynis Breakwell, Vice Chancellor of the University of Bath and the higher education representative on the board of the WoE LEP, said: "The collective strength of the new grouping is much more than the sum of its individual parts. Taken together, the breadth and depth of our research expertise is truly impressive providing a powerful new contender in the increasingly intense competition for research funding on both the national and international level."

… as Bath and Exeter team up for graphene research

The universities of Bath and Exeter have have received more than £1.1 million to commercialise the technology at their joint joint R&D unit, the Centre for Graphene Science, The potential uses include electronics, flexible touch screens, biosensors and in composite materials.

A team led by Exeter's professor David Wright and professor Simon Bending of Bath will look at new techniques of manufacturing. Current methods for the manufacture of graphene have many drawbacks that act as barriers to the successful development of graphene products," said Wright. "Our goal is to accelerate the commercial exploitation of graphene by developing new ways of manufacturing and using the material."

www.siliconsouthwest.co.uk

GE sets up Subsea Centre at Aztec West…

GE's Oil & Gas Subsea Systems subsidiary is creating a new subsea centre in Bristol at the Aztec West Business Park, creating 200 new jobs in 2013. GE Oil & Gas currently employs 550 people in Bristol, where it has operated since 1980. The company's Subsea Systems headquarters in Aberdeen employs more than 800 people.

GE's subsea production equipment is one of the world's main suppliers for subsea field development, with more than 1,000 systems installed worldwide.

www.ge-energy.com

… as TDK-Lambda sets up Power Technology Centre at Science Park

TDK-Lambda has set up an Advanced Technology Centre for its power supply research and development at the Bristol and Bath Science Park.

"The opening of the Advanced Technical Centre is a natural progression for TDK-Lambda and part of our plans is to bring more new leading-edge products to market faster," said TDK-Lambda's chief technology officer Andy Skinner who leads a team of six. "We will focus on all aspects of power supply development, including algorithms for digital control, new topologies and innovative thermal and mechanical design techniques."

TDK-Lambda makes power supplies in Ilfracombe, Devon, and wanted to tap into the skills in the area. "By basing our Advanced Technology Centre here, we have access to a wide pool of highly skilled technology professionals," said Skinner.

www.uk.tdk-lambda.com

XMOS moves to new offices….

Bristol chip designer XMOS has moved to new offices alongside Nokia in Wine Street in the city. The move brings the team of 30 together in one space and has room to double the staffing, says Nigel Toon, CEO.

… and creates world's biggest range of multicore controllers

XMOS has launched a new range of microcontrollers, creating what it claims is the industry's largest range of embedded multicore devices. The L Series adds 6-, 10- and 12-core variants, plus new memory size options, to the existing 8- and 16-core products in its xCORE family, which now includes over 50 devices, making it the world's broadest range.

The new products join the recently announced xCORE-USB devices, and existing members of the general purpose L series (formerly known as L1 and L2). The L-series now ranges from the 6-core XS1-L6 to the 16-core XS1-L16-128. The new L8-128 integrates 128Kbytes of on-chip RAM and delivers enhanced performance, with each of the eight logical cores able to deliver up to 125MIPS of computing power. The introduction of 10- and 12-core options provides xCORE users with more flexibility in balancing the price and performance requirements of their products. And the L-Series is organized into two pin-compatible groups.

"We have a unique fundamental technology that offers unbeatable predictability, parallelism, performance, and overall cost-per-MIPS," said said Ali Dixon, Co-Founder and Director of Product Management at XMOS. "These products will bring that technology to many new applications and support our rapid expansion into sectors such as consumer, industrial and automotive."

Devices based on the XMOS xCORE multicore architecture with Hardware Response can perform multiple simultaneous tasks, delivering a new level of performance and real-time response in a low cost easy-to-use software programmable platform. As a result engineers can implement functions that traditionally required hardware, by writing a software program.

The xCORE Hardware-Response I/O technology allows XMOS to provide ready-made and adaptable xSOFTip for a wide variety of functions, from communications protocols to motor control, and LCD drivers to audio equalization. The supporting xTIMEcomposer Studio development tools offer designers access to multicore processing using a familiar C/C++ environment. xTIMEcomposer Studio includes static timing analysis and cycle-accurate simulation tools, making it easy for designers to meet precise real-time requirements. These tools are available to download free of charge at *www.xmos.com/tools*.

Intelligent Media group bring together tech and content…

A new Special Interest Group in Bristol and Bath is aiming to bring together the world-leading expertise in both video technology and content production in the region. The "Intelligent Media" project aims to develop quality content with the metadata to enable multiple workflows, automate context-based delivery and capitalize on the next generation of chip and software technology.

The market opportunity stretches from chips through software to applications and content and the group aims to identify a typical flow in content tagging through to delivery and interaction. Round table discussion will ask participants to develop and challenge the opportunity, setting the strategy and developing milestones for 2013 and beyond.

The session is part of Digital Bristol Week and takes place at 3pm on Friday 1st February at The BBC on Whiteladies Road (BS8 2LR) and will be presented by Mike Bartley, Paul Appleby (Local Enterprise Partnership Chairs for High-Tech & Creative), with Ken Helps of InnovTV and Harry Grinling.

For security reasons you MUST register here at the Eventbrite page and you should select a ticket for "14.00-16.00: Business Day Conference" at either 2pm or 3pm..

… as Digital Bristol Week showcases technology

The Digital Bristol Week showcased broadcast technology on its Technology Day on Tuesday, 29 January. Nick Sturge, Director of the SETsquared business acceleration centre was joined by Professor Dave Bull, whose work in video analysis, compression and communications has had a significant commercial impact., and experts from Dolby and BBC R&D. The SETsquared team will be displaying a number of exciting technologies at the Early Stage Technology Showcase. Experts will be on hand to explain the technologies, their stage of development and commercialisation and the experiences of the researchers, technologists and entrepreneurs.

"There is so much going on in digital, creative and technology innovation at the moment – it's been a challenge to ensure the showcase is representative of this," said Sturge. "We will be showcasing technologies related to broadcast, content and user experience from the research level up to early stage commercial operation. Panel sessions will also allow us to discuss how to best exploit these new technologies and the exciting cutting-edge research that is happening at Bristol University."

Digital Bristol

£600m science and technology opportunities for region

The UK government has detailed funding to boost its vision of science and technology, with the South West seeing significant opportunities.

The key investment is £189 million for big data and energy efficient computing to build on the research base's capacity for analysing big data sets, in areas like earth observation and medical science, but there are other significant areas of funding.

However £35 million for centres of excellence in robotics and autonomous systems aims to bring together the research base and industry. The Bristol Robotics Lab is the largest in Europe and at the forefront of such developments. David Willetts, science and universities minister, also announced a £1m Technology Strategy Board competition to help to accelerate the development of concepts where robots are able to interact with each other and humans.

There will also be £25 million of additional funding for the National Space Technology Programme for the development of commercial products and services using space technology and data from space-based systems which can benefit space technology companies in the region such as SciSys in Bristol.

There is also £45 million for new facilities and equipment for advanced materials research in areas of UK strength such as advanced composites, high-performance alloys, low-energy electronics and telecommunications, as well as £28 million to the National Composites Centre in Bristol.

In newer areas such as smart grid, the government plans to invest £30 million to create dedicated R&D facilities to develop and test new grid scale storage technologies, an area where the region is strong and the High Tech Sector collaborates with the Low Carbon group.

www.swinnovation.co.uk

Surprise as Bristol loses Future City to Glasgow…

Bristol has lost out to Glasgow for the £24m Future City demonstrator in a surprise move.

"Industry expectations have been overturned throughout this competition, and this result, too, will surprise many," said Joe Dignan, Chief analyst for European Public Sector at market researcher Ovum. "Initially, the smart money was on Bristol, Birmingham, Leeds + Bradford or Manchester to scoop the prize, given their level of preparation. However, only Bristol joined the shortlist alongside Glasgow, Peterborough and London. Glasgow's success reflects a global trend in the development of future cities being presaged by a major global event. Although it was considered the outsider in this race, its preparation for the 2014 Commonwealth Games was the catalyst to get the right people around the table to look at the performance of the city as a whole," he added. " There is no doubt that the judging process was objective and Glasgow's bid excellent, but one can be sure that Westminster is happy to show its commitment to Scotland at the current time."

The demonstrator will include real-time information about traffic and apps to check that buses and trains are on time. The council will also create an app for reporting issues such as potholes and missing bin collections. Other services promised by the council include linking up the CCTV cameras across the city with its traffic management unit in order to identify traffic incidents faster.

"Glasgow has some quite extreme challenges - it has the lowest life expectancy of any city in the UK for instance - and the hope is that if we bring together energy, transport, public safety and health it will make it more efficient and a better place to live," said Scott Cain, the TSB's project leader for Future Cities, talking to the BBC.

Glasgow will use analytical software and security cameras to help identify and prevent crime in the city and monitor energy levels to find new ways of providing gas and electricity to poorer areas where fuel poverty is a big issue.

… but wins £3m for Connected Smart City development

While Bristol was not selected as the overall winner, the TSB judges rated the city's bid very highly, so much so that they have awarded a £3m 'runners-up' prize.

"While there is some disappointment that we did not gain the main prize, Bristol is now the only city in the UK to have won funding from Government to be both a Super Connected City and a Future City." said Mayor George Ferguson. "Bringing these awards together gives us a pot of nearly £15m with which we can move really quickly to lever-in additional funding and support from business to help deliver our plans."

"We are fast becoming the UK's creative capital, a city of experimentation and a city that offers a warm welcome," he said. "Our achievement in beating more than 30 other cities to win government funding for Future Cities is testament to our ambitions and our strong partnership approach with both the city's universities, businesses and partners such as Watershed and Knowle West Media Centre."

www.swinnovation.co.uk

Advisor sought for Innovation Vouchers…

Science City Bristol is looking for an Innovation Advisor to assist in the delivery of the ERDF Competitiveness Innovation Voucher scheme. The role will include helping to promote the scheme, supporting and building partnerships between companies and knowledge base institutions, supporting businesses with their applications, ensuring compliance with European Union ERDF requirements, record keeping and reporting and monitoring.

The closing date will be 2pm on Friday, 1 February 2013.

Science City Bristol

… as region appoints inward investment specialist

The Inward Investment team for Bristol and Bath are set to appoint sector specialists to support bids to encourage multinational companies to set up in the region. The specialist for High Tech is set to be appointed over the next few months and will work with the High Tech Sector group for information and support for bids. There may also be a role for the sector specialist in some of the new High Tech Special Interest Groups that are being planned.

Comment

As the UK looks a triple dip recession in the eye, it is encouraging to see the activity and support in and around Bristol and Bath. The South West iNet has been a success and is moving into the next phase for supporting small and medium sized high tech companies, while the LEP's multi-million growth fund should also provide opportunities to boost high tech activity in the area. Despite the loss of the Future City demonstrator to Glasgow there is over £15m of investment available to demonstrate smart, connected technologies and applications within the region, an opportunity not to be missed. The politics involved in the decision are a clear demonstration of why the industry in the region needs to have effective access to government through organisations such as the LEP.

The West of England is the only LEP in the country to have a specific focus on microelectronics and high tech, reflecting the strong cluster that is present in the Bristol and Bath region. That strength in skills and local universities is clearly demonstrated with new Technology Centres launched this month from GE Subsea and TDK-Lambda, and world leading new technology from companies such as XMOS.

Having an industry-led group that can both provide feedback into the wider strategy of the region and take information back out to companies is a tremendously valuable resource that can benefit companies, researchers, funders and investors, both internal and external, in many different ways.

This is the first newsletter, and you can sign up for future ones here which we aim to deliver every two months. I hope you find it useful, and any contributions and guest comments would be welcome.

Nick Flaherty

INDUSTRY EVENTS

Fri 1st Feb, 2pm
Intelligent Media SIG
Digital Bristol Week, BBC Bristol

Tues 5th Feb, 10am
3D printing workshop, EADS
Manufacturing Advisory Service, Bristol

Tues 5th - 7th Feb, 9am
Safety-Critical Systems Club 21st Annual Symposium
SCSC, Bristol

Wed 20th Feb, 6pm
Simon Walker, Director General of the Institute of Directors
UWE, Bristol

Mon 25th - 28th Feb
Mobile World Congress 2013
MWC, Barcelona

Tues 26th - 28th Feb
Embedded World 2013
Embedded World, Nuremberg

Fri 1st March, 9.30am
Tech Trends - where to focus your technology business, 10am
SiliconSouthWest, Bath

Wed 13th Mar, 7pm
South West Founders Meetup
South West Founders

About the West of England Local Economic Partnership

The West of England Local Enterprise Partnership supports business growth and is working to attract new jobs to Bristol, Bath and Weston-super-Mare – and the surrounding countryside. The West of England has unrivalled business strengths, is at the forefront of academic research, and has a well-qualified workforce. The LEP aims to assist in the creation of 95,000 new jobs by 2030 with 3.4% annual growth by 2020 from over £1 billion of private sector investment over the next 3 years.

The structure supports the LEP Board in making it happen, backed by multiple Sector Groups including the High Tech Sector which meets once a month. More information on the vertical and cross cutting sector groups is here. For more information or to get involved sign up for the High Tech Sector Newsletter at SW Innovation News with news of events and Special Interest Groups