

# Project is making worldwide connections

**THE newly-launched DEVICES project, aiming to help people to run small businesses and social enterprises from home, is already forging links across the globe.**

From its base at Luton, the DEVICES Telework Centre has connected regionally with the St John's Innovation Centre in Cambridge, as well as internationally with its new tenants Your Property in Poland and Tiscover from Austria.

Help and advice comes from the specially-trained DEVICES team at the Telework Centre and a DEVICES Support Pack includes aids for a rapid business start-up: a web camera, microphone and i-key. Teleworkers can see and talk to each other and link up to professional advisers and business support organisations.

Information technology consultant Dr Tim Rowsell not only helps DEVICES with IT support and development but also uses its links to help his own home-based business Rowsell Research. "I have links with the Innovation Centre in Cambridge and they will be getting the benefits of DEVICES in their aim to link innovation centres across the region," he says.

"Working from home can be quite an isolating experience. Linking up with DEVICES gives you good opportuni-

ties both socially and financially. It is like extended networking. If you are someone working in rural Suffolk, you may be able to access some skills and advice locally, but linking with DEVICES means you extend your reach.

"You can access the specialised business services that the proactive Luton Innovation Centre has to offer and beyond. The contacts you make are also more like personal recommendations, so it gives you confidence in the advice you're getting."

## CASE STUDY 1

**RENATA Ray is looking forward to a long relationship with the Innovation Centre and its DEVICES project. Her new company Your Property in Poland sells Polish property to buyers both in Britain and international-**

ly.

"We work from home and are part-time tenants of the Innovation Centre," she explains. "We are impressed with the centre's innovative technologies which we will be able to use as our e-commerce business grows."

"We are currently setting up our database and we will be relying on photographs and detailed descriptions to sell our estate agency services. But

with the DEVICES project I can see that we could make very good use of the webcam as well as gaining good business advice from their great links. Communication is the key to our success.

"We are confident that with the interactive IT resources available, rapid increase in networking, selective advertising and the imminent launch of our new book, the first English language detailed guide to buying property in Poland, we will go a long way very quickly."

*For more information visit [www.yourpropertyinpoland.co.uk](http://www.yourpropertyinpoland.co.uk)*

## CASE STUDY 2

**TISCOVER was looking to set up in the UK and, with East of England Tourist Board being a key customer, the Innovation Centre gave them the perfect location and opportunity.**

As a leading destination management system provider, Tiscover supplies the web presence for East of England Tourist Board's entire region, covering the counties of Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk.

Since launching in the UK earlier this year, Tiscover has also announced agreements with numerous destinations including Plymouth Tourist



■ **DEVICES team members Lillian Iruene (left) and Dimitra Vitsa are ready to help you link up at the Innovation Centre, at the Spires building in Luton.**

*The DEVICES project, run by the Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre, at The Spires, 2 Adelaide Street, Luton, is funded by the Department of Trade and Industry's Phoenix Fund and a Building On The Best Award. For more information visit [www.innovationcentre.co.uk/projects](http://www.innovationcentre.co.uk/projects)*

Board, Bournemouth Tourism, Isles of Scilly and Jedburgh in Scotland in addition to contracts spanning the rest of the world.

Michelle O'Connell, from Tiscover UK Ltd, says: "Through DEVICES, I look forward to being able to set up good working relationships with other organisations so that Tiscover can continue to work well on a local as well as international level."

The Tiscover group of companies, headquartered in Austria, has wholly-owned subsidiaries in England, Germany and Italy, and operates one of the top ten most visited travel websites in central Europe ([www.tiscover.com](http://www.tiscover.com)).

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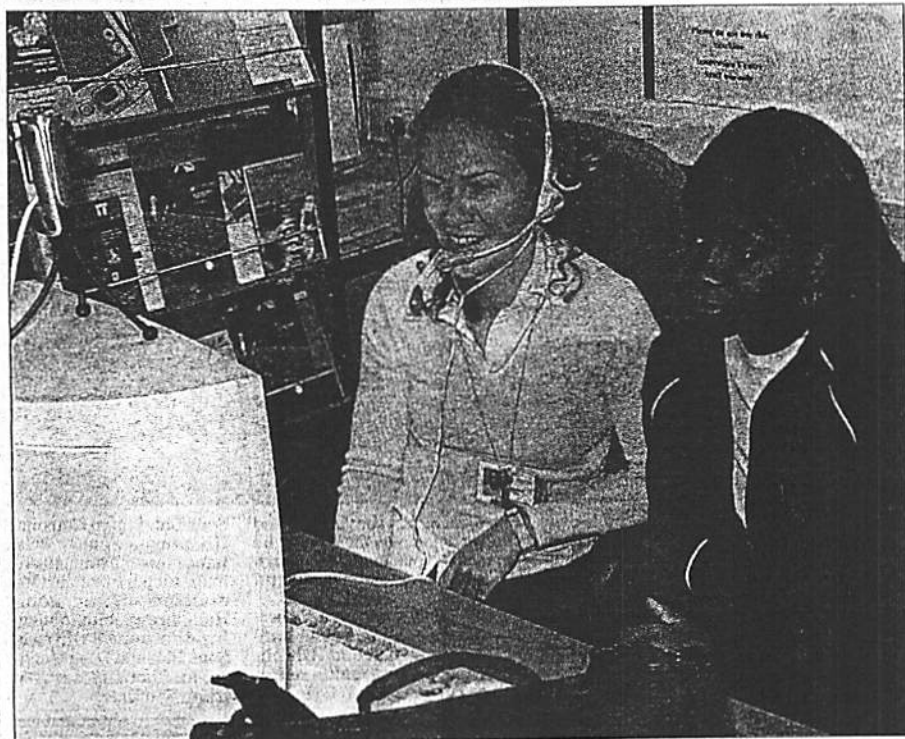


University of Luton



**PHOENIX  
FUNDS**

# Smiling faces for webcam network



**HOW'S IT GOING?** Dimitra Vitsa and Lillian Iruene will greet callers to the Telework Centre. **51**

AN international flavour has been added to a newly launched project at the Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre.

Lillian Iruene, from Nigeria, and Dimitra Vitsa, from Greece, are the new friendly faces of the Telework Centre, which aims to help and support anyone setting up or running a small business from home.

The Telework Centre is funded as part of the Innovation Centre's DEVICES project, one of only 26 schemes in Britain to receive funding under an award scheme known as 'Building on the Best'.

Set up with an award of £110,000 from the Department of Trade and Industry's Phoenix Fund, it pioneers the use of low-cost internet and communications technologies to support teleworkers and home-workers.

Lillian and Dimitra will be offering help in particular to disabled people, people who live in rural communities, anyone made redundant, carers of children or the elderly, or people who can't afford to retire.

The first three months of the project will see Lillian and Dimitra using the Innovation Centre's 56 tenants – made up of new and developing companies – as initial privileged clients. They will test out the DEVICES Support Pack, which provides everything needed to set up a business from home.

Dimitra, who came to the UK from Greece five years ago, gained her degree in Artificial Intelligence at the University of Luton and followed it up by studying in Surrey for a Masters degree.

She said: "We will be looking at how our technology can help with networking, what kind of business support our companies need, what issues they face and how we can help them."

## Telework Centre trials support pack for small firms run from home

Lillian moved from Nigeria to the UK with her husband, who is studying here. She provided business and financial support to companies in her banking career. "I hope to bring that experience to the centre," she said.

Innovation Centre manager Mike Anstey said: "What we learn from helping our own tenants here, we can then use to help people to set up their own companies from home."

"The Telework Centre will provide the focal point for all that information. Our support pack will have everything they need to get

started. Networking, using the low-cost technology we provide, is a vital part of that – working from home can be an isolating experience."

The pack contains the Teleworkers' Handbook, membership of the Telework Association, a webcam and microphone to link into the Telework Centre and an ikey, a device to log you into your virtual office on the Telework website.

For more information about the Telework Centre, please visit [www.innovationcentre.co.uk/projects](http://www.innovationcentre.co.uk/projects) or call Sarah Leeming on 01582 743702 or email Sarah.Leeming@luton.ac.uk.

### Ethnic minority leaders needed for east region board

A DRIVE to encourage more ethnic minority men and women to apply for the boards of regional development agencies has been launched by Equality Minister Jacqui Smith – with the support of the East of England board.

The regional development agencies are big-spending business-led organisations and Jacqui Smith wants better representation of ethnic minority leaders.

"With more than a quarter of a million minority ethnic enterprises delivering over £13 billion a year to Britain's economy, minority ethnic leaders are vital to the economic success of the regions," she said.

She said there were high calibre candidates, but they were not coming forward.

Applications for board positions in the East of England can be made to Jacqui Ozakpinar at the Government Office for the East of England on 01223 372624.



## Poles impressed with hi-tech tour

A GROUP of Polish professionals enjoyed an hour-long tour of our Innovation Centre recently, without putting a foot in a train, plane or car to get here.

They paid a visit thanks to exciting new technology, which, through 'live' transmission – with web cameras, a laptop linked to the internet and a wireless network – enabled the university staff in Poland to see and hear the centre in action.

The Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre, based at the Spires, offers exciting opportunities to locate companies or start-up ventures within an innovative university environment and revitalise the local economy.

### Delighted

Innovation Centre Manager Mike Anstey was delighted with the success of the Polish tour. He said: "They were very impressed – we heard gasps from their end. Even we were impressed at ourselves, just because it worked so well."

The Poles are keen to set up their own centre to generate new businesses, as Luton has done – and the Innovation Centre is now helping them.

■ For more information, email [innovationcentre@luton.ac.uk](mailto:innovationcentre@luton.ac.uk) or visit [www.innovationcentre.co.uk](http://www.innovationcentre.co.uk) or call 01582 743700.

## Teleworking support hub opens at Spires



ANYONE unable to go out to work can now access support to set up business from home after the launch of a new project by the Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre.

The Centre, which is part of the University of Luton, has won £200,000 in funding to establish a Telework Support Centre in the town, which is designed to offer help to people who have to be at home but who also wish to run a small enterprise, such as carers of elderly parents, people who retire early and parents.

Lynette Warren, the Innovation Centre's specialist in Social Enterprises, says: "Many ventures are initiated by women from home with family commitments, and it

is hoped that this project will provide support and encouragement to enable these enterprises to grow and flourish."

The Innovation Centre, based in the University's Spires centre, is combining forces with the Telework Association and other project partners, to produce a support pack, which will include membership of both organisations as well as a web camera and other items of low-cost hardware and software.

The pack will enable people to make a rapid start in running a home-based enterprise, as well as enabling existing teleworkers to see and talk to each other, to professional advisors, and to small business support organisations, over the internet.

The money was won by the Innovation Centre's 'Devices' project, one of only 26 schemes in Britain to receive funding under the award scheme, Building on the Best.

The 'Devices' project is pioneering the use of low-cost internet and communications technologies to support teleworkers and homeworkers. It was originally set up with an award of £110,000 from the Department of Trade and Industry's Phoenix Fund.

Innovation Centre manager Mike Anstey adds: "This latest award of funding really is brilliant news for the Centre and for Luton. It helps to reinforce the growing national image of the town as a location for new and innovative projects."

# Training scheme wins £8,000 grant



◆ Tauqir Ahmed, Raza Sharif, Sohail Khan and Conrad Wilson

FOUR young entrepreneurs have joined forces to form an organisation delivering free certified computer training to disadvantaged people.

University of Luton graduates Tauqir Ahmed, Raza Sharif, Sohail Khan and Conrad Wilson have formed Learn 4 Work and have won an Unltd Award – a prize of £8,000 of National Lottery money – which will help them to put their plan into action.

The four, former students at Challney Boys School, set up their companies Affordable Training and At Work Solutions in the Luton & Dunstable Innovation Centre. As well as their commercial success, they provide distance e-learning in information technology.

Learn 4 Work has attracted inter-

est from Dunstable College, the University of Luton, the Dallow Learning Centre, Luton Borough Council, Learning and Skills Council, Business Link and Catalyst training in Bedford.

“We have put together what we have learned in the commercial world to produce a project that supports disadvantaged people, like those in the Bury Park and Dallow areas of Luton where we come from,” said Tauqir.

He and his colleagues are members of the Bury Park Community Centre regeneration forum. “What people need are real skills for real jobs,” said Tauqir. “We aim to give them employable skills by teaching them professional, certified, advanced IT skills (NVQ level 2 and

3 equivalent) free of charge.

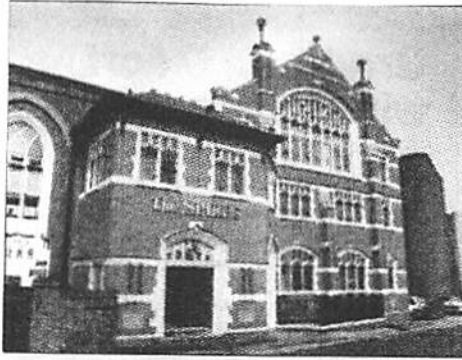
“Normally students would have to pay up to £1,000 at a local college or private training centre for the same qualification, thus making it unattainable to people from poor backgrounds to acquire the necessary skills to forge a rewarding career.”

Successful students emerge with a certified internationally recognised qualification. Learn 4 Work is plan-

ning to open a call centre to give students the chance to use their skills to offer reasonably priced help to small and start-up businesses.

Conrad said: “We know what it’s like to be starting out. We have been helped here at the Spires. It is hard to rent out affordable office space when you set up a business and that’s where the Innovation Centre has come into its own.”





## Latest firm to join Innovation Centre

A NEW internet security company, offering retina scans for secure e-business, is the latest tenant in the University of Luton's Innovation Centre.

iTrust Security Ltd is working on state-of-the-art technology which can establish a person's identity and help make transactions on the internet completely safe.

As well as this latest ID technology, the company offers consultancy and internet threat-alert services to small and medium-sized businesses.

iTrust was established by its director, Khalid Khan, who was previously professional services director of RSA Security Inc – a world leader in security with more than 27,000 customers around the world and 13 million users.

The new company moved into the University's Innovation Centre at the Spires building (*pictured above*) in Luton this summer and is the only RSA Security Services Premier Partner.

Khalid said: "I wanted to run my own business and hope to deliver dedicated security services to SMEs and assist in extending their business reach.

"Our close business connection with the University means we can give students opportunities to be involved in this new technology, to help them study and help us to build our business."

iTrust Security is part of a global group with headquarters in London.

■ **For more information about iTrust, visit [www.itrustsecurity.com](http://www.itrustsecurity.com)**

■ **To find out more about the Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre, visit [www.innovationcentre.co.uk](http://www.innovationcentre.co.uk) or telephone Sarah Leeming on 01582 743702.**

# Gesture of thanks to community

By **Sue Thomas**

**OUR of Luton's young entrepreneurs who have made a great success of their two companies since graduating from the University have joined forces to put something back into the community.**

Tauqir Ahmed, Raza Sharif, Sohail Khan and Conrad Wilson have formed an organisation called Learn 4 Work – to give free certified computer training to disadvantaged people, setting them up to find real careers in IT.

They have just won an Unltd Award – a prize of £8,000 of National Lottery money – which will help them to put their plan into action.

The four were all brought up in Luton, educated at Challney Boys' School and graduated from the University before setting up their companies – Affordable Training and At Work Solutions, right opposite each other at the University's Innovation Centre at The Spires.

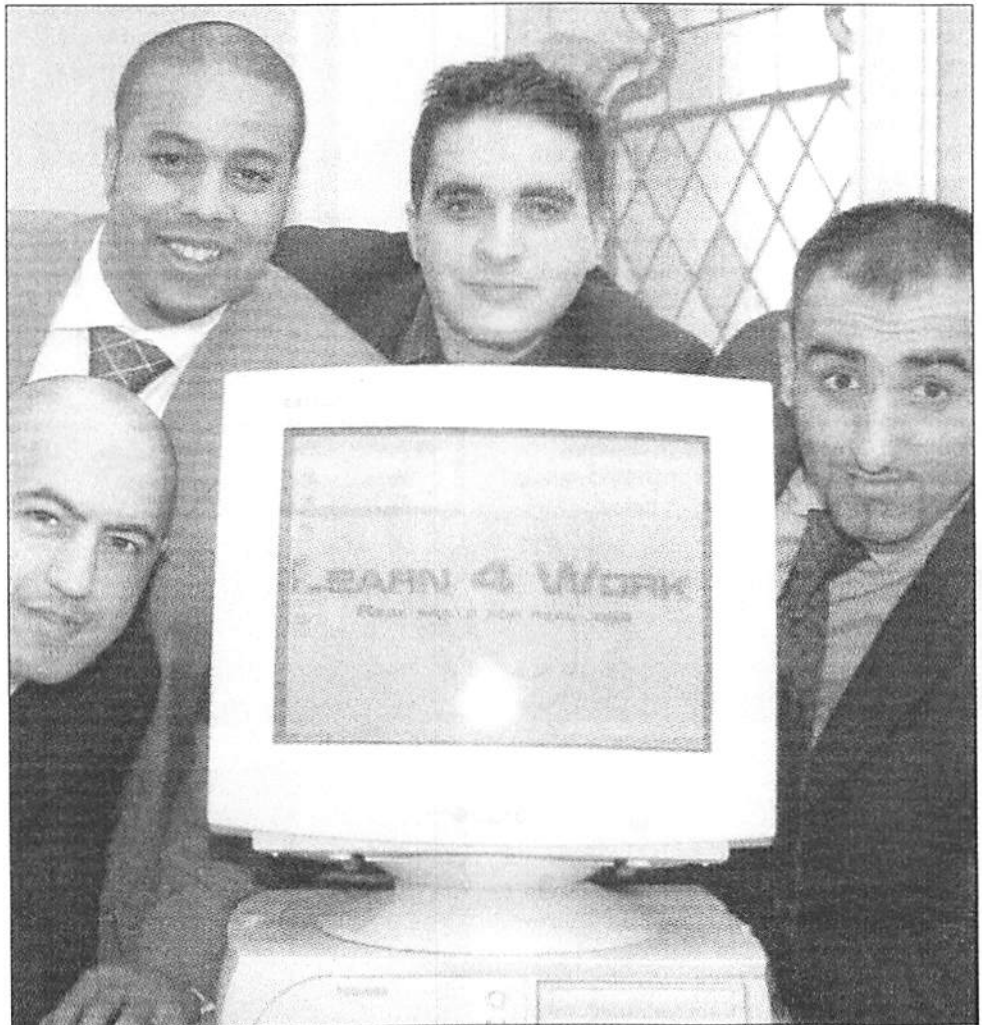
## Unique

After recent commercial success, they have decided to join forces to provide distance e-learning in IT that goes beyond the normal Word, Excel and web packages. Their unique approach to learning is fun and interactive – and gives people more employable skills by training them to be computer engineers.

Tauqir explained: "We have put together what we have learned in the commercial world to produce a project that supports disadvantaged people, like those in the Bury Park and Dallow areas of Luton where we come from.

"We are members of the Bury Park Community Centre regeneration forum, part of the action group that draws up proposals for bettering the area.

"What people need there are real skills for real jobs. We aim to give them employable skills by teaching them professional, certified, advanced IT skills (NVQ level 2 and 3 equivalent) free of charge.



**HELPING THE COMMUNITY:** Sohail Khan, Conrad Wilson, Tauqir Ahmed and Raza Sharif.

"Normally students would have to pay up to £1,000 at a local college or private training centre for the same qualification, thus making it unattainable to people from poor backgrounds to acquire the necessary skills to forge a rewarding career in IT.

"We train our students to take PCs apart and rebuild them and also work with a mini network of computers, with a certified and internationally-recognised qualification. This solid foundation means they can be self-employed or they can gain valuable work experience within a company."

Learn 4 Work is already gaining interest from several training bodies and with this

support and help from the lottery money, they hope to firm up a pilot project that will get their training off the ground.

Conrad said: "We hope that our training will help the socially disadvantaged, lone parents and unemployed, as well as men and women from ethnic minorities.

"We know what it's like to be starting out. We have been helped here at the Spires. It is hard to rent affordable office space when you set up a business and that's where the Innovation Centre has come into its own."

■ **To find out the kind of training that Learn 4 Work will offer, please visit [www.learn4work.org](http://www.learn4work.org)**

# UK spotlight on Luton's innovation achievements

FOLLOWING a visit by UK Business Incubation (UKBI) in the summer, staff at the Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre were invited to speak at the UKBI conference on *Incubation for Regeneration* in Liverpool.

Regeneration is currently a hot topic on both central and local government agendas and the conference covered the latest developments and views of practitioners and policy makers.

Delegates considered three case studies from incubation projects in Liverpool, East London and Luton.

Delegates to the conference included representatives from incubation centres throughout the UK as well as from regional development agencies, business support agencies, regeneration agencies, universities, the finance community and local and national government officials.

Mike Anstey, Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre manager, said: "We were delighted to have been chosen as a UKBI case study.

"It enabled us to show a national audience some of the new and exciting developments that are transforming Luton."

The Innovation Centre, with its headquarters at The Spires building in Adelaide Street, will be mounting a campaign later in the year – 'Luton InSpires' –

designed to focus local attention on the new Luton based companies and enterprises revitalising the local economy.

The innovation centre has now spread to three other locations and is nurturing nearly 40 businesses.

It will refocus its activities on a new centre to be established at Butterfield Park in the next two years.

The Innovation Centre was established in The Spires building in September 1998 as a collaborative venture between the University of Luton, Luton Borough Council and Business Link.

The project was funded through the Luton Dunstable Partnership with £332,000 of Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding. This was allocated to cover the first three years of Innovation Centre operation, until April 2001.

The aim was to establish a permanent means of creation of small businesses and jobs within the Luton-Dunstable conurbation.

In 2000 all available units were occupied and a waiting list was in operation. In response to this, additional space was secured at Britannia House in Leagrave Road which offers industrial units for light manufacturing as well as office space.

In 2002, following a successful Phoenix bid in January to run the DEVICES project, additional funding

was awarded from the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF).

This funding was allocated to the Cambridge Luton Innovation Project (CLIP).

In April 2002 further SRB funding was granted to develop the offshoot centre at Britannia House.

Objective 2 funding was awarded as part of a package of projects to provide support for new small business.

The Spires and Britannia House accommodated a total of 23 businesses

In April 2003, nine offices were secured within the town centre Hat Factory for arts and media based enterprises. The Hat Factory is a Luton Borough Council owned arts venue. All the offices were occupied by June.

Office space was also acquired within the Marsh Farm area of Luton – an area targeted for major regeneration and which has been allocated New Deal funding. The building originally housed Coulter Electronics and is now the site of a number of regeneration projects.

During 2003 there has been a noted increase in the demand for virtual accommodation. There are currently nine virtual members and a further two applications for virtual membership waiting for approval.



# University experts add value to business

MORE businesses are tapping into the expertise of the region's universities and higher education institutions, according to the *2002 Higher Education-Business Interaction Survey*. A particular growth area has been the Teaching Company scheme, a Government initiative aimed at stimulating collaborative partnerships between business and education. A key element of the scheme is the appointment of 'associates' by local companies: graduates who retain links with their colleges and universities to drive further innovation and recruitment.

In the east, eight universities and colleges are taking part in the Teaching Company Initiative: Cranfield and Luton Universities in Bedfordshire; the University of Hertfordshire; the University of Essex and Writtle Agricultural College in Essex; the University of Cambridge and Anglia Polytechnic University.

The report covers findings from 98 per cent of the country's universities and colleges. The research illustrated a strong bias towards universities and colleges making strong links with businesses in their own region.

Dr Jill Kent from Cranfield University, said universities now take a far more strategic approach to working with business. "We have more than 50 businesses in our region taking part in the Teaching Company Scheme," she said.

Latest figures show the average annual profits increase for each business taking advantage of the initiative is more than £150,000, plus a one-off profit increase of around £47,000. Businesses also report an average creation of four new jobs, plus training opportunities for 19 employees.

Brendan Heery, an associate working with Whistonbrook Technologies in Luton, is doing valuable work in a specialised area, custom-designing electronic instruments. Technical director Steve Edwards said Brendan was taking the firm forward much more rapidly than would otherwise have been the case.



*Brendan Heery, a Teaching Company Scheme associate testing an electronic circuit*

# Award bonanza for Luton miniaturists

By JOHN COLE

A COMPANY based at the Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre has won a £60,000 Smart Award for research into electronics miniaturisation.

Whistonbrook Technologies Ltd specialises in the design and fabrication of small and micro sensor instruments and loggers.

But it wants to make them even smaller by reducing the number of microchips employed and dispensing with cabling in favour of radio communication.

Technical director Steve Edwards said: "As automation becomes widespread the need for remote autonomous sensing of systems has become important.

"And the market for loggers to collect, analyse and store or pass on this information has been increasing rapidly over the last few years."

The 15 month project, which began on January 1, is to prove the feasibility of a new concept in encapsulation that will allow Whistonbrook to fabricate very small micro data loggers.

Mr Edwards, 49, said: "Low power, short range radio and mobile phone technology will link these devices to control centres but making use of software code previously designed by the company. Low power designs, novel software code and a variety of chemical sensors will be investigated during the project."



**TOO BIG:** These EzeSCAN potentiometers – an interface for sensors and loggers – are made by Whistonbrook Technologies and among the instruments which directors Derek Law, left, and Steve Edwards would like to miniaturise. Steve Edwards said: "Derek is holding the version used for field operations and it is really a little too big to be carried around. Miniaturisation would not only solve that, it would reduce costs. We sell these instruments for about £1,000 – a standard model from a standard commercial company would be about £15,000. Reduce them to matchbox size and we could maybe sell them for £100."

Whistonbrook will also investigate the feasibility of developing a generic unit that can be adapted to take data from a number of sensor types.

The business carries out its technological research in two

offices in the Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre in Adelaide Street but also has an office based in INVENT, the innovation centre on the Dublin University campus.

A Dublin University mecha-

tronics graduate Brendan Healey recently joined the company as a researcher after it was awarded a second grant as a teaching company, in collaboration with the University of

Turn to page 4

# Innovation Centre's ambitious plans



**EXCITING:** Visit The Spires to learn more about the Innovation Centre's plans for the future.

THE Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre is celebrating its fourth birthday this year and is in the midst of developing some ambitious and exciting plans for a new Innovation Centre and Technology Village on the Butterfield Green site near Putteridge Bury.

Any members of staff or students who are interested in the project are invited to visit The Spires (2 Adelaide Street, Luton) on Tuesday December 3 at 10.30am to learn more about it.

Contact Sarah Leeming on 01582 743702 if you would like to attend. But don't worry if you can't make it – there will be further dates arranged for the new year.

The Innovation Centre is also organising a workshop on December 12 as part of the Cambridge Luton Innovation Project (CLIP), called 'Strategic Issues for Luton', which aims to identify and discuss issues affecting Luton and its business community.

The workshop will take place at the Putteridge Bury Conference Centre between 6pm and 8pm. To book your place, contact [innovationcentre@luton.ac.uk](mailto:innovationcentre@luton.ac.uk).

# Are you an isolated telecommmer?



**THE FUTURE?** Innovation centre officer Sarah Leeming demonstrates webcam communication at work.

ARE you running a small business from home – and looking for useful contacts with the outside world?

If so, you may be able to find them by becoming involved with a major piece of telecommunications research being carried out by Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre.

The Adelaide Street, Luton, centre has been given Small Business Service funding to look at the latest, easily affordable technology to see how it might enable groups of people to work – or live together – as virtual workgroups and communities.

The study is aimed at helping the many people who are unable or prefer not to conform to the traditional “travel to work and work nine to five in an office” pattern that is the norm for most people.

“Government and organisations,

almost without exception, see the powerful economic, social, environmental and strategic advantages to be gained by helping these people to co-operate and work in new ways, using new technologies,” says the centre.

It has called the project DEVICES – looking for the best way of Delivering Effective Virtual Interaction for Community EnterpriseS.

It hopes to hear from homeworkers or teleworkers running of starting up a small business or community enterprise – or people wishing to explore these possibilities.

Examples include:

- Home based carers ( in particular women at home looking after children or elderly relatives)

- Geographically dispersed individuals or groups who wish to work

with others using telecommunications and the internet

- Individuals or groups with disabilities, where mobility may be a problem

- Individuals or groups where cultural requirements have implications for work patterns.

The centre expects DEVICES to generate some new and exciting ideas for discussion, consideration and experimentation.

The project will run for two years and its findings will be presented at a conference in 2004.

If you would like to take part ,send an e-mail to [innovation.centre@luton.ac.uk](mailto:innovation.centre@luton.ac.uk) and you will be put on a mailing and discussion list. Or call 01582 743700 for a chat, or track the project on the centre website at [www.innovationcentre.co.uk](http://www.innovationcentre.co.uk)



# French partners trip the light fantastique

By JOHN COLE

ALPINE skiers will sweep down snowy slopes in night time revels this winter looking from a distance like swarms of graceful fireflies.

The effect will be achieved by small luminous sticks worn by the skiers but invented and manufactured in Luton by two French entrepreneurs who intend to light up the world with their ideas.

Christophe Mermaz, 33, and his partner Dominique Pecquet, 45, have patented battery powered luminous sticks and torches that can be turned on and off with one brisk tap.

Through their company, Light Emotions, they have also patented a process where liquid poured into a glass on to two electrical contact points illuminates the base of the glass with a very pretty effect.

But this time next year they hope their luminous gadgets will have been accepted for a far more serious purpose as well – for safety lighting for Britain's hundreds of thousands of leisure sailors.

Beyond that they envisage dozens more safety applications – believing their muted lighting, attached to



LUMINARIES: inventors Dominique Pecquet, left, and Christophe Mermaz.

**Luton based inventors believe they can tap into many different markets with ingenious LED lights – including new safety products**

clothing, would be an ideal way of ensuring the visibility of motorway, building site and railway workers at night.

Christophe said: "We are getting more and more enquiries about safety products on our website – ground sig-

nalling possibilities at airports being one of the latest."

Light Emotions' products are intrinsically safe because they use LED technology which can never overheat, said Dominique Pecquet.

Christophe, who holds

MBAs (Master of Business Administration) qualifications from Lyon in France and the Cranfield School of Business describes the safety market as a huge market for the firm.

It is one of three target markets identified

by Light Emotions, the others being event products and marketing promotions for top brand customers.

The partners have patented both the water lighting and "bang" lighting systems.

Their first product was a glowing champagne glass, followed by two different sized tumblers, all with a life expectancy for the light of four to six hours.

Then came a range of glowing sticks – from four cms long to around 40 cms long – all switched on by a sharp tap at one end and then off with a tap on the other.

Skiers on the Alpine slopes were among the first to enjoy the fun new product last winter and Light Emotions' sales executive Melanie Portailier is working hard to ensure that this winter more and more ski event and apres ski event organisers are aware of its existence.

This summer Light Emotions secured substantial orders for both sticks and glasses at the five day Paleo world music festival in Nyon, Switzerland, and then at a ten day tourism festival in Geneva.

Another success was selling 5,000 sticks to a charity fireworks event at Chantilly, north of Paris.

Turn to page 6

## Chiefs hail £8m funding

THE FIRST phase of the proposed Luton Technology Village has been given the go-ahead.

Chiefs at the East of England Development Agency have awarded £8 million for a new innovation centre in the town.

The new centre will herald the first phase of an ambitious technology village for new knowledge-based companies, creating around 1,500 jobs.

The new centre aims to capitalise on its strategic location near London Luton Airport, said innovation centre manager Mike Anstey.

### Inward

"This ability to service worldwide markets from a Luton base is already a powerful means of attracting inward investment," he added.

The money also will go

to venture start-up capital to encourage new small businesses in the town.

Cllr Roy Davis, Luton's executive member with special responsibility for regeneration, said: "It will kick-start the entire technology village development."

Work on the innovation centre - the catalyst for the entire development - must start inside the next nine months.

# Innovation centre wins funding until 2005

LUTON and Dunstable Innovation Centre has been awarded £260,000 to help secure its future development until 2005.

The award has been made by the Government Office for the East of England as part of a bid for £2.9m for a package of projects to provide support for new small businesses in Luton. The innovation centre submitted proposals as part of the bid.

Mike Anstey, the centre manager, said: "This is really excellent news following on from our award of £110,000 from the Small Business Service Phoenix Fund. We now have secured the necessary funding to ensure the future of the project until 2005 and we are currently preparing further exciting proposals for the move to a new building in the proposed

Luton Technology Village.

"All our existing units are occupied and this funding will enable us to seek additional accommodation prior to our move."

Mr Anstey said new knowledge based businesses are starting to appreciate the strategic location of Luton. "Easy access to a major London airport, with cheap flights servicing major European markets is proving to be a much undervalued asset which we have only just started to exploit."

Walter Herriot, the managing director of the St John's Innovation Centre in Cambridge, has joined the Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre board. This will strengthen links between the two centres and help create opportunities for co-operation and networking between Cambridge, Luton and the rest of the Eastern Region.

# Innovation Centre looks ahead to year of major advances

INNOVATION centres in Luton and Cambridge are celebrating their success in obtaining funding for CLIP (The Cambridge Luton Innovation Project).

Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre, based in Adelaide Street, Luton, will be collaborating with St John's Innovation Centre in Cambridge to identify projects and activities which can assist with the incubation of new knowledge based businesses in Luton.

The projects will also be a valuable means of bringing the resources of Luton to the attention of expanding industries in Cambridge and the surrounding region.

Mike Anstey, manager of the Luton centre, said: "We are delighted to be working with friends and colleagues in Cambridge. St John's is one of the oldest and most suc-

cessful of the UK Innovation Centres and has a wealth of experience and expertise which will be invaluable in the continuing development and expansion of the Luton centre.

"Equally CLIP will present a range of opportunities to promote the locational, manufacturing and other resources of Luton in Cambridge and throughout the Eastern Region.

Walter Herriott, managing director of the St John's centre, said the initiative was an excellent example of collaboration and would be of benefit to both Cambridge and Luton economies.

The project starts early in 2002 and will involve a range of individuals and organisations in the build-up to pilot projects later in the year.

A briefing paper issued by Luton centre says the project will establish important innovation transfer mechanisms

between the two communities and it is anticipated that it will provide valuable guidelines for co-operation between innovation centres across the Eastern Region.

St John's Innovation Centre was established 13 years ago and has a highly respected track record in supporting innovative companies. It has also had an important role in the success of the adjacent Cambridge Science Park.

Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre was set up two years ago in a former church and is a leading player in an ambitious plan to develop a purpose built innovation centre and technology village at Butterfield Green, close to Luton airport.

The proposed centre and technology village are envisaged as a focal point for attracting innovative industry into the town as part of its wider regeneration plans.

Cambridge and Luton are

very different areas with distinctive infrastructures and resources.

But while planners here have an urgent need to provide alternative employment of many kinds following the closure of the Vauxhall car plant they are also looking at the possibility that Cambridge's success in gearing innovation to its economic prosperity may hold pointers to wealth creation policies that can be applied in Luton.

Early stage action next year will include comparisons of the two business communities and innovation centres, analysis of transferable processes and mechanisms, and drafting of pilot collaborative projects that could be run by the centres.

A six month interim report and recommendations will be circulated prior to a conference of all contributors.

## Wireless technologies, flexible working, e-envoys in futuristic talks programme

THE Luton & Dunstable Innovation Centre has launched its fourth events programme looking at new ways of working in an information society.

A November presentation by the Telework Association will be followed in January by a talk on wireless technologies. This is the programme:

### January 30

The future of communications for business organisations: wireless technologies' Lucent Technologies and KnowWare UK Ltd

Speakers: Bryan Hall (Wireless Product Manager - Lucent Technologies) and Mike Baker (Sales Manager - KnowWare UK Ltd)

The speakers will discuss all aspects of wireless technology, including security issues, the standards and what the future holds. Particular attention will be paid to the advantages over structured cabling, specifically

with a business organisation and client companies in mind.

### February 27

'Managing flexible work methods' Henley Management College - Future Work Forum

Speaker: Peter Thomson (Director of the Future Work Forum)

The Future Work Forum was established in 1992 as a focal point for people interested in remote and flexible working methods. Peter will discuss how the Forum supports and encourages the organisational, managerial and social changes enabled by new working practices. Particular focus will be given to how managers of SMEs can effectively remote work with employees.

### March 27

'What can IT do for my business?' Small Business Service - UK Online

Speaker: Keith Padbury (UK Online for Business Centre Manager)

Keith heads the UK Online initiative in Bedfordshire offered through the Small Business Service. He will be explaining the relevance of the initiative to people establishing or running a small business. Focus will be given to the application of IT to new ways of working. Other forms of help, funding and assistance will also be discussed.

### April 24

Office of the e-Envoy  
The Office of the e-Envoy is leading the drive to get the UK online, to ensure that the country, its citizens and its businesses derive maximum benefit from the knowledge economy. An official from the Office of the e-Envoy will be attending to explain Government policy and initiatives on the promotion and use of IT in busi-

ness. Particular focus will be given to small businesses and new ways of working.

### May 29

### NTL

NTL are the major local telecommunications and internet service provider over the Luton Cable Network. They are planning the use of Broadband within the home office and small office (SOHO) environment. The speaker will be talking about the exciting and innovative range of new services available to the small business market. Special reference will be given to remote working and teleworking.

All events take place at The Spires, 2 Adelaide Street Luton, Beds. The events are free of charge and anyone is welcome to attend. For booking and further information please contact Sarah Leeming on sarah.leeming@luton.ac.uk or 01582 743702.



# Kick3 dead against the flatline option



KICK3's two: partners Karen Brain and Kevin Howard

A DESIGN consultancy started in September 2000 has generated so much business in its first year that it has turned itself into a design agency.

Kick3 is so busy it is experiencing "manic" moments, according to its livewire managing director Karen Brain, who has only recently turned 30.

Miss Brain, who lives in Swanmead, Luton, is in partnership with Kevin Howard, a Londoner with whom she worked at the Northern & Shell publishing group.

When they left the company Miss Brain was group marketing design manager and Kevin was editorial design manager.

They quit to set up a magazine and book design consultancy in Hackney but decided this was not sufficiently challenging – and Kick3 in the Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre in Adelaide Street, Luton, is now the vehicle for their wider ambitions.

Miss Brain said: "It is all developing far faster than we expected. We had to make a decision. Either we flatline and don't take on work or we take a risk – and at the end of the day there was only one choice. We started up because we wanted to build a business. You have to take the risk."

Another reason for the change of image to design agency was clients' suspicion of the word consultancy. "People were frightened to come to us because consultancies have a reputation for charging extremely large fees for telling you what can be achieved,

but then don't necessarily handle the design. We do both.

"At Kick3, first off we help clients to look at their marketing, because we design for function, we don't design material to look pretty. We talk about where the client's going, what they're aiming for. We clarify what markets they need."

She went on: "I love what I do. That's why I'm doing it. If you have got a passion for something it should read in your work. That is what is selling us – the passion.

"Last week we captured five clients in two days; today I have talked with possibly three more. That's the way it keeps going and it's a bit frightening. I make contact with a company and they say: 'Oh yes, we have heard about you.' Kick3 is getting references from clients who just keep putting our name forward."

Kick3's portfolio includes a bespoke tailor, two web marketing companies, two office services companies, a yoga training firm, a knee brace designer, a translation agency, an office water supplier and a personal coach.

Working with the support of a graphic designer-photographer and a marketing administrator, plus various freelancers, the partners have been giving 101 per cent to keep pace.

"It's 24/7 and we definitely need to recruit now but we are very pleased with the way things are going."

Miss Brain is the principal networker and account winner but still handles design as well and said: "I enjoy the balance even if I have to work into the evenings and at the weekends."

# Innovation Centre a credit to Luton

by Adam Phillips, student reporter

The Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre received a high profile visit when Alan Johnson, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Competitiveness went along to see how it has progressed.

Managed by the University of Luton, the Innovation Centre was established two years ago and aims to support new enterprises with a focus on development or technology.

Mr Johnson believes it *"provides a unique service for Luton"* and is *"a great example of how businesses and universities can work in partnership to promote innovative ideas"*.

Mr Johnson toured the centre, based at The Spires in Adelaide street with Margaret Moran, MP for Luton South. She was equally impressed with the centre and said: *"It is a real credit to the town to have such a centre right on our doorstep."*

The centre is responsible for many small businesses. One of its newest residents, Parlant Technology, specialises in educational technology designed to help parents monitor their children's progress at school and may be used to help schools fight truancy. The technology informs parents of their children's attendance figures and grades. Rather than the school having to perform these tasks manually, wasting valuable time and money,

ParentLink XP automatically delivers the details from a central server through letters, phone and e-mail.

Lynette Warren, Innovation Centre Co-ordinator from the University of Luton said: *"We were delighted to welcome the Minister and explain some of the advantages that Luton can offer new technology based businesses. The University of Luton and its local partners in the Innovation Centre Project are keen to develop further links with businesses and the positive comments of the Minister underline our successes so far."*

The Innovation Centre is currently running a Business Start-up competition for students or recent graduates with a new business idea. If you have a business plan you'd like to put in to action, but need financial support and professional advice to make it work, the Business Start-up Award could give you access to £3,000.

For entry details contact Sarah Leeming on 01582 743702 or email [sarah.leeming@luton.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.leeming@luton.ac.uk)



*Alan Johnson pictured with Margaret Moran MP (left) and Lynette Warren*

## Euro MP visits Innovation Centre

Eryl McNally, Luton's local Member of the European Parliament, visited the Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre in March. Eryl met Innovation Centre staff and the University's Director of Research Professor David Rawson.

Whilst at the Centre Eryl met Trevor Doyle of Doyle International, a company which has designed and manufactured an innovative knee brace, primarily for skiing, but which also has medical applications.



She also met Angela Paul, Director of Intrinsic, a competency-based search and selection consultancy who specialise in on-line psychometric testing.

Eryl's visit follows that of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Stephen Byers who visited the Centre in December 1999, together with MP for Luton South, Margaret Moran.