

# Encouraging Innovation

## Quaternary Research Service

### Overview

Professors Simon Haslett and Paul Davies of Bath Spa University, together with a part-time undergraduate student, received innovation funding to identify the market and explore whether the consultancy services provided by their Quaternary Research Centre could be provided on a viable and sustainable commercial basis.

### About the Project

The Quaternary Research Centre (QRC) at Bath Spa University was established in 1995 with academic research in reconstructing past depositional environments (using fossils) as its main activity. Over the years the reputation of the Centre has grown to include producing scientific publications, textbooks, and media appearances on Time Team, Timewatch, Close-up West, Countryfile, and Coasts. The Centre has also undertaken occasional ad hoc consultancy work for a number of high profile clients, including Somerset County Council, Essex County Council, Wessex Trust for Archaeology, English Heritage, University of Reading, and University of Exeter. This work involves establishing the environmental context of archaeological sites using fossils as environmental indicators.

The mission of the QRC is to use the research expertise and experience of its directors to provide consultancy/contract research services for the purpose of supporting research and enhancing reputation. This involves the use of organic and inorganic proxies to reconstruct past environments and environmental changes through the Quaternary (the last two million years). These services are offered on an ad hoc request basis to archaeological organizations – such as English Heritage and Headland Archaeology in Edinburgh, other universities, and local authorities.

The QRC team wanted to explore the feasibility of marketing the services on a more commercial basis. Their initial aim was to identify the archaeological market that may form a client base and to advertise their services to them. Their proposal included:

- Undertaking market intelligence gathering through competitive pricing analysis, value perceptions from target clients, etc in order to understand perceived market values and to guide a pricing strategy
- Identifying a sustainable level of activity in order to provide a continuous service
- Undertaking primary research with potential clients, eg heritage organisations and Local Authority planning departments, to understand their procedures, internal policies, politics and purchase decision making units.

### Fast Facts

- **The idea:** to identify the market and explore whether the QRC's consultancy services could be provided on a viable and sustainable commercial basis
- **Market opportunity:** niche market nationally and internationally, where legislation requires all new building developments to undertake an archaeological assessment of proposed sites
- **Potential for commercial application:** environmental reconstruction is contracted out to specialist consultants
- **Competitive advantage:** the types of fossils in which the QRC specialises are under-represented in the consultancy community; very few university-based units providing such services; advantage of support of the university infrastructure for services to archaeology and forensic service clients

## Benefits

Written final reports belong to the client, but usually contracted work is subject to joint-authored publication and so contribute to academic scholarship. These consultancy activities can be seen as contract research in this respect.

The most important factor is being known to an organisation, as they will often fund analyses because they know it is available at a reasonable unit cost. The process of market intelligence gathering highlighted to many organisations the existence of a quaternary research service at Bath Spa University.

## Outcomes

The innovation award allowed the QRC team to develop a database of archaeological organisations, which included 189 UK organisations that were prioritised, based on an initial assessment, as to likelihood of wanting QRC services and notes on current activities of these organisations. These organisations were emailed and many responded indicating some degree of interest. Additionally, a telephone survey was undertaken amongst those expressing interest and requesting further information, to canvass views.



Paul Davies at an archeological dig



QRC Reconstructing Past Environments

The project was completed in four months. The team supplied all plans and findings to two demanding business review panels at the Innovation Centre in Bath, whose panel members included a SETsquared business mentor and the managing director of Isis Energy Ltd.

Successful completion of the innovation project produced credible results that enabled constructive decisions to be made. It was concluded that growth can be achieved through the existing route to market, ie university research contacts, rather than by developing a commercially based enterprise to trade within the business-to-business arena.

Increased marketing activity to facilitate potential growth was achieved by the production and circulation of a new promotional brochure and by generally being more proactive and targeted in marketing activities. The team is also considering the value of investigating new market segments, which could be opened up by 'innovating' existing methods.

## Perspective

“Receiving an Innovation Award gave the support needed to test out our ideas – without it we’d still be wondering whether or not we could make a go of it.”

Professor Simon Haslett  
Bath Spa University

Bath Spa University's Business Support Office acts as a catalyst for engaging with employers, providing enterprise opportunities for students and graduates, and maximising on the expertise of the university for the benefit of the local business community. For further information, contact the Business Support Office at [businessenquiries@bathspa.ac.uk](mailto:businessenquiries@bathspa.ac.uk) [www.bathspabusiness.com](http://www.bathspabusiness.com)