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## **SMEs creating jobs and boosting turnover thanks to University's support**

71% of SMEs that have participated in Northumbria University's £1.1 million programme to support regional business have had, or are expecting to have, an increase in turnover according to a new report.

Northumbria University launched the Northumbria Graduates into Business project in 2013 to help start-up 30 new businesses and to provide graduate interns for more than 50 small businesses in the North East region.

With support from the European Regional Development Fund, the project has

provided part-funded interns to bring new skills, knowledge and approaches to the businesses on a six-month contract. The interns are helping SMEs to develop their workforces and improve performance.

An interim evaluation report was commissioned to assess the performance and impact of the project after its first year of operation. A full evaluation will follow after the scheme draws to a close this summer.

42% of businesses who responded to the evaluation had seen their turnover increase as a result of recruiting an intern – some by between £50,000 and £200,000 per annum. A further 29% said they expected their turnover increase within the next year. Six businesses said their turnover has increased by between 25% and 50%.

At the time the report was produced, 20 graduates had been offered full-time posts at the end of their internship. The businesses also reported that they were creating 10 additional full-time equivalent posts, with a further 64 jobs planned in the next 12 months. This equates to 2.38 new additional jobs created by each responding business.

The scheme's other aim of supporting 30 new start-up businesses is also on track for success. To date, 70 current students or recent graduates have approached the University for advice and support to start their own businesses. They are now in the process of receiving guidance to develop their business plans and put their ideas to market.

Lucy Winskell OBE, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Business and Engagement at Northumbria University, said: "The role of universities in contributing towards economic regeneration cannot be underestimated and this further proves the breadth of our impact.

"Our interim report is proving that this scheme has been a resounding success. We have businesses reporting increased turnover and the need to take on additional staff, and we have students and graduates reporting that they feel they have improved their ability to secure a job or start-up a business as a result of participating."

One company receiving support from the scheme is Consett-based Surgical Dynamics who design and produce medical products and devices. They

recruited Design for Industry graduate Rhydian Lewis as an intern to work with their in-house team to develop prototypes for manufacture.

Managing Director, Claire Jessup, said: Rhydian has clearly had excellent training at university and has brought energy, enthusiasm and a wide range of technical skills to the business. These skills have helped us to achieve our goals and bring projects to fruition and we have been delighted to offer Rhydian a permanent contract at the end of his internship.”

Lucy Winskell added: “Thanks to Northumbria’s reputation as a leading university for working in partnership with business we have been able to actively engage with SMEs in the region. The scheme proved so popular that we received enquiries from four-times the number of businesses we had capacity to work with.

“We are also pleased to see the positive impact it has had on graduate retention by helping to retain highly skilled individuals in the region who will further contribute to economic growth.”

Northumbria has a high success rate in supporting entrepreneurship and graduate start-up businesses. It is the UK’s best university for start-ups based on turnover, having supported the development of more than 100 graduate companies in the last five years. The companies employ almost 800 staff and have a combined turnover of £54 million. Most of these businesses are based in the North East but are trading nationally and internationally.

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