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International researchers and employers “throw around” business ideas in sandpit event at Northumbria University

Leading researchers from around the world came together at Northumbria University for a “sandpit” event to explore how organisations can successfully tap into young talent.

The group workshop-style event is part of an €954,000 European-funded project which sees Northumbria lead research into why many employers the world over struggle to attract, manage and retain young talent.

Global & Entrepreneurial Talent Management 3 (GETM3) is a consortium of international higher education institutions, the Irish Association of SMEs (ISME) which is a partner in the project and employers focused on young talent as a key driver of future development.

Made up of 14 partners and funded by Horizon 2020 - the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation - universities in Slovenia, Poland, Ireland and South Korea have collaborated alongside researchers at Northumbria on a four-year project with international reach that explores how to harness the skills and aptitudes of young talent in future. The group also includes multinational corporations and SMEs, as well as students and graduates.

Staff and students are funded to spend up to 12 months working with a large company, SME or industry body linked to a university in a partner country during the four-year project, alongside fellow researchers. The funding also supports networking and dissemination events, which rotate around partner universities in five countries.

The purpose of the first GETM3 sandpit was to reveal partners' collective knowledge, experience, networks, assumptions and ideas that relate to the programme's three primary constituencies - graduates, employers and academia. The 3 in the title stands for 'transnational, trans-sectorial and transgenerational.

During the sandpit, the participants started to establish shared understandings, aligned ways of working, and agreed a roadmap of milestones and outputs that will contribute to the project's success.

The multi-disciplinary event was the first of 15, which will happen on a quarterly basis around the world. It was well-attended by colleagues from three faculties at Northumbria, Multidisciplinary Design Innovation (MDI) students and secondees funded to spend time at Northumbria from Dublin, Ljubljana and Warsaw.

One of the participants, Rose Quan, had returned from a month in South Korea, just in time for the sandpit event. Each secondee was buddied with a Northumbria colleague to explore opportunities for international research, impact and publication.

Dr Alison Pearce, Project Leader at GETM3 and Senior Lecturer at Northumbria University's Newcastle Business School, said: "This project gives us the opportunity to work internationally and produce international standard research, to work directly with young people and industry organisations and to work across the faculties.

"The '3' in GETM3 is all underpinned by these free networking and innovation events every quarter in Europe and Asia. We are proud to have set the standard for the next four years."

Mark Bailey, Director of Innovation Design at Northumbria University, led the inaugural sandpit, using creative and innovative techniques developed by the University's design-led Innovation team.

"Innovation sandpits are about establishing a direction of travel and common purpose around a given topic," said Mark. "They're about bringing multiple stakeholders together for an intense period of activity in order to reveal their collective knowledge and to work with that knowledge to establish actionable opportunities.

"On the second day we brought in a group of 12 students to work alongside the employers in the room to discuss why graduates – often criticised by senior employers for having a sense of entitlement – get such a bad reputation."

The three-day event included a visit to Eliesha Training Ltd in Newcastle, a partner of the project, that is supporting the University in making a real impact in the business world.

The next Innovation Sandpit in the programme takes place at Chonnam National University, South Korea in July, and again, Northumbria's design-led Innovation team, other Business staff, students and employers will be seconded to Korean partners to play a leading role, funded by the GETM3 project.

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Contacts



Rik Kendall

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Business and Law / Arts, Design & Social Sciences

rik.kendall@northumbria.ac.uk

07923 382339



Andrea Slowey

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Engineering and Environment / Health and Life Sciences

andrea.slowey@northumbria.ac.uk

07708 509436



Rachael Barwick

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

rachael.barwick@northumbria.ac.uk

07377422415



James Fox

Press Contact

Student Communications Manager

james2.fox@northumbria.ac.uk



Kelly Elliott

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

kelly2.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk



Gemma Brown

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

gemma6.brown@northumbria.ac.uk