Flinders helping to shape the future south

Flinders is to play a major role in helping the southern metropolitan region of Adelaide pursue new directions in industry and employment, as well as contributing to the development of its environmental and social strategies.

The national shift away from a traditional industry base in areas such as car manufacture means that new skills are required for new industries. The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Barber, said Flinders would enhance its existing commitment to the southern region, an area strongly affected by the changes in employment patterns.

"Flinders already plays a role in addressing the region’s workforce needs, and we also play a role in providing advice and conducting research in social and environmental areas," Professor Barber said.

"But we want to, and will do, more,” he said.

Coordinating the University’s efforts is the Southern Knowledge Transfer Program (SKTP). Established with Commonwealth funding in 2009, the SKTP has been set up to increase the University’s contact with community organisations, businesses and government agencies in a collaborative approach designed to deliver improve skills, knowledge and innovation.

"The concept is to strengthen the connections between the University, all levels of government, the community and industry to ensure that teaching and learning at Flinders is responsive to the needs of the southern Adelaide community,” said SKTP Head, Ms Penny Crocker.

As well as developing course curricula that reflect the region’s social, environmental and economic needs, Flinders will increase its extensive network of work placements and internships in businesses and organisations.

In terms of educational opportunities, Flinders is increasing initiatives aimed at encouraging southern school students to undertake tertiary study, as well as seeking ways to improve pathways to study at Flinders, particularly through its Southern Program for Improved Participation in Education (SPIPE).

SPIPE’s Inspire Peer Mentoring Scheme has placed more than 500 Flinders students in schools and community organisations. As well increasing the awareness of tertiary education, physical access has been eased by the Flinders Noarlunga Study-Hub, an IT and learning-support centre.

Medical device manufacture is one example of new “smart” industries finding a home in the south, and the Medical Device Partnering Program (MDPP), led by Flinders, is a collaboration between South Australian researchers, end-users and industry aimed at streamlining the development, production and marketing of medical devices.

Five current MDPP projects involve partnerships with companies located south of Adelaide’s CBD.

The University has well established links with the southern community, particularly through its provision of clinical and research health services around the Flinders Medical Centre, the Repatriation General Hospital and the Noarlunga Hospital.

New Flinders-based bodies such as the National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training, the School of the Environment and the Southgate Institute for Health, Society and Equity also have obvious roles to play in mapping out the south’s environmental and social future.

A newly signed agreement between Flinders University and the South Adelaide Football Club (SAFC) aims to enhance the prospects of young people in the southern suburbs, the Fleurieu Peninsula and Kangaroo Island.

The November agreement will take advantage of synergies between two of the most influential and visible entities in the south.

As well as offering professional development via degree and short courses to the Panthers’ staff and players, Flinders will facilitate business development and sponsorship opportunities for the Club through the University’s extensive networks in the region.

In its turn, the Club will provide field placement opportunities for Flinders students, and the two organisations will assist each other in marketing and local community activities.

Flinders continues to make practical contributions to the economy of the south through its representation on a variety of boards and committees – the Vice-Chancellor, for example, is a member of the Southern Suburbs Coordinating Group chaired by Mr John Hill, Minister for the Southern Suburbs.

“Our ultimate objective is to build up the southern region’s knowledge capacity in strategic areas that will materially assist in creating a prosperous and dynamic community,” Professor Barber said.

Charles Gent