Fusion: The Inis Meain Knitting Company and Ulster University Collaboration Project

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Introduction
The outcome of a recent IntertradeIreland Fusion project, which involved Inis Meain Knitting Company Aran Islands (the Industrial partner) the Ba (Hons) Textile Art, Design and Fashion Course (Fashion knit) Ulster University (the academic partner and knowledge provider) and a recent graduate (the knowledge carrier).

Objectives
The input of the graduate designer eager to extend their knowledge, skill base and understanding of the subject area, improving future employability opportunities.
The Industrial partner working with the University to avail of University resources and knowledge transfer opportunities creating new product developments and working practices.
The academic partner gains access to state of the art CAD CAM systems and knitting technology, networking events, designers, buyers, Industrial trade fairs and production teams.

Methods
Collaboration and Triangulation:
The Company Team met regularly on a weekly basis to discuss weekly tasks and to ensure project success.
The Steering group met on average once a month. Communication was also via email, telephone, video-conferencing or Skype between the partners this provided effective support throughout the project.
The Project Management Group met quarterly for PMG meetings. Reports were prepared and reviewed by all stakeholders quarterly while the graduate maintained a reflective journal. Therefore the methodology included the main stakeholders in the project, business consultants aligned to IntertradeIreland and international agents.

Conclusion
In conclusion the Fusion Project outlined the importance of developing partnerships between industry and university. The academic partners’ access to cutting edge equipment and contemporary practice impacted on pedagogy that was disseminated via curriculum design and content. The graduate benefit could be measured in terms of personal development, skills acquisition, post-graduate qualification and raised employability. The Company had an injection of innovation that improved productivity, efficiency and market share. The increased turnover of 20% in the first 6 months continued to improve over the next 24 months with continued input from the academic partner and placement student employment.

Results
Overall outcomes and Benefits to the Academic Partner
Lecture material for presentation and dissemination
Student Placements
Student Opportunities – Live Projects
Visiting Lecturer – Graduate and Company
Access to Resources – current and contemporary knitting operations
Contacts and networks
Journal papers and conferences
Overall constraints difficulties to the Academic Partner
Time invested in the project alongside academic responsibilities
Travel and the location of the Company
Overall outcomes and Benefits to the Industrial Partner
Training on the Apex system by the graduate disseminated to the company
Increase in sales
Investment in resources – physical and human
Design development input – New product ranges
Archive of Inis Meain styles, designs, patterns
Access to Ulster University students – placement/projects
Access to Ulster University equipment and resources
Increase in contacts and collaborations
Overall constraints/difficulties to the Industrial Partner
Training time investment in the graduate
12 month project - short timeframe in a cyclical industry

Overall outcomes and Benefits to the Graduate Partner
Post Graduate Qualification
Communication and Presentation skills
Training on the Apex – CAD_CAM
Exploring interface between ADOBE and APEX
Organisational skills
Project management experience
Team Work
Sales and Marketing experience
Operation of production machinery
Research and Development
Overall difficulties/constraints for the graduate
Time in travel due to Company location to Training

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