
Better Innovation – Better Business

UK Innovation in Central Europe

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Twelve key players from the UK innovation scene participated in a UK innovation mission to Central Europe in March 2008. Led by Nick Stuart from the Science & Technology Unit of UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) and Sheena Newell of AEA Energy & Environment, the UK delegation comprised representatives of UK research, finance, industry and the Knowledge Transfer Networks.

The four-day innovation roadshow programme was arranged by the

British Embassy Science and Innovation Network (SIN) and UKTI teams in Prague and Warsaw. It included UK Innovation Partnership Conferences in both locations, plus meetings with key innovation contacts and site visits. The total audience figure ran to over 150, comprising innovation specialists, government officials, innovative businesses, university and innovation park representatives.

The roadshow's coherent proposition in UK innovation was based on UKTI's

UK Innovation Map*. Better innovation means better business: by introducing the British innovation environment and UK expertise to the Czech Republic and Poland, the roadshow aimed to strengthen UK co-operation with these two countries in the innovation sector, thus facilitating wealth creation collaborations between Czech and Polish partners and key players in the UK.

Central Europe was identified as a region which would benefit from the Innovation Map's clear presentation of

*<https://www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk/ukti/fileDownload/UKTIInnovationReport.pdf?cid=415913>

the UK's complex innovation landscape because the UK has a particular interest in ensuring that innovation professionals in rapidly developing EU Member States work closely with UK industry and academia. With UKTI and SIN officers co-located in Prague and Warsaw, and SIN's focus on regional working within Europe, the geographical focus was clear.

Both Poland and the Czech Republic benefit from large chunks of EU Structural and Cohesion Funds (SCF). This financial provision offers them the opportunity to use this funding to help develop their science infrastructure and put sustainable policies in place to foster innovation.

Poland's Innovative Economy programme (OPIE) is worth €9.7bn over the period 2007-2013, including €8.3bn EU funding (12.3% of total Polish SCF for the same period). The programme comprises a range of sub-programmes designed to improve Polish economic development by fostering an innovation culture and improving R&D infrastructure. The €190m Wroclaw Research Centre (due to be operational by 2013) is one example of how Poland is using its SCF funding.

A range of reforms is under way to improve the Polish science landscape. The National R&D Centre (NCBR), set up in 2007, is the leading Government funding agency for applied research. R&D funding is becoming much more focused on key strategic programmes and projects, with excellence seen as a major criterion for funding.

Similar developments are seen in the Czech Republic where the government is looking to give its economy more of

a focus on high added value business and increase its R&D spending. It is using €7.3bn of its structural funds primarily to improve science (R&D), competitiveness, and research infrastructure using three specialised operational programmes (Business and Innovation, Education for Competitiveness, and Science & Research for Innovation).

A new Technology Research Council will provide grant funding for applied research, for which university-business collaboration – including part funding from business – will be required. New legislation is in the pipeline designed to encourage applied research and innovation to allow universities to commercialise successful results of its research, patent, sell licences and start

UK INNOVATION MAP

The UK builds on a history of innovation to deliver new products and services. With an extensive network of organisations focused on innovation, the UK is a global innovation hub that creates wealth for the UK and its international partners.

The Innovation Map, recently produced by UK Trade & Investment, identifies for the first time the 12 key groups into which all UK innovation organisations fall. UKTI's Science & Technology team works in collaboration with those 12 key groups, helping to raise the profile of UK Research & Development.

The Innovation Map can be downloaded from <https://www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk/ukti/fileDownload/UKTIInnovationReport.pdf?cid=415913>

spin-off companies.

This focus on revamping the Polish and Czech R&D landscapes offer a range of potential business opportunities for UK organisations in collaboration with local partners. The UK has much to offer by way of best practice, indeed Professor Rudolf Hanka of the University of Cambridge has recently become one of the innovation advisers to the Czech Prime Minister.

In terms of achievements, all of the UK missioners have leads likely to result in collaborations, possibly contracts. The Polish and Czech audiences, already interested in the UK's approach, went away with a much better understanding and, importantly, a desire to pursue links with the UK. There was so much interest in the Knowledge Transfer Networks and the Knowledge Transfer Partnerships that equivalent structures may well emerge in both countries.

By working together, UKTI and FCO SIN have delivered a strong set of events promoting UK innovation, and delivering on joint objectives in a way that neither could have achieved separately. The expertise of the SIN officers in Prague and Warsaw and access to their local networks were essential to a successful outcome.

The opportunities revealed by the innovation roadshow have created demand for follow-up activity in the UK later this year. And the SIN teams in Prague and Warsaw are working on plans to raise awareness of the opportunities which structural funds could offer UK businesses in partnership with local organisations in the Czech Republic and in Poland.

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