

Bolton Technical Innovation Centre Ltd

A new concept for delivering education in SET to 9-19 year-olds

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Paul Abbott, a former teacher who always tried to take his pupils beyond the science and technology textbooks, had a dream to create a specialist facility to help nurture innovation in young people from across Bolton. He shared his vision with Lord Puttnam, with the Local Education Authority and with the Northwest Development Agency, and the result is Bolton Technical Innovation Centre Ltd, the first junior incubator in the country.

This is a partnership between the NWDA, who put up £2.2 million for a futuristic looking building which was completed in June, Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council, who provided transport infrastructure improvements and who will provide some of the £0.5 million per annum revenue income that is required to operate the building and Mount St Joseph Business and Enterprise College.

Bolton TIC is not a school; it's a limited company, and I am privileged to be the first Chairman of its slowly expanding Board of Directors. We hope to open the building in the evenings, at weekends and throughout the school holidays, as well as during school term time. Bolton TIC aims to give 9-19 year-olds an out-of-school SET experience, and to support all schools by providing facilities beyond their reach.

Regional industry is being invited to give or loan the TIC state of the art equipment and to second staff to show

pupils how to use it. The TIC can become a showcase for new equipment and instruments. Local and regional industry are invited to use the TIC for conferences, exhibitions, and away days. In this way the TIC will bring Bolton's young people closer to industry, and industry can get closer to motivated young people.

The entrance of the TIC is impressive. After entering a reception area the visitor enters a two-storey research and development hall, with a dedicated room for Computer Aided Design. Other ground floor rooms include material preparation areas, storage, a technician base, meeting rooms and a video-conferencing suite. The building is to be wired for state of the art IT. On the first floor there is a 100-seater lecture hall, to be fitted out with advanced audiovisual equipment, and other rooms including a large business incubation suite, meeting rooms and a library.

It is my hope that we can bring famous figures in SET into this building to inspire young and old alike – the equivalent of the Faraday Lecture Theatre in the North West. If we can inspire enough volunteers, I would like to see various science and engineering clubs set up so that young people can pursue a "hobby" without it costing them the earth.

We want 9-19 year-olds from Bolton to use this building whether they show an interest in science or not. This project, which is an experiment itself, is about

turning ideas into reality. It is established to nurture innovation and entrepreneurship in young people from every school in the town. It seeks to provide modern design and manufacturing facilities, including rapid-prototyping and 3D visualisation systems, and 3D Computer Aided Design, to enable young people to pursue their ideas. Hopefully, we will be able to fabricate in any material.

A detailed programme has been drawn up for each age group. Primary school children will visit for a day or two, but older children for longer periods. Hopefully, a future school curriculum in science can encompass a visit to the TIC.

Of course, the success of this brave experiment depends on the interest shown by regional and national industry. We are looking for sponsors who are willing to help us to fill our revenue gap. All major sponsors will have their logos on the TIC's publicity materials and at the entrance to the building. We are looking for a major national company to become a major sponsor, but other sponsors are invited to sponsor rooms and equipment in the building.

Bolton's TIC deserves to succeed. If this model for inspiring our future scientists and engineers is successful, it can be replicated. Bolton TIC needs funds, equipment, programmes and volunteers. It needs the expertise, goodwill and actions of people to make it successful. Will you or your company be one of those?

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