



Business Support
& Innovation

COMMERCIALISATION STRATEGY

Business Growth Plan

Think Differently, Think Opportunity

Tracy Rice
ricet@src.ac.uk

1. INTRODUCTION

This Commercialisation strategy has been developed to support SRC to address on-going fiscal challenges and gain a reputation for “best in class” service delivery by setting out a 3C framework **‘Culture, Collaboration & Communication’** to foster a commercial culture and mindset and ensure effective collaboration with external partners and across organisational boundaries.

This strategy will work in tandem with other strategies both internal and external to deliver the best outcomes for our customers, ensuring they can enjoy a quality service delivery that is focused on their needs and getting it right first time.

The development of the 3C framework will support the College in the delivery of the following outcome included in the 9 PfG's draft Outcomes Framework:

- “Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon neutral.”

This Outcome is about creating the conditions required to achieve a strong, competitive economy that helps Northern Ireland compete on the global stage, attract investment and stimulate innovation and creativity, with one of the key priorities being innovation.

The framework will also support the delivery of DfE's 10x Economy – NI's vision for a Decade of Innovation. The ambition within this economic vision is a transformational mind-set centred on what can be achieved with the right level of ambition. The 5 key priority clusters within 10X are:

- Digital, ICT and Creative Industries
- Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering
- Agri-Tech
- Life and Health Sciences
- Fintech / Financial Services.

In addition, the drive to meet efficiency demands in an extremely challenging financial environment, places pressure on SRC alongside other FE colleges to deliver better outcomes at less cost. With increased competition, we need to pool College resources to ensure we deliver for our local businesses and realise our vision to be the provider of choice for industry training needs and applied research.

To address this, SRC must explore and develop new ways to manage the financial pressure without compromising on the delivery of outcomes for our stakeholders.

The embedding of the 3C framework set out in this strategy will enable SRC to diversify the income portfolio and develop a more effective and efficient approach to delivery, supporting the organisation to achieve a holistic approach to realising financial efficiencies, address increased competition and declining enrolments and deliver better outcomes.

2. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Southern Regional College (SRC) is one of six FE/HE colleges in NI delivering a range of technical and professional training programmes at all levels to a wide audience. We have a significant industry base in our region - with the industrial city of Newry, the manufacturing hub in Craigavon, Financial and Professional services, the “big three” pharmaceutical companies and retail, hospitality and tourism across the region.

As a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) and a key delivery arm of the Department for the Economy (DfE), SRC has a dual mandate, taking a pivotal role in generating a strong and vibrant economy through the development of professional and technical skills, increasingly at higher levels, and by helping employers to innovate; and supporting social inclusion by providing those with low or no qualifications, or who have other barriers to learning, with the skills

and qualifications needed to find employment and to become economically active.

As part of the FE sector, SRC is an essential component to support delivery of the Executive's PfG Outcomes and the Department's vision and strategies. NI's future economic and social success is predicated on its ability to access a highly skilled, talented and flexible workforce to deliver a vibrant economy and inclusive society.

Presently, SRC's '**Business Support & Innovation Unit**' (BSI) delivers on the College's key aim to "support economic growth and innovation through flexible business support solutions". The unit plays a major role in identifying and responding to the needs of local business and industry and has an income generating function for the College as well as an external business engagement role. In recent years, BSI has delivered successful approaches to supporting foreign direct investment through the Assured Skills Programme and the development of knowledge transfer and innovation programmes for indigenous SMEs and micro-businesses through the Skills Focus and InnovateUs programmes. The unit will continue to work alongside organisations such as Invest NI, Intertrade Ireland, local Councils and Chambers of Commerce and Trade to create end to end skills and development solutions that will help improve the competitiveness of the local economy.

A commercial culture is embedded in the BSI unit, rendering it the main commercial wing of the College supporting companies of all sizes to innovate, compete and grow through the provision of a unique mix of technical and business know-how, skills development and research and development services. This commercialisation strategy sets out the College's vision of fostering an organisation wide culture, and commercial mind-set to deliver our ambitions to transform and diversify how we do business.

The BSI unit has three main pillars of support as follows:

Business Support & Innovation

1.

KNOWLEDGE
TRANSFER &
INNOVATION



2.

UPSKILLING &
WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT



3.

APPRENTICESHIP
& HIGHER
APPRENTICESHIP
DEVELOPMENT &
EMPLOYER SUPPORT



Business Support & Innovation Centre

Newry | BT34 2QX
Portladown | BT63 5BL

T. +44 (0)28 3025 9664
T. +44 (0)28 3859 7778

E. betterbusiness@src.ac.uk
W. www.src.ac.uk/betterbusiness



Business Support & Innovation

Pillar 1. Knowledge Transfer & Innovation

The unit specialises in a range of knowledge transfer and innovation support services using many specific support interventions from multiple funding bodies, outside of DfE, thereby generating income for the College. A team of innovation specialists, housed within the unit, exclusively work with SMEs offering a flexible and reliable service. Key areas of specialism include design engineering; product design, development and prototyping; lean manufacturing and lean processes; food innovation including food product development, manufacture and scale-up; tourism innovation; emerging and digital technologies. Depending on the sector and size of the company, the innovation team can offer interventions on a progressive basis as the company develops and grows - referred to as the "innovation escalator".

Innovation is at the heart of the Department for the Economy's (DfE) new 10X Economy strategy - it is recognised as a vital activity in securing NI's economic

success. Innovation is well established at SRC through the work of the BSI innovation team over the last 10 years and this area of work continues to go from strength to strength. The delivery of innovation projects through Innovation Vouchers, Fusion Innovation Boost and Co-Innovate are a regular source of income for the College. With the recent approval of an Innovation and Technology Manager post to lead this area of work, this pillar will experience a broadening out of innovation activities, resulting in increased income for the College.

Pillar 2. Upskilling & Workforce Development

BSI is committed to local workforce development and over the last 8 years, we have developed a highly skilled and qualified team who engage with businesses of all sizes to support their efforts to attract, retain and develop the talent and skills necessary to increase business productivity and growth. This is done through a range of employee upskilling programmes, both funded and through full cost recovery. The business development team proactively engages with local industry to ascertain their needs and put appropriate solutions in place. The team offers a high level of customer service to all clients and a lot of repeat custom is secured.

Skills is recognized as one of the key contributors to economic recovery and growth and, working with employers to design and deliver meaningful skills programmes, is one of the main actions on BSI's 3-year action plan (under the College Development Plan 2022-25). There are many opportunities to develop this area of work to increase the income portfolio. This team adopts an externally focused approach and are driven by customer demands – and it is this type of approach that needs to be mirrored across the organization.

Pillar 3. Apprenticeship & Higher Apprenticeship Development and Employer Support

The centre also liaises with industry to identify and support Apprenticeship and Higher-Level Apprenticeship (HLA) development activities, including a full employer support service. The HLA specialists engage with employers throughout the year to promote and develop new HLA opportunities in conjunction with the faculties. The HLA specialists are also instrumental in

guiding curriculum managers in the development of new Foundation degree qualifications that underpin HLAs, in seeking appropriate approval with sector partnerships and DfE and in working with the College marketing unit to promote new apprenticeship opportunities. This team is outward looking and continuously challenges the norm. Their strapline is "Think Differently, Think Apprenticeships" and it is imperative that staff across the organisation begin to think differently and that they are encouraged to do so.

Although there are three distinct strands housed within the BSI unit, the team works holistically to offer a solution driven service to local and regional businesses. It is the bedding in of this culture across the organization that will ensure the successful delivery of this commercialization strategy.

To further promote the College's key role in supporting local and regional economic development, the Business Support and Innovation unit continues to work closely with a wide range of partner organisations to deliver a quality service to local companies. This partnership approach with councils, chambers, economic development agencies and other business networks ensures the College plays a pivotal role in driving local economic growth as well as presenting opportunities for the College to engage in income generating activities.

The BSI unit is externally focused, target driven and continually strives to win business. It is intended that this ready-made culture within the BSI unit is rolled out across the College so that there is a more cross cutting view of commercialization thereby securing business growth.

Through the development of a SWOT analysis of the organisation it is acknowledged that SRC has a lot of strengths which can be built upon. This includes a strong level of staff expertise across the College, excellent relationships with employers and external stakeholders, increasingly sound industry offer, Higher Level Apprenticeship portfolio and external reputation. The four faculties and skills training team at SRC currently engage with businesses regularly to secure placements for students, identify projects for students through Project Based Learning (PBL) and to monitor progress of higher apprentices. However, one of our weaknesses is that many of these business activities are carried out in isolation from each other creating duplication and conflict and not maximising on the opportunities within our business market.

Additionally, there is a lack of standard employer engagement practices across the College and in a lot of cases, we are not able to respond to employer needs in a timely fashion, these needs representing a key growth market for SRC. This framework, created through the delivery of this strategy, will enable SRC to address the weaknesses and use our strengths to maximise opportunities for industry engagement and commercial gain, including:

- new opportunities for revenue generation to expand full cost recovery activities in respective business areas;
- maximising on business engagement opportunities across all College activities;
- the review of delivery models for industry provision to transform the offering and meet the demands of the modern business client.

3. VISION

Our vision for this strategy is articulated as:

To embed a commercial mindset and culture within the organisation where all staff continuously seek out new opportunities and deliver a “best in class” service offering to all learners and stakeholders, embodying the culture of “one team”.

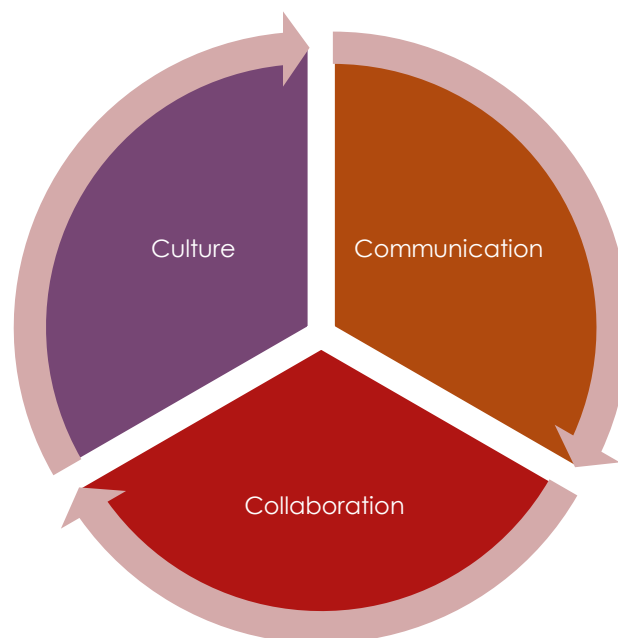
Our Vision is embodied in the strapline:

Think Differently – Think Opportunity

This vision is closely aligned to the long-term vision of the College to **‘To be the provider of first choice for professional and technical education and training in the region – prized by individuals and employers’**. Recognising the College’s desire to provide relevant and meaningful vocational learning opportunities

delivered through quality and innovative teaching, this strategy will create a shift in mindset and a genuine appetite to offer the best outcomes for our customers, ensuring they can enjoy a service delivery that is focused on their needs and getting it right first time.

The 3C Framework for SRC



Culture, Communication and Collaboration

This strategy sets out a vision as follows:

“To be the provider of choice for industry training and innovation services in the southern region, embedding an entrepreneurial culture and commercial mindset across the College, that continuously drives income generating activities through commercial activity whilst delivering results to industry.”

The vision will ensure there will increasingly be a culture of staff actively looking for additional commercial opportunities as part of the development of their curriculum / business activities and proactively seeking to undertake a continuous review, identifying alternative ways of delivering services to

achieve the best outcomes. The College seeks to have a reputation for being willing to be flexible and innovative with a clear understanding of where it is desirable to be able to increase and develop our capabilities.

Building on the 3 pillars of work underpinning the College's BSI unit, we will develop our workforce through the 3 C's – culture, communication and collaboration. We will transform our people to work more efficiently and build an entrepreneurial mindset that challenges the norm and seeks out new and innovative ways of working

4. KEY DRIVERS

The key drivers of the strategy underpinning the 3 C's Framework are as follows:

Culture:

- to create an entrepreneurial culture where staff are encouraged to identify opportunities for commercialisation through the excellent service offering through the faculties.
- to create an openminded and commercial mindset where all business support opportunities are welcomed with an appetite to develop and deliver this offer.
- to diversify our income portfolio and work to embed a culture of commercialisation across the organization, ensuring all staff are outward looking and recognize the value and importance of maximizing the opportunities associated with business engagement and other externally facing activities.

Communication:

- to enhance the global curriculum offer, position SRC as a leader of meaningful and relevant training provision and provide a best-in-class customer service experience -all of which needs to be communicated effectively to the target market.

- *Regular and structured two-way communication between BSI, faculties and other support departments to identify and share new opportunities for business, working together to achieve better outcomes, particularly ensuring that the work of the specialist lecturers is aligned to BSI objectives.*

Collaboration:

- *working together, through a shared vision, to grow the SRC's offering to industry by looking beyond the established funding pots that the College relies on each year, and instead seeking out additional income streams.*
- *shared commitment to increasing capacity to support a greater portion of the business community which the College serves thereby contributing to local economic recovery and growth.*
- *joint funding bids with FE sector colleagues and other external stakeholders – creating a stronger FE brand.*

Communication, both internally and externally, will play a large role in the effective delivery of this strategy.

This proposed strategy also aligns to several national and regional economic strategies including:

A 10x Economy – Northern Ireland's Vision for a Decade of Innovation

Published in May 2021, 10x is the Department's economic vision for a decade of innovation in delivering a ten times better economy. Key to that vision is an investment in skills and 10x sets a pathway to see more of Northern Ireland's businesses, especially small businesses and emerging entrepreneurs, put new ideas into practice.

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/10x-economy-economic-vision>

Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland - Skills for a 10X Economy

Between May and August 2021, the Department held a public consultation on a new Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland - 'Skills for a 10x Economy'. It sets out proposals which will set the strategic direction for the development of a flexible skills system for the next decade, in line with the Department's 10x economic vision. This includes the need to invest in the skills that will drive our key strategic clusters, boosting the research and innovation potential of our workforce.

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/consultations/skills-strategy-northern-ireland-skills-10x-economy>

The Northern Ireland Skills Barometer 2021

This is the fourth NI Skills Barometer publication from Ulster University Economic Policy Centre, (UUPEC) since 2015. The Barometer provides a detailed understanding of the skills requirements for the Northern Ireland Economy up to 2030 with the aim of ensuring that any skills gaps are identified and addressed.

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/skills-barometer-2021>

The Innovation Strategy for Northern Ireland (2014 to 2025)

Published in 2015, the Innovation Strategy highlights the innovation challenges, the need to intervene to address market and other failures in the innovation of SMEs and the need to address Northern Ireland's continued underperformance in innovation activity, particularly amongst the small business base. It highlights the importance of skills in driving innovation and competitiveness.

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-innovation-strategy>

ABC Council Recovery and Growth Framework (February 2021)

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council has outlined an ambitious framework aimed at helping the local economy to quickly recover and forge a path to future inclusive growth.

The Framework emphasises the regional focus on driving economic investment for Northern Ireland around key sectors such as: agri-food, health and life sciences and advanced manufacturing, where the borough already excels and which, with support to improve skills, connectivity, and productivity, can become global exemplars.

[Recovery and Growth Framework - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council \(armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk\)](http://armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk)

NMDDC Council Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy (2020-25)

This plan sets out a pathway to economic prosperity and growth. The action plan falling out of the strategy has employability and skills at its core and the Council recognises SRC as a key partner in delivering on the local skills agenda.

[Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy \(newrymouredown.org\)](http://newrymouredown.org)

SRC is well positioned to deliver on all of these strategies within the southern region. There are also opportunities through the Belfast Regional City Deal and the Mid-South West Growth Deal – both of which have skills and innovation at their core. In particular, ABC Council is committed to delivering a new Agri-Tech/Agri-Food centre in the borough and SRC is a strategic partner in realising this ambition.

5. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this strategy is to develop a commercially efficient approach to our business support services which generates a financial return. We want to build on our strengths as well as unlock other opportunities for growth where we currently have little to no capacity or capabilities.

Four key objectives have been identified in this strategy to help the College become more commercially minded and increase income generation. They are:

1. Develop and embed a culture of innovation and commercialisation amongst all College staff to maximise on commercial opportunities to increase income generation. **(Culture)**
2. Develop an outward looking approach to business engagement, working in partnership with external stakeholders to better respond to the needs of local businesses. **(Collaboration)**
3. Develop large company engagement with a view to establishing strong working relationships, thereby significantly increasing commercial income, including cross border opportunities. **(Collaboration)**
4. Introduce a college-wide employer engagement procedure with associated processes to streamline activities and ensure recording of same by way of a fit-for-purpose CRM. **(Communication)**

Objective 1 - Develop and embed a culture of innovation and commercialisation amongst all College staff to maximise on commercial opportunities to increase income generation.

This objective is key to changing the mindset of staff across the organisation. There is a myriad of opportunities for commercialisation through the core business of curriculum delivery. Within each faculty, there are opportunities to generate additional income through delivery of services and the development of small enterprises. There is also the need to instil a lean mindset in all college staff to encourage staff to consider how to work more efficiently and identify smarter and cost-saving ways of working. In order to achieve this objective, the goal is to:

- 1.1** Roll out innovation and design thinking training to curriculum teams to trigger ideas for commercial opportunities with information on how to take ideas forward and instilling a total change of approach.

1.2 Identify and use existing SRC champions to inspire staff to embrace commercialisation within their area of work (e.g., commercialisation of music studio in Armagh campus). A scoping exercise could be carried out across the faculties to identify areas of potential commercialisation.

1.3 Facilitate workshops with faculties to identify appetite and areas for commercialisation and develop a 3-year action plan based on proposals.

1.4 Facilitate enterprise development for lecturers and students providing opportunities for business ideas to be explored, developed, pitched and won (via competitions) – introducing rewards as incentive (and explore how this can contribute to achievement of modules – embedded into curriculum). This will also provide opportunities for cross-curricular engagement.

1.5 Introduce a student enterprise initiative whereby students provide a service for local businesses which attract accreditation for the student and income for the college (e.g., websites, graphic design, databases, CAD, administration, social media as well as opportunities for new ideas / innovation work). This is a perfect example of students entering the Gig economy.

1.6 Support lecturers to actively participate in the delivery of innovation projects to industry through Innovation Vouchers, Innovation Boost (Fusion), KTP, TechStart NI and other InnovateUK and InterTradeIreland initiatives which will be secured and supported through BSI. The appointment of the new Innovation and Technology Manager in BSI will help to achieve this objective as he/she will lead this work.

1.7 Establish a package of support to encourage and prepare young people to become self-employed in their chosen vocational area. This is another example of SRC supporting the Gig Economy.

1.8 Proactively promote hire of SRC facilities to generate income.

1.9 Introduce a business address service through the BSI centre.

Objective 2 - Develop an outward looking approach to business engagement, working together to become more responsive to the needs of local businesses.

Achieving this objective will see faculty staff embracing business engagement activities within their role, identifying business opportunities through their industry engagement activities and bringing about a willingness to deliver quality training delivery to business clients. One of the greatest opportunities

is to align targets between the Business Support and Innovation unit and curriculum so that there is a more joined up approach to delivering a responsive and high-quality service to industry clients.

The objective is for staff to:

- 2.1** actively seek out new businesses each year for placement and PBL opportunities to bring continuously fresh ideas and projects to the curriculum.
- 2.2** develop an appetite for delivery of industry provision and actively sign up with BSI to deliver training and knowledge transfer services to industry clients (within their area of expertise).
- 2.3** explore opportunities for collaboration and joint working both internally and externally, ensuring skills, knowledge and best practice are identified and utilised.
- 2.4** contact BSI with ideas for new industry short course provision and collaborate with BSI on development of same.
- 2.5** actively seek the support of BSI when hosting industry events, employer clusters, instilling a culture of “one team” approach.
- 2.6** Work closely with BSI when setting targets for curriculum development plans.
- 2.7** follow new college wide business engagement procedures

There will also be a requirement for senior managers to make time to carry out external engagement activities by way of best practice visits and development days in order to identify more innovative ways of doing business (e.g., tours of local businesses who have successfully implemented a lean culture throughout their organisation such as Kukoon Rugs in Newry). In so doing, senior managers can lead by example and encourage an innovative and commercial mindset amongst staff throughout the College, at all levels.

Objective 3 - Develop large company engagement with a view to establishing strong working relationships, thereby significantly increasing commercial income, including cross border opportunities.

The achievement of this objective will be led by the work of the BSI team, in conjunction with the faculties. The newly approved BSI structure will act as an enabler for this objective. With a new Business Skills Manager tasked with developing large company engagement, the goal is for staff to:

- 3.1** achieve the CDP target to develop meaningful engagement with 15 large employers in the region, introducing a “round table” model of engagement to bring about regular business for the college, and continue to grow this.
- 3.2** actively seek out companies with large numbers of hard-to-fill vacancies with a view to securing Assured Skills funding to support these clients.
- 3.3** develop a new call-off industry register, housed within BSI, to increase capacity to deliver specific areas of industry training, particularly for the manufacturing sector.
- 3.4** grow the number of HLAs at the College through engaging with more large employers.
- 3.5** carry out targeted business development activities with cross border companies with a view to increase Full Cost Recovery (FCR) income, specifically for bespoke, non-accredited provision.
- 3.6** Secure KTP projects with medium to larger clients.
- 3.7** Seek out sponsorship opportunities for new kit, new technologies and for PR activities.

It will also be important that targets are joined up and that faculties are allowed to recognise the importance of business engagement targets and how this work will add to the development of the faculties. The introduction of more specialist lecturers across more technical areas will work towards achieving this goal.

Objective 4 - Introduce a college-wide employer engagement procedure with associated processes to streamline activities and ensure recording of same by way of a fit-for-purpose CRM

In order to successfully achieve these objectives – communication will be key. There needs to be a shared information portal which will capture all business

engagement activities across the College to facilitate maximisation of opportunity as well as an excellent level of customer service. In order to achieve this goal, the following actions will need to be undertaken:

- 4.1** Develop and embed a new procedure for engaging with employers, highlighting the different types of engagement, followed up by a staff training exercise.
- 4.2** Introduce a new training module for lecturing staff (FTLs and PTLs) for delivering provision to industry clients.
- 4.3** Further develop and roll out the existing BSI CRM to add functionality to record all types of business engagement across all faculties and departments, including functionality to research employers as required (to support the immediate needs of this strategy).
- 4.4** Research a suitable longer term CRM solution and seek budget approval for implementation in year 3.
- 4.5** Facilitate a 360° view of an employer to maximise on opportunities.
- 4.6** Proactively promote on a continual basis, both internally and externally, good case studies and collaborative projects to raise the profile of this commercially focused and customer driven organisation.

The attached Gantt chart illustrates the actions over the next three years.

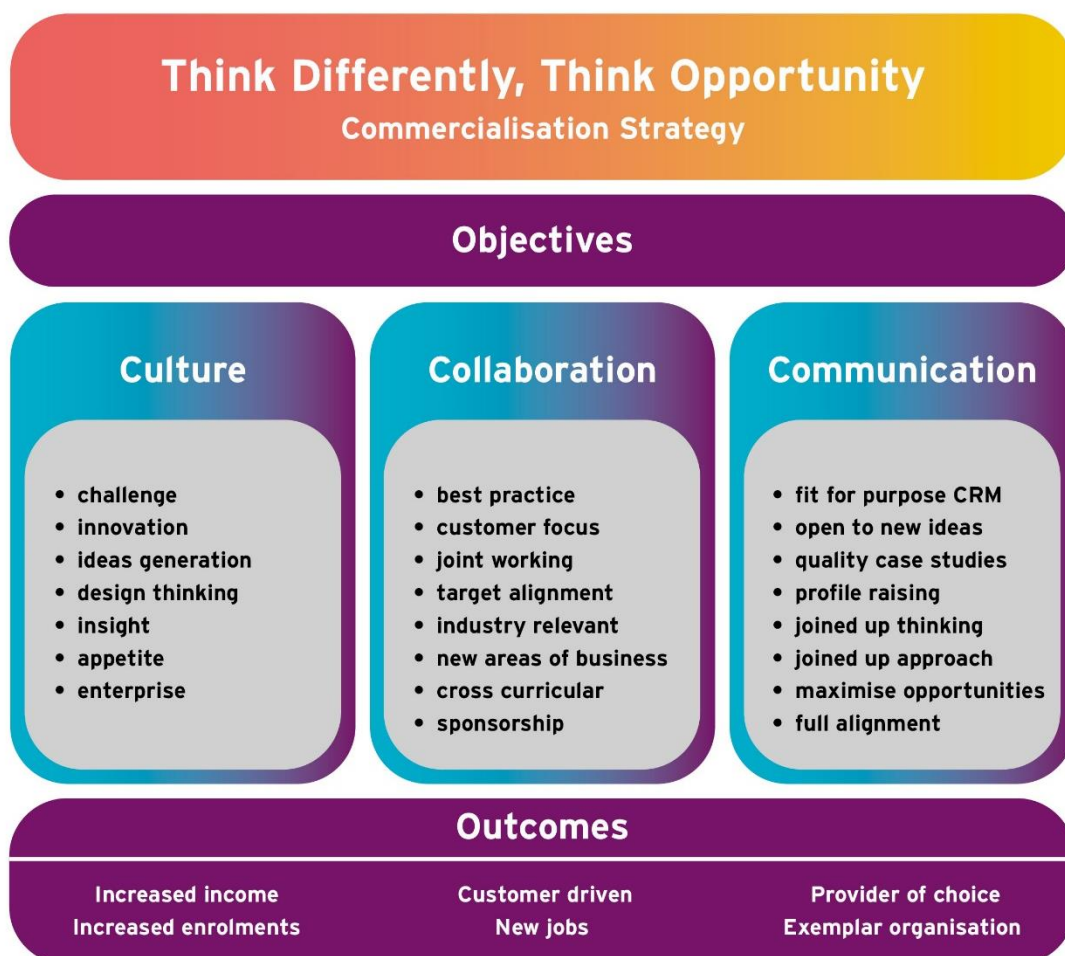
Communication will play a large role in the effective roll-out of this strategy. Developing a method of communicating regularly and clearly with the faculties is key to the success of this strategy. The new BSI management team will drive this communication through staff workshops, regular meetings with curriculum managers and ongoing support for faculty industry events. Although it is anticipated that with the new business support structure, BSI will have deeper engagement with faculties, there will also be a need for new resource to drive this strategy forward in the faculties. This may be addressed through an increase in specialist lecturer roles, but another possible way of achieving this is through the introduction of industry/enterprise champions who will drive this strategy forward in partnership with BSI.

It will be important to showcase and champion innovation throughout this process. The Innovation and Technology team in BSI can start to lead on this initiative but it may require further development by way of a centre for advice, training, demonstration and research in order to be fully embraced and rolled out across the College. This is something to explore through further

development of the BSI innovation team, particularly given the team's regular exposure to live innovation projects in industry.

5. HOW WILL WE GET THERE

Supporting the College to adopt a more innovative and commercial approach requires a careful plan, broken down into short-, medium- and long-term actions. This plan will include a programme of activity to ensure effective and inclusive idea generation, challenge, business planning, prioritisation and project management.



6. GOVERNANCE AND REVIEW

Each of the themes and objectives detailed above will drive specific actions to deliver our high-level outcomes. To ensure successful delivery of the outcomes over the 3-year period of this strategy, annual delivery plans will be developed by the Head of BSI in collaboration with Heads of Faculty.

Key actions to ensure proper governance and review of the action plan include:

- 1. A project board will be established, with agreed terms of reference. The board will be chaired by the Head of Business Engagement and members will include Heads of Faculty, BSI Managers, Assistant Directors for HR, Finance and Student Activities and Marketing.*
- 2. Once the commercialisation strategy is agreed by the Executive team, it will be delivered as a programme with a set of workstreams, which will be monitored by the board to ensure outcomes are achieved.*
- 3. The Head of Business Engagement will monitor the delivery of the action plan and, together with the Heads of Faculty, will review the action plan quarterly for presentation at SMT.*
- 4. Any changes made to the action plan in response to the presentation of commercial opportunities will be agreed with the Heads of Faculty and advised to SMT.*
- 5. An annual progress report will be published at the end of the Academic year.*