



29 October 2008

For Immediate Release

HEADS OF THE VALLEYS BUSINESS INITIATIVE IN AWARDS SPOTLIGHT

On a packed evening at Cardiff City Hall, the Heads of the Valleys Innovation Programme (HOVIP) recently won a coveted Wales National Training Award. The National Training Awards are recognised as the most prestigious training awards in the UK.

HOVIP aims to help businesses, including social enterprises, to: survive, develop and grow and to raise the business profile of the region. The programme, which covers Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Torfaen, is contributing to the Welsh Assembly Government's regeneration agenda: 'Turning Heads – A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020'.

The core of HOVIP involves businesses from all sectors joining together for innovation training workshops, where they learn and share skills by finding group solutions to their real business challenges. Workshops are followed by ongoing support and an annual innovation awards and exhibition event is held to celebrate success and generate leads.

A total of 132 individuals and 32 businesses were supported in HOVIP's first phase, generating £40,000 financial benefits alone. Similarly, in this tough economic climate, the recent 2008 HoV Innovation Awards and Market Place resulted in 25% of the exhibitors winning new business within one month of the event.

A wide range of benefits across the five boroughs is evident and continues to flow. For example, Regan Construction Services, based in Merthyr, exhibited at the HoV Innovation Awards and Market Place and also introduced a novel customer feedback process after attending a HOVIP Business Challenge workshop. As result, their turnover

increased by 20% in 12 months.

Royvon Dog Training School, which has premises in Merthyr and Surrey, introduced new services that are generating an extra £1500 per month after employees used techniques gained from a HOVIP workshop. The business has just hosted their first best practice visit, focused on profitably growing an SME and customer service, as part of the 'Inside Welsh Industry' scheme, thanks to the Wales Quality Centre and HOVIP.

In contrast, Williams Medical Supplies (a Sunday Times Top 100 SME), based in Caerphilly, and Penn Pharmaceuticals (sole sponsor of the Wales Innovation Award), based in Blaenau Gwent, have enjoyed other benefits based on HOVIP working closely with their respective Employee Forums.

These benefits have ranged from employees using innovation tools to obtain Green Dragon Award accreditation to enhancing motivation. Val Ellis, former HR Director of Penn, noted: "Two great sessions. All [Company Forum] motivated and up for taking control which is exactly what we wanted. Empowered and motivated is a great result."

HOVIP provides opportunities for regional businesses. Bandog Media Ltd., for example, who won the Best New Business Start Up at the 2008 Rhondda Cynon Taf Business Club Awards, won the tender to film the 2008 HoV Innovation Awards and Market Place event and winners DVD. Out and Out Living, a regional lifestyle magazine based in Torfaen, has also published HOVIP advertorial.

HOVIP is also using HoV venues to deliver services. This includes the new Orbit Centre in Merthyr and the first meeting of the 'Turning Heads Club' at the former Park Place Chapel – now Venue 1 – in Tredegar, which is run by the Kidz R Us social enterprise.

The first phase of HOVIP was funded by the Welsh Assembly Government's Knowledge Exploitation Fund and was hosted by Merthyr Tydfil College. The second phase, hosted by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, is funded by Assembly Government's Heads of the Valleys regeneration programme and is rolling out new services.

HOVIP reflects a private, public and voluntary sector partnership involving five Heads of

- -

the Valleys Councils, Community Enterprise Wales, NESTA, BT, HSBC, KTS Owens Thomas, ngb2b and the Wales Quality Centre. New partners for the second phase include Design Wales and Further and Higher Education Institutions in the region.

“A partnership approach has been crucial to the shared success of HOVIP,” said HOVIP’s Manager, Phil Burkhard. “The Wales National Training Award and our own innovation award winners and businesses are showing that innovation is once again turning heads and changing perceptions in the Valleys and beyond.”

The National Training Awards for Wales are organised by the Welsh Assembly Government’s Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) and are promoted and supported in partnership with UK Skills on behalf of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

For further information about the Heads of the Valleys Innovation Programme, please visit www.hovip.org.uk.

ENDS

Notes for editors

Caption for photograph:

- 1) Phil Burkhard (HOVIP Manager) receiving a Wales NTA Award on behalf of partners.

Enquiries to: Phil Burkhard, Programme Manager, HOVIP (Heads of the Valleys Innovation Programme).

Tel: 01685 725 469 Email: phil.burkhard@merthyr.gov.uk

1. ABOUT HOVIP

The Heads of the Valleys Innovation Programme (HOVIP) aims to increase the capacity for innovation in businesses in Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Torfaen. HOVIP2 is hosted by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and supported by the Welsh Assembly Government Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Programme. It is also supported by Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Torfaen County Borough Councils, Community Enterprise Wales and NESTA.

For more information visit www.hovip.org.uk or call Phil Burkhard on 01685 725469 or email: phil.burkhard@merthyr.gov.uk

2. ABOUT THE NATIONAL TRAINING AWARDS

The National Training Awards are designed to celebrate organisations and individuals that demonstrate outstanding business and personal success through investment in training. By recognising best practice, the awards aim to raise awareness and inspire others to invest in learning and development as a route to becoming world class.

Recognised as the most prestigious training awards in the UK, The National Training Awards are now in their 21st year and have been restyled for 2008 to more fully reflect the needs of today's economy and society, and to provide equal opportunity for all organisations and individuals across every sector.

The National Training Awards are run by UK Skills on behalf of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. Visit: www.nationaltrainingawards.com

3. ABOUT THE HEADS OF THE VALLEYS PROGRAMME

The Heads of the Valleys initiative is a 15 year regeneration project, led by the Welsh Assembly Government, working to benefit communities in Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Caerphilly and Rhondda Cynon Taf. Aimed at stimulating regeneration, economic growth, and environmental improvement, the £140 million programme is making the Heads of the Valleys an increasingly successful and attractive area for people to live and work.

The Heads of the Valleys initiative was launched by the Welsh Assembly Government in September 2004. The 15 year regeneration strategy has been developed in full partnership with five local authorities, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen, and other local stakeholders. The initiative is tackling the root causes of economic inactivity and other key issues in the area, within the context of the Wales Spatial Plan.

The £140million programme aims to create:

- An attractive and well-used natural, historic and built environment
- A vibrant economic landscape offering new opportunities
- A well educated, skilled and healthier population
- An appealing and coherent tourism and leisure experience
- Public confidence in a shared bright future

For more information visit: www.wales.gov.uk/headsofthevalleys

ENDS

For further information please contact:

Beth Melhuish, Project Officer- Corporate Communications

Tel: 01685 725052

Email: beth.melhuish@merthyr.gov.uk