

INSPIRING INNOVATION AND ENTERPRISE

A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN EAST LONDON

As the mass adoption of new technology transforms our world into a global village, new opportunities are emerging to connect creative people in all parts of the world, irrespective of age, gender, nationality, wealth, or intellectual and physical ability.

Our SMARTlab Digital Media Institute, under the Directorship of Professor Lizbeth Goodman, develops new technologies, multimedia interfaces and other tools that empower children, women in developing countries and disabled people. Earlier this year, SMARTlab researchers developed a new interface that enables people with severe motor disabilities to compose and perform music simply by moving their eyes.

Based in Knowledge Dock, the Institute runs three distinct strands of activity: a research centre for Digital Arts and Performance Technologies with a vibrant practice-based PhD research programme; a community outreach centre hosting a diverse range of social and digital inclusion projects; and the innovative PLAYroom, which provides the Research and Development space for development and testing of a suite of public facing knowledge transfer projects, including the Multimedia and Games Innovation Centre.

In November, UEL's SMARTlab was Highly Commended in the prestigious Times Higher Awards 2007. The award recognises a range of successful innovations including the TRUST project, an immersive game and healing environment for young people, an innovative haptic chair, and work with the Stephen Hawking School for students with disabilities.

In December, SMARTlab launched Future Factory: Homemade Goes Hi-Tech, an interactive exhibition and workshop at the Science Museum. This featured the MAGICbox, a laser cutter that cuts or engraves patterns onto different materials, enabling people of all abilities to design and create a range of complex objects and artefacts. ■

► SMARTLAB'S Future Factory exhibition and workshop at the Science Museum



▼ Students in the Knowledge Dock Centre



Knowledge Dock, UEL's enterprise development service, drives our vision to encourage enterprise and innovation and act as a catalyst for social, cultural and economic development in East London and the Thames Gateway. Now working with over 1,000 companies and entrepreneurs across the region, Knowledge Dock provides a wide range of facilities, training, consultancy, and funded programmes, including the Shell Step programme.

The Knowledge Dock Centre is home to an exciting range of innovative expert centres, set up to provide smaller companies with access to state-of-the-art technology and know-how. Facilities include the Product Design Lab (PDL), the Fabric Print and Design Bureau (FabPad) and Simlab, our new centre for process mapping and 3D modelling. In 2007, Simlab was a key partner in a collaborative project that received over £250k funding from the Urban Buzz 'Building Sustainable Communities' programme to develop innovative technologies aimed at radically changing the way communities develop infrastructure and services.

With support from Barclays, Tate & Lyle, London City Airport, and the London Development Agency, we launched a new initiative to encourage student entrepreneurship - the 'E-Factor' business plan contest. This proved a tremendous success, with entries from dozens of students. The inaugural competition was won by Graham Hoffman, BSc (Hons) Computer Games Design, for his 'Console Café' idea. Graham has since used his £10,000 business grant prize to establish himself as a leading competitive-gaming event organiser.

July marked the climax of Knowledge Dock's new Enterprise Mentoring programme in partnership with the East London Business Alliance. The scheme successfully matched over thirty aspiring entrepreneurs with established business mentors from major organisations. Knowledge Dock has also recently developed its outreach work, organising a range of events specifically tailored to foster a culture of entrepreneurship among school children in our local communities. ■