Course proves to be the perfect therapy

"Towards the end of my corporate career I was diagnosed with depression and burn-out," said Alex Coppock-Bunce, who retrained on Oakfield's Women into Enterprise course.

"I was disillusioned with the 'long hours' culture and I wanted time to appreciate life and live it for myself. I'd come to a stage in my life where I needed to be able to support my parents and I desperately wanted to do something more meaningful."

After 31 years building a successful training and development career in large international companies, Mrs Coppock-Bunce wanted to leave behind the stresses of corporate life and find a new, more fulfilling way forward.

Two years later she is a trained hypnotherapist and has launched her own business, with the help of the Women into Enterprise training course run by Oakfield's Business Hub.

Alex Coppock-Bunce at work with a client

"The course gave me the opportunity to do something completely different with my life. I'd been a small cog in big business organisations but I had no idea how to run my own business, especially the marketing side of things."

Mrs Coppock-Bunce's business is growing at a steady pace, helping people with a range of issues, from lack of confidence to stopping smoking, weight control and attaining goals.

To read more about her journey and find out about the Business Hub courses visit www.bath.ac.uk/swindon

Latest phone innovation floats Air above all its rivals

Two entrepreneurs at the University of Bath in Swindon have taken their electronics company, Air Semiconductor, from launch to a successful European company in less than a year.

David Tester, an engineer from Swindon, joined the University's Innovation Centre at the end of 2005 with an idea for developing a new semiconductor, or micro-electronic component, for mobile phones.

Once housed within the Innovation Centre, the University's launch pad for technology-based, high growth businesses, he used its facilities and resources to forge ahead with his idea, making the most of the expert support and guidance on offer to support his ambitions.

Securing funding for international growth

The Centre introduced Mr Tester to Pond Ventures, a venture capital fund with a strong track record in working closely with entrepreneurs to build European technology into global companies.

Through the introduction he met his business partner Stephen Graham, who is Vice President with responsibility for marketing the company.

Together they secured a large amount of funding from Pond to enable them to move onto the next level. In May of this year they officially founded their company, Air Semiconductor Inc, with Mr Tester becoming Chief Executive Officer. They have now recruited six staff, half of them from the local community.

Support from the Innovation Centre continues, with plans to introduce the directors to American investors in Silicon Valley. Without the University's connections it could take a company many years to tap into this market.

Stephen Graham, Vice President of Air with Innovation Centre Manager, Phil Merrick

Phil Merrick, Manager of the Innovation Centre, is delighted at the potential that Air Semiconductor brings to the University and Swindon as a whole.

"The nature of high-tech companies is that competition is hot on your heels, so Air is rightly operating in what's known as 'stealth mode', keeping its cards to its chest," he said.

"It's safe to say though that the speed with which they have progressed through the Innovation Centre, and the level of financial backing they've achieved, points to a very exciting development in the global semiconductor market."

Mr Merrick was appointed in May as the first dedicated manager for the Swindon Innovation Centre. With a strong background in marketing and brand management, corporate strategic development and regional business development, he is assigned with taking forward the Centre's achievements and its growing reputation in business incubation.

Air Semiconductor is quick to acknowledge the role played by the Innovation Centre in the company's burgeoning success. "When David joined the Innovation Centre he was an engineer with a bright idea," said Mr Graham. "The facilities of the centre helped set him off in the right direction."

"It provided the company with an ideal environment to get started. It meant there were a whole set of concerns that we didn't have to worry about. Of course though the highest value was the introduction to each other and to investors."

Nurturing high-tech innovation

The Innovation Centre currently has around 15 ventures within its SETsquared Business Acceleration Centre.

The SETsquared partnership includes the universities of Bath, Bath in Swindon, Bristol, Southampton and Surrey, all supporting early-stage, potential high-growth technology ventures, both from within and outside the universities. Each centre provides entrepreneurs and business professionals with business mentoring, guidance and affordable office space.

"The Innovation Centre is about investor readiness," said Mr Merrick. "We measure our success by the amount of funding that we help clients to realise. We work with very high calibre clients who stand to make a very significant contribution to Swindon's economic growth and development."

For more information about the Swindon Innovation Centre visit www.bath.ac.uk/researchandinnovation or email P.Merrick@bath.ac.uk

Learning from an entrepreneur with strong track record

Peter Lay, prolific entrepreneur and chief executive of the Whitehorse group of companies, will share the highs and lows of thirty years of business ventures in one of a series of free leadership and management seminars for small businesses at the Oakfield Business Hub at 7.30pm on Tuesday 21 November.

From his best known local success story, which was master planning and purchasing the 142-acre former British Rail Engineering Works in Swindon in 1988, to his passenger ferry service running into the ill-fated Millennium Dome, Mr Lay's experience provides plenty of business insight.

His company achieved large-scale property highs across the UK until he and his four brothers were hit hard by the property recession of the 1990s. It was a damaging time but the company survived. They then vowed to diversify into other areas to insulate themselves from future economic downturns.

Peter Lay and John Prescott launch the Central London Fast Ferry Service

Mr Lay now spearheads an impressive portfolio of businesses spanning public transport passenger ferries, childcare nurseries, mortgage arrears counselling and a dotcom business that develops website applications.

It is a strategy which he says learns the lessons of history and gives a good commercial mix between property development and trading businesses.

Further seminars with leading business speakers will run monthly on Tuesday evenings, through to June. Open to local business people, they also provide networking opportunities.

The events are run as part of the Leadership and Management Programme, funded by the European Social Fund. For more information, visit www.bath.ac.uk/swindon or call Carole Sheppard on 01793 328772 to book a place.

News in brief...News in brief...News in brief...News in brief...News in brief...News in brief...News in brief...News in brief...News in brief...News in

Learn for life and leisure

People in Swindon and the surrounding area are enjoying a varied programme of part-time day and evening courses this term. From archaeology to philosophy, drama to horticulture, and all subjects in between, the new courses offer plenty of scope for learning for life and leisure. Students are now encouraged to enrol for courses online at a new, easy-to-use website (www.bath.ac.uk/lifelong-learning). For information about next term's programme email: dll@bath.ac.uk

Business award for female entrepreneur

Caroline Waldron (pictured right), from Oakhurst, who completed the Women into Enterprise course at Oakfield, has gone on to win top prize in a local competition for businesswomen. She won the Swindon Businesswomen's Breakfast Club *Make it Happen Award* for her new company, called *The Sparkly Princess*, which makes bespoke special-occasion jewellery, including wedding tiaras, prom jewellery and party wands. See www.thesparklyprincess.co.uk for more information.

Crèche gets Ofsted approval

The crèche at the Oakfield campus has received official Ofsted approval and received very positive feedback in its first 'on-the-spot' visit by the inspectorate. The crèche supports students of Oakfield's Business Hub, which runs a range of programmes to support local women entrepreneurs and small businesses. Swindon Child Carers, who run the crèche, is now looking to extend the opening hours and investigate how the facility can best serve the local community. For more information about the crèche call 01793 328849.

Oakfield launches a new website

The University of Bath in Swindon has a new website which gives visitors easy access to information about the full range of activities on offer at the campus, including community-focussed activities such as free public lectures and arts events, plus academic courses and business support. The site includes details of new conference facilities at Oakfield for business and organisations looking for meeting, training or conference space. To find out more, visit www.bath.ac.uk/swindon

Also new on campus are its two new garden areas for students, staff and visitors.