

24th February 2005

WALES' GROWING OPTO-ELECTRONICS SECTOR WILL REAP BENEFITS FROM LATEST TECHNIUM

Wales' £522million opto-electronics sector will be boosted by the opening of Technium OpTIC, the latest Technium to join the pan-Wales initiative, and the first of its kind in the UK.

Andrew Davies, Assembly Economic Development and Transport Minister, today (**Thursday, 24th February 2005**) officially opened OpTIC at the St Asaph Business Park in Denbighshire, North Wales, and said the new Technium – already an architectural icon and a recognised centre for the opto-electronics sector internationally – would bring huge benefits to the sector in Wales.

Twelve businesses – including several start-up enterprises and larger developing companies – are already based at OpTIC which incorporates the latest research and development facilities and a specialist business support team. Three more companies are due to move in within the next month. Between them they currently employ more than 50 people.

Opening the Technium, Andrew Davies said: “Technium OpTIC will enhance our reputation as an international centre for the opto-electronics sector. Already an architectural icon, this fantastic facility will enable companies to exploit the latest technology to develop this important sector in Wales.

“By bringing companies together in cluster developments like opto electronics, we stand to make real strides in promoting the growth of high value added businesses.”

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OpTIC is a £15.7 million project backed with over £6.3m of European Objective 1 funding provided through the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO), part of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Privately managed by Optropreneurs Ltd, it was initiated by the Welsh Optronics Forum (WOF) and is part of the Technium Wales network – a pan-Wales initiative supported by the Welsh Assembly Government, Welsh Development Agency, European Union funding, the private sector, and the Higher Education institutes of Wales.

OpTIC is designed to create over 318 high-quality jobs in North Wales and safeguard hundreds more throughout Wales. Developed by the WDA, it is the first of its kind in the UK and will help build up cutting-edge skills and expertise in Wales. The Technium will also capitalise on the expertise of the Chemistry Department of the University of Wales, Bangor.

Opto-electronics are used within a wide range of products, from RAF jet pilots visors to data and audio communications using fibre optics. Other applications include computers systems that owe their existence to opto-electronics such as plasma screens, optical storage devices (CD and DVD), laser printers, scanners and digital cameras.

Chris Farrow, WDA Executive Director for North Wales, said: “OpTIC will be at the forefront in the development of the opto-electronics industry and its technology, providing a powerful resource for the UK and Wales’s optronics sector – the heart of which is here in North Wales.”

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Five companies currently occupy full incubation space at OpTIC with a further seven based at dedicated workstations and pre-incubations areas that allow them to develop business ideas and technology utilising the dedicated support and expertise.

Trefor Jones, Chairman of Optpreneurs Ltd, the private management company running OpTIC, said: “OpTIC is innovation in action. The OpTIC team works with start-up companies to guide them through the early phases of their life, to keep them on track until they reach the natural stage where they outgrow OpTIC.

“This innovation is an active process, helping to develop the early stage ventures into a self-sufficient business. And it’s here to see in action at OpTIC.”

The Technium’s Incubation Centre contains 24 units each of which provide advanced serviced space, including 3-phase electricity, extraction, water, clean air and broadband connectivity. This provides flexibility for new or relocating businesses from universities and industry within the UK and internationally.

Dave Rimmer, Managing Director of OpTIC, said: “To allow companies to grow, a full spectrum of products are provided here at OpTIC. The first is a Virtual Suite which provides the first step to working through the Technium.

“Next is the Arizona Suite which provides personal office space in a shared office. From here the start ups to allow them to move into a full innovation or an Advanced Innovation Unit which will allow them to realize their high growth potential with the appropriate level of assistance, including commercial, financial and/or technical from OpTIC staff.”

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OpTIC is majoring on four platform technologies: Opto-electronics materials, Thin Films, Surface Structuring and Opto-electronic Device Packaging. To address these technology areas, Centres of Expertise have been formed and currently include Ultra Precision Surfaces (UPS), the Centre for Modern Optics (CMO), Optical Polymers and Metal Organic Chemical Vapour Deposition (MOCVD).

The unique architectural design of OpTIC helps it stand out and it has already become an icon within the opto-electronics sector worldwide because of its massive 2,400 photovoltaic panels which form a massive array on the side of the building.

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NOTES TO THE EDITOR

Companies currently located at Technium OpTIC are:

Optopreneurs Limited

Optopreneurs is a Company Limited by Guarantee currently comprising 15 staff who provide resource for supporting incubating companies, servicing technology centre development contracts, and running the business centre. The company plans to grow to some 25 people during 2005 to cope with the business expansion.

The management team within the Business Support Unit works with start-up companies to guide them through the early phases of the company's life, to keep them on track until they reach the natural stage where they outgrow OpTIC.

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Pinacl Solutions Limited

Pinacl Solutions is one of the UK's leading independent providers of integrated building and business technology solutions. With over 30 years experience, we work with enterprise and public sector organisations at every stage of their building infrastructure investment to help minimise the costs and maximise the business value of their technology solutions.

CDC Limited

CDC Ltd was established by Dr John Rees in 1995 and was the first company to be based within OpTIC. Its mission was to develop the world's first self testing kits to identify the triggers of asthma, eczema and rhinitis. This was successfully completed in 2002 with the launch of Imutest™ – a range of self test to detect sensitivity to common allergies. CDC manufactures these tests on site.

ORS Limited

ORS Ltd which was established in November 2000 and is a spin-out company of the Chemistry Department at the University of Wales, Bangor. ORS have developed a range of unique instruments and supporting software designed specifically for monitoring the deposition of thin films. These products have proven to be perfect for monitoring the rate of deposition of the thin films, the thickness of the materials deposited, the topography of the surface of a layer and the quality of the film. The management team are all experts in the field, some with over 20 years of experience in the thin film monitoring.

Spiral Scratch Limited

Spiral Scratch Ltd was formed in 2002 with the sole intention of developing and licensing a revolutionary 3D scanning technology, termed 3FM. Two company directors, Matthew Reed and John Wilson are the co-inventors of the technology. The company has five patent applications. In 2004 the company won the Campus Ventures Business Competition (awarded to the 'best' New Technology company in the North West of England). The company moved to optic in February 2005.

NFab Ltd

Developing a next generation electron microscope

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- The main contractor for the construction of OpTIC was Shepherd Construction.
- The project was designed by architects The Percy Thomas Partnership.
- The project managers were Bucknall Austin, who were also the Quantity Surveyors and Planning Supervisors.
- The photovoltaic panels have been manufactured and supplied by Shell Solar, and installed by PV Systems of South Wales.
- The structural and services engineers and the sustainability advisor was URS Corporation.
- FIRA were the landscape architects.