

# Learning to improve with latest funding

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A CAERPHILLY-based tech start-up has secured its first round of funding from Finance Wales and four angel investors.

Noddlepod will use the funding, which includes £105,000 from the Wales Technology Seed Fund, to develop and commercialise its collaborative learning tool.

It will also enable the company to recruit a number of developers and sales staff.

Noddlepod's innovative learning platform provides leadership networks and expert groups a safe, private environment in which to share knowledge, support and learn from each other.

"Noddlepod has a unique approach to organising and filtering information, which reduces information overload and enables peer-to-peer learning.

"This funding will enable us to reach new customers and build on this competitive advantage," said chief executive and co-founder, Ollie Gardener.

Finance Wales's investment came from the Wales Technology Seed Fund, which aims to provide technology start-ups with the financial backing they need to commercialise innovative new products, services and technologies. This is Finance Wales' fourth investment from this fund.

Economy Minister Edwina Hart said: "The Wales Technology Seed Fund was set



Duska Rancic, Elena Haf Williams, Ollie Gardener and Stephen Gardener, and Chilli the dog, of Noddlepod

up to provide technology start-ups with the financial backing they need to commercialise innovative new products, services and technologies.

"This is Finance Wales' fourth investment from this fund and I am pleased to see how it is supporting and helping technology companies like Noddlepod take their innovative products to market."

Finance Wales investment executive, Ann Casey, made the investment in Noddlepod.

She said: "Noddlepod is the result of four years research and development. The software solves a real problem in the marketplace and has the potential to dramatically improve knowledge sharing and group learning.

"Finance Wales' investment will enable Noddlepod to bring its software to market, initially targeting Business Schools and leadership development providers."

Following the investment,

Noddlepod's co-founders Ollie and Stephen Gardener will now be joined in an advisory capacity by three of the most inspirational and successful business executives in the world of learning technologies.

Charles Jennings, Mary McKenna and Nigel Paine bring more than 100 years combined experience of designing and implementing learning technologies to the company's board of directors.

## Commercially speaking

By Haydn Thomas, director, Hutchings & Thomas Chartered Surveyors



WITH the improving economy both nationally and locally, the demand for commercial premises in and around Newport is beginning to increase markedly.

Enquiries for industrial and office premises, especially freeholds, across most ranges, are increasing and it is noticeable that the supply of quality stock in most areas is struggling to satisfy this demand.

With regard to the office sector we are finding that there is a growth in demand from private companies looking to purchase modern freehold office premises in and around the city and the supply of premises of this nature is almost zero.

We have recently been discussing requirements with a number of local businesses who are looking to expand or just move from leasehold accommodation, with their search area being the M4 corridor from Junction 23 to 28 and north to Cwmbran.

While they are finding that a supply of secondary stock is available, that of quality modern office accommodation both to lease and purchase is few and far between.

Unfortunately, this is leading those companies to search outside the area, which would be to the detriment of Newport and its hinterland with both the loss of such businesses and employment that is potentially created.

With regard to the industrial sector we are finding manufacturing demand increasing markedly especially demand for units with cranes.

Unfortunately, due to the down turn in the manufacturing sector over the past 20 years, units of this nature are again at a premium with landlords, in some instances, now looking to reinstate cranes when a pre-let can be agreed.

Apart from this specialist requirement supply of general good quality warehouse production space is also at a premium with demand increasing for units of up to 10,000 sq ft. The supply of this nature is sadly lacking.

It is concerning that although, regionally, we are at an early stage of economic recovery, we are already experiencing issues with being able to accommodate increased demand in both sectors while new development of such space is almost non-existent.

We are currently dealing with developers looking to invest in Newport and they are concerned with the lack of assistance they are receiving from government bodies to enable them to develop out units for which they have demand.

This is linked to the ongoing issues with bank funding, which is also stifling potential speculative development.

The issue, as we see it, is that the demand we are currently experiencing for business space will create inflationary pressures on the existing stock and without development to the levels required companies may look to relocate to other areas or their business strategy may be affected to the detriment of their operation.

We are aware of certain funding from both local authority and the Welsh Assembly.

But we feel there should be a more focused approach to development funding to encourage development across the sector.

Maybe it is time to also look at the planning system to speed up the amount of supply coming on stream. It also raises the question as to whether the Welsh government should hark back to the Welsh Development Agency days and be looking to develop themselves in certain areas?

Although the issues faced by the commercial sector are nowhere near that of the residential supply/demand issues the consequences of the lack of commercial space could have serious consequences for the local economy.

## Firm on good wicket with new deal

A HI-TECH Newport-based manufacturer has signed a shirt sponsorship deal with Glamorgan County Cricket Club.

The first-class county has announced a one-year partnership with SPTS Technologies, who make semiconductor processing equipment.

The company has enjoyed significant growth since its formation in 2009 and won the Queens Award for Enterprise in International Trade 2013 and was awarded the prestigious Anchor Company status by the Welsh Government in 2014.

It also won the International Business of the Year category at the South Wales Chamber of Commerce Awards in 2014.

More recently, SPTS added

the Skills and People Development and Environmental Impact Awards at the Welsh Business Awards 2015 to its catalogue of industry awards.

Michael Temple, Glamorgan CCC's head of commercial, said: "As a multi-national business with a strong presence in South Wales, SPTS couldn't be a better fit for us.

"They have enjoyed significant success and continue to expand in a very competitive industry.

"We're delighted they have chosen to support our efforts to improve our standing in the LV= County Championship."

SPTS designs, manufactures and sells equipment used for making semiconductor and microelectromechanical

systems devices found in vehicle safety systems and smartphones.

Destanie Clarke, director of corporate marketing at SPTS Technologies, said: "We take great pride in being seen as good corporate citizens and our support for Glamorgan County Cricket Club marks an exciting first foray into sports sponsorship.

"Both organisations are proud to call South Wales 'home'.

"We look forward to keeping a close eye on the Club's progress on and off the field."

Glamorgan, under the captaincy of Jacques Rudolph, kick off their LV= County Championship Division Two campaign against Leicestershire at Leicester on Sunday.



Left arm spinner Dean Cosker