The University of Nottingham signs £3m deal with AVIC, one of China’s biggest aerospace businesses

The opportunity

In recent years Chinese industry has been encouraged by its government to be more global in its approach, and to explore and develop new technologies and opportunities in overseas markets.

As the first foreign University to have an independent campus in China, The University of Nottingham was in a strong position to respond to any new initiatives and build on the links that had been established since opening its Ningbo Campus in 2005. With added support from the Chinese Ambassador to the UK, His Excellency Liu Xiaoming, preliminary discussions were held with one of the giants of the Asian aerospace industry, AVIC.

AVIC, who employ more than 400,000 staff in China, through a number of subsidiaries, and controls assets in excess of £29bn, were considering sponsoring a group of its employees to undertake research at Nottingham University. When it became clear that there was potential for much wider collaboration across the group, an application was put to Hermes to fund workshops to explore the group’s research needs.

A framework agreement was put in place in early 2012, with a deal formally ratified in late summer.
The funding

During the spring and early summer of 2012 the HERMES programme supported a series of joint workshops held with research scientists from both the University and AVIC subsidiary companies.

These workshops identified key challenges in composites and thermal barrier coatings on engine components which it was felt needed to be explored further. In August 2012 the University completed a deal to develop a new University Innovation Centre (UIC) based in Nottingham.

In addition, AVIC Commercial Aircraft Engine Company Limited (ACAE) agreed to support a group of around 20 of its own employees to undertake postgraduate and master’s degree research studies at the UIC.

The benefits and future

While this initial contract is worth over £1 million per annum to the University over the three year programme, there are a number of areas that remain unexplored which could present further opportunities for additional research as the relationship with the AVIC group develops.

Of this initial development, Dr Victor Wang, the Research and Development Director of ACAE who came to Nottingham to witness the contract being signed, said: “This really is a historic moment for ACAE, as it is the first time we have collaborated with a British university. The University of Nottingham has an excellent reputation for its work in engineering and aerospace. I am confident that our work with the University will enable us to further develop our products and help to give us a competitive advantage in our market.”

Professor Chris Rudd, the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Business Engagement and Knowledge Transfer said of this new collaboration: “China, together with other Asian economies, will drive global civil aerospace growth over the next decade. We recognise that there is a tremendous opportunity for us to build close partnerships with ACAE and AVIC, to help develop innovative new solutions for them. I am sure that this will be the start of a long and mutually beneficial collaboration between our two organisations.”