Thank you, Carol, for your kind introduction. I would like to acknowledge Dr Pornchai Mongkhonvanit, the President of Siam University, the partner institution for this Workshop and Ms Edwige Rozier, Acting Director of Asia-Europe Foundation Education Department and her staff who have organised this workshop, and, of course distinguished colleagues here today. Let me begin by giving you a brief overview of the Business/Higher Education Round Table.

**The Business/Higher Education Round Table**

The Business/Higher Education Round Table was established in 1990 by members of the Business Council of Australia to create an organisation dedicated to collaboration between higher education and the business and community sectors. Those founders recognised the central role that universities should and need to play in the nation's economic and social well-being.

This was a bold initiative taken 23 years ago - well before Australian universities had ‘professionalised’ their various relationship programs. Today, every Australian university has
a development, partnerships or engagement office or an innovation centre but despite this, there is still far too wide a gap in realising the benefits of collaboration.

B/HERT’s objectives and broad membership base continues to be unique in our country; the only not-for-profit organisation with members comprising the majority of Australian universities, business and professional industry organisations. We are small and would like to grow because the larger the base the greater the interest taken in collaborative activities.

B/HERT’s expertise is in facilitating better and effective working relationships and this forms the basis of all of our activities and programs. Our round tables and forums aim to create the necessary dialogue that encourages mutually beneficial cooperation and understanding between business and the university sector. It is our strongly held view that it is these productive relationships that form the foundation for a successful and competitive knowledge economy and a prosperous society.

While I am happy to discuss our full array of activities, in this presentation I would like to focus on the annual B/HERT Awards program and some past winners. These projects will illustrate the value and high return on investment that flow from successful collaborations. I will also identify, based on what we have learned, a framework for effective partnerships. Finally, I will spend some time referring to future challenges and we can discuss what ASEF might be able to do to promote increased engagement among the education, business and community sectors.

**The B/HERT Collaborative Awards**

The B/HERT program of national awards was initiated in 1998 to recognise outstanding achievements in collaboration between business and tertiary education in fields such as research & development and education & training. The objective of the program is to highlight at a national level the benefits of such collaboration and enhance links between
industry and universities. The awards program also includes the important categories of philanthropy and community engagement which also deserve recognition.

Awards are made to programs or projects involving a collaborative partnership between business and tertiary education in a metropolitan or regional setting. The collaborating organisations must come from business or NGOs and the tertiary education sectors. The presentation of the Awards are made at the annual B/HERT Awards dinner usually held in November where the winning achievements are celebrated by vice-chancellors, CEOs, senior executives from industry/professional associations, key stakeholders, government representatives and members of the community. It’s a great night.

The process is fairly straightforward and the majority of submissions are initiated from the university sector, though we welcome those that come from the private sector. Last year we introduced an overall B/HERT award winner with a $10 000 prize and this has generated considerable interest. We have an eminent independent judging panel who are always impressed at the breadth and depth of the projects that are submitted.

The B/HERT awards are unique and are an excellent process of prestigious national recognition of collaboration between business and universities. We consider this a very important program because of the beneficial impact for Australia to promote and improve our business/higher education collaborative efforts. We can do a great deal better and these successful partnerships demonstrate innovative projects that have significant impact beyond the universities.

**Showcasing Collaboration**

B/HERT award winners cover a broad range of educational and research topics and the full list can be found on our website, in our publication *Partnerships@Work* and the forthcoming monograph *Collaboration: The 21st Century Mechanism for Success*. The following examples I have selected for discussion today amply illustrate the case for collaboration and why it makes sense.
• **Sustainable Futures by Design:** The Burnett Mary Regional Group (located in regional Queensland) approached the Queensland University of Technology about involving landscape architecture students to deliver creative design and engineering solutions to the challenges faced by coastal communities. The Regional Group was clear that communities need to be involved in the creation of solutions to the challenges they face. This philosophy was shared by the university and the private and public sector partners and was central in facilitating the successful collaboration in sustainable futures planning. Students, under supervision and working directly with the project partners delivered successful outcomes that benefitted the coastal region significantly.

• **The Medical Device Partnering Program** was developed by Flinders University and serves as a model for medical device research collaboration among researchers, end-users and industry. The MDPP brokers relationships between companies and between companies and manufacturers. The model was designed to address problems in collaborating with SMEs by streamlining and accelerating the research & development process and driving new medical device products. Three universities bring multi-disciplinary research expertise in medical devices and access to state of the art facilities for product development and testing; government agencies provide strategic advice to the program and access to existing programs and services that align to medical device research, product development and end-user engagement. Commercialisation expertise is also made available for the companies. Companies join the network where they can access advice on innovation and commercialisation including product design, project management, knowledge transfer, funding opportunities, regulatory issues and manufacturing. By offering up to 250 hours of coordinated assistance to accepted projects that demonstrate market potential, the
MDPP removes barriers between stakeholders and provides space for ideation and innovation.

- **The IBM-University of Ballarat Alliance**: As part of IBM’s reorganisation of its worldwide services operations and cost reduction in the late 1990's, the company responded to the tight IT employment market by establishing IT services in regional Australia. IBM was looking to increase the supply of IT capable graduates from the university sector. Ballarat is a regional city that prospered during Australia’s historic gold mining boom and then relied heavily on agriculture and manufacturing industries. By the late 20th century, Ballarat was having difficulty competing globally and recognised it would need to develop knowledge-based service industries for future growth. This recognition was supported by the state government who helped establish a Technology Park adjacent to the university, of which IBM became the first tenant. The City of Ballarat was also highly supportive because it understood that a knowledge-based service industry would build on the city’s reputation as a university city and lift the employment prospects and average income for residents in a low socio-economic region.

In 2001, the relationship between IBM and the university was put to the test. To address the labour supply issue for IBM, the university needed to introduce a new course that provided students with the academic and practical experience to work in the IT sector. The solution was Earn as You Learn – students graduated job-ready due to IBM staffing being involved in course advisory committees and the work experience gained through the study program. IBM staff also worked as associate lecturers and supervised projects. IBM has a customised and cost effective university curriculum that allowed them to build their IT services centre. The university has become a centre for quality IT training and the city experienced the benefits of increased numbers of employed residents.

**Lessons learned from the case studies**
We all know that successful outcomes such as those referred to above always involve hard work. Each of the objectives in these collaborative projects rely on what universities do best—ie, high level teaching and research. In Sustainable Planning for the Future, QUT was able to integrate study with practical work based experience that improved the quality of the learning and the employment prospects of graduates. The success of the outcomes ultimately led to a further six public and private sector partnerships with the School of Design at QUT. And the coastal region now has access to innovative planning and design.

MDPP became the vehicle for start-up companies to continue their research and commercialisation activities with the necessary support SMEs often are unable to acquire.

There are many measures of success in the IBM/University of Ballarat alliance but perhaps the most obvious is the expansion of IBM IT services where in excess of 1000 personnel are now employed. The university has benefitted significantly from the growth of the Technology Park tenants and the city is happy because the injection into the local economy has been significant. The vice-chancellor attributes the success of this alliance to vision, hard work and mutual respect.

What is also noteworthy, however, are the long term outcomes that develop through successful collaboration. The relationships expand and deepen. In the 3 case studies above, the sustainability program attracted the attention of other regions where new partnerships and major projects formed. The original collaboration deepened as a result of the experience and the partners developed a greater understanding of tertiary design and engineering pedagogy, while QUT staff and students developed a deeper understanding of the complexities of the real world interface of natural and commercial environmental management. A valuable spin-off was that the university staff and their partners collaborated further on research concerning the practice and benefits of real world learning.

The success of the MDPP program has attracted new partners and the level of collaboration has strengthened as the program has progressed. Additional state government investment
has been made available securing its continuity. The model works and after 3 years, MDPP can report increased linkages between research organisations and SMEs, 18 new prototype medical devices have been designed, and 23 proof-of-concept/validation studies have been conducted. The spin-offs from the MDPP include partnerships in research grants and PhD scholarships. Most important is the ongoing active network of all relevant stakeholder groups providing support for industry growth.

The IBM – University of Ballarat alliance also continues to prosper. The partnership now focuses on u/g and p/g teaching and academic research activities. The collaboration and co-operation shows how a government, a university, a city and a global company working together can achieve outstanding outcomes in a regional environment.

One very important lesson learned is that as knowledge is transferred among the partners, ideas form so that innovation can thrive. We also learned that there are enablers that can be identified that underpin successful collaborations. These include –

- A clearly identified need that is shared by the partners.
- Mutual respect for all participants and their contributions.
- A governance structure that is inclusive.
- A process that identifies common objectives, expected outcomes, values and contributions by each of the partners, IP ownership etc.
- A process for managing the partnership – who is responsible for what?
- Recognition that the collaboration is among organisations not individuals; this will contribute to making the project sustainable.

There are challenges also that must be dealt with. For example –

- Cultural differences that manifest in competing pressures and operational timelines for eg commercial pressures may impact on business activities so efficiency and adherence to timelines are essential; universities work to different pressures and to a different timetable. These are best dealt with early in the process.
• Possible divergent attitudes about IP ownership, commercialisation. Stereotypes about how each partner operates may inhibit planning and implementation. These are all important issues that should be addressed.

I have touched on the many benefits arising from collaboration between business and universities. Each sector offers unique skills and perspectives that are often complementary. I would like to conclude by saying that this is the process that nurtures innovation and productivity and ultimately economic and social well-being and we should be doing everything we can to encourage more and better partnerships.

**Next steps – what can ASEF do to support collaboration?**