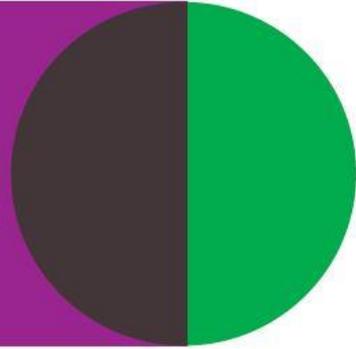


Knowledge Transfer Community Workshop



KTI Report

Best practice in technology transfer consortia

Executive summary

A workshop highlighting best practice in the Enterprise Ireland Technology Transfer Strengthening Initiative 2 (TTSI2) funded technology transfer consortia was held on 25 March 2015 at the Hilton Hotel, Kilmainham, Dublin. Members of highly successful technology transfer (TT) consortia shared their insights on best practice with over 50 TT professionals in Ireland.

“The technology transfer system in Ireland has embedded well and there’s quite a spotlight on what we’re doing here,” said Alison Campbell, Director of Knowledge Transfer Ireland (KTI). “Just over half way through the four-year TTSI2 programme, it’s a good time to take stock and share experiences.”

Sessions addressed consortium strategy and operations, managing a large consortium and a regional approach to consortium delivery. A panel discussion explored the topic of adding value for consortium partners.

The primary benefit of joining the consortium is access to expertise in tech transfer. The lead Technology Transfer Office (TTO) adds particular expertise around progressing inventions, patents and licences. For industry-focused projects, higher education institutions need to be able to offer the tech transfer wraparounds, including contracts, non-disclosures, licensing agreements and templates. Having access to the consortium, and an established TTO in the lead partner, gives immediate access to these tools. Once an organisation becomes a consortium partner, it can behave as if it has a big tech transfer office at its disposal. Both industry partners and researchers value this.

One of the key findings was that partnership success is based on relationships at various levels, but particularly between the case manager and the researchers. An effective relationship and trust with the research community is key.

Training has been a big part of engagement. The lead TTO provides direct face time with researchers through in-house training and events. Clinics and seminars inform researchers on innovation, entrepreneurship, spin-out models, general contracts and negotiations and it’s always helpful to hear how someone else with more experience has dealt with difficult negotiations.

There are some challenges: It can be increasingly difficult to balance the burden of reporting to funders and agencies, as well as fulfilling the reporting required from consortia through their leads. And on the upside, with the volume of new business leads developing with help from the consortium leads, some of the Industry Liaison Offices in the Institutes of Technology (IoTs) are beginning to face the challenge of how to progress the increased deal flow.

Session 1: Consortium strategy and operations

John Scanlan (Maynooth University)
Paul Tyndall (Maynooth University)
Peter Conlon (Maynooth University)
Breda Lynch (Athlone Institute of Technology)

Key takeaways

- Have a consortium agreement in place at the start. This is a legally binding agreement with each of the partners. It specifies how the consortium agreement will operate, sets expectations and allows progress to be measured.
- It's important to progress on two fronts: delivering a TT service and developing a culture of commercialisation.
- Partnership success is based on relationships at various levels, but particularly between the case manager and the researchers. A level of trust has come of this, which cannot be underestimated.
- A cultural change has occurred where researchers now view their work on a commercial framework.
- With regard to developing potential projects with industry, it's important to ensure that the research team and principal investigator get out of the building and talk to the potential clients that are going to shape commercial opportunities.
- In the Maynooth model, the TTSI2 funding is used as follows: a management allocation pays for travel, which is considerable, and joint marketing. The rest is divided between the partners using the Enterprise Ireland (EI) formula.
- The case manager has desk space and an office on-site at the partner institution; he's very much embedded in the research community.
- Case managers take responsibility for metrics and support is split by site. All opportunities appear on management meetings every two weeks.
- Clinics and seminars run by the Maynooth University case managers at the partner IoTs inform researchers on innovation, entrepreneurship, spinout models, general contracts and negotiations.

Session 2: Managing a large consortium

Tom Flanagan (Dublin Institute of Technology)
Assumpta Harvey (Institute of Technology Blanchardstown)

Key takeaways

- When establishing a consortium, agree the roles that the tech licensing and industry liaison people will perform and what the administrators in both the lead and the partner institutions will do and how they will align.
- In the Dublin Regional Innovation Consortium, the team at DIT Hothouse is like a SWAT (special weapons and tactics) team, aimed at closing licences, launching start-ups and providing support to its partners.
- Having access to the full TTO in DIT allows consortium partners to bring TTO case managers in for particular negotiations.
- A negotiation model that works well is for the TTO to negotiate through to contract, before handing over to the partner institute to handle the IP review, organise a separate legal review and get sign-off.

- While the senior teams in a consortium's member institutes may have significant experience in contract negotiation and project management, the TTO adds particular expertise around progressing inventions, patents and licences.
- Partner organisations find it useful to have a dedicated case manager on site for a specific half-day per week to meet with tech transfer colleagues and researchers.
- It is important that researchers have access to the local tech transfer executive and build a relationship with them.
- Trust is vital, especially around first researcher engagement with a great need for the lead TTO case manager to clarify confidentiality and the fact that they are acting as a consultant to the partner institute.
- In the Dublin Regional Innovation Consortium, partners benefit from linking with the marketing function at the lead partner for both marketing technologies and developing marketing material. Lead partners post online and social media updates on behalf of partners and run direct mailing campaigns targeting particular industry sectors.
- The consortium lead uses proprietary tools for managing IP and licensing, and offers access to all partners.

Session 3: A regional approach to consortium delivery

Paul Dillon (University of Limerick)

Dr. Siobhan Moane (Limerick Institute of Technology)

Dr. Siobhan MacSweeney (Institute of Technology Tralee)

Key takeaways

- The philosophy going into the consortium has got to be one of win-win, not one big institution trying to show everyone else this is a consortium; it's a supportive approach.
- The consortium provides partners with direct access to a highly experienced tech transfer office at a scale impossible to resource in-house.
- Review and oversight at the highest level is vitally important. Senior management at the institutions must be involved with the process.
- Three case managers from the lead are assigned by discipline and work through the ILO in the partner institutions.
- UL offers independent advice. If there is a question as to whether a project should be led from Tralee or Limerick, often it's the independent relationship with UL that will advise on the best way to go.
- When working with industry, be aware of the importance of local interactions. E.g. Institute of Tralee has very strong local interaction and it's important to not impact negatively on that.
- You can't beat face time with individual researchers. Once you get the researchers tuned in you've got to get them thinking about working together.
- Training is a big part of engagement. The UL TTO provides direct face time with researchers through in-house training, events and seminars.
- Partners have access to all documentation; it is completely open book. The consortium has developed a common look and feel for documents. E.g. Institute of Technology Tralee began engagement with the consortium by auditing its forms, templates and all practices, and modernising them to best practice.

Session 4: Panel discussion: Adding value for consortium partners

James O'Sullivan (Waterford Institute of Technology)

Josette O'Mullane (Cork Institute of Technology)

Brian Ogilvie (Carlow Institute of Technology)

Jack McDonnell (Institute of Technology Tallaght)

Facilitator: Dr. Alison Campbell

Key takeaways

- After two years of the TTSI2 programme, TT managers are seeing a cultural change. A challenge for the IoTs is that academic staff time needs to be bought out from teaching to engage in research. This is happening more frequently.
- TTSI2 metrics are now within the strategic plans of many RPOs.
- For all the applied, industry-focused projects, RPOs need to be able to offer the tech transfer wraparounds, including contracts, non-disclosures, licensing agreements and templates. Having access to the consortium and an established tech transfer office in the lead partner gives immediate access to these tools.
- From the moment an organisation is funded as a consortium partner, it can behave as if it has a big tech transfer office at its disposal. That is valued by both industry partners and researchers.
- With the increase in volume and type of work requested from the TTO, there isn't enough bandwidth to service all the researchers across the consortium. Waterford Institute of Technology has found that a dedicated analyst can help speed things up with patent searches and market reviews.
- Researchers have increasing expectations of the services they want from the TTO, including the TTO's input around the patent, patent strategy and landscape reviews.
- The importance of having the tech transfer lead available on site was stressed. It is vital to have someone engaging with academics on an ongoing basis.
- Consortium members need to be careful that they are also seen to be managing their brand identity at partner level, that it is a consortium of equals, that they are doing this for the benefit of their researchers and that the consortium is tightly managed.
- There is an increasing burden of reporting to funders, agencies and KTI, as well as fulfilling the reporting required from consortia through their leads. But it's noted that the reporting required for TTSI2 is more of a burden for the head of the consortium.
- Communications from Enterprise Ireland to each consortium tend to be via the lead partner. This then may trickle down to the partners. Partners would prefer more direct communication from the agency itself on tech transfer activities.