

Knowledge exchange: Getting practitioners to engage with universities

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Achieving impact requires engagement

- ESRC funded Business Placement Fellowship exploring how to get practitioners utilising university expertise more extensively
- Interviews with 14 individuals in 6 major firms
- Firms identified in collaboration with IOD SW, as having potential to benefit from greater access to university expertise

Findings

- Existing engagement limited and mainly related to internships and graduate recruitment
- Main issues
 - Awareness and accessibility
 - Value offered by universities
 - Challenges in making projects work effectively

Awareness & accessibility

- Universities not on 'shopping list' of providers
- Lack of clarity on how to interact
- Challenge of breadth and complexity of what universities offer
- Universities in competition with more focussed suppliers

“Wouldn't it be great if there was some kind of central index or database of expertise, IP, research groups, that was kind of easy to navigate. Say it was, I don't know whether it was Wiki based or some kind of portal type thing. It shouldn't be particularly difficult for I don't know – whether it was a research group or that institution to be able to update – it oughtn't to be tricky really.”

Value offered by universities

- Universities and academics generally well regarded
- But academics sometimes seen as difficult to work with
- Cultural differences on attitudes to delivery

“The biggest con is sometimes academia’s not focussed on deliverables..... it’s used for training people, not for delivering milestones to projects which is what we’re used to, so it’s kind of – it’s just you’re coming at it from an opposite end of the spectrum. We’re saying ‘Here’s the date, here’s when we’re going to deliver’ and we do it. Sometimes it’s small things, you’re trying to get an MDA signed off, and they have a different focus on it to we do here. We expect it to be done by a date whereas it’s not their regular working thing to do that, so it tends to take longer.”

Challenges in making projects work

- IP contractual negotiations often lengthy & cumbersome
- Process of research funding over bureaucratic & lengthy

“The timescales are nonsense – we would have to know in January in one year to bid and start work by October the next.”

“.....bureaucracies who are capable and willing to sit back and say ‘Actually we’ll wait until next year or we’ll put that funding in next year.’ Whereas in reality, we’ll lose patience with them. If it’s not important for the professor and us to start this year then why is it important that we start next year?”

Implications

Issue	Possible actions
Awareness and accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clearer positioning of universities' offering and expertise• More effective marketing and communication by university sector to potential users of knowledge• Focus on initial accessibility through the internet
Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transition of academics from traditional mould to Mode 2 working• Development of university systems of reward and training to encourage and support more effective engagement• Review of IP policies to ensure mutual benefit
Challenges in making projects work effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simplification and speeding up of application processes• Communication to businesses of requirements