

### Case Study 3.1. Champions Programme at the University of Cambridge

**CRITICAL AREA OF FOCUS 1:** “Scouting ideas/technologies from the PRO and incentivizing researchers to disclose IP”

**BEST PRACTICE FOR:** “Innovation Scouts” **AIMED AT:** TTOs/PROs/Researchers

**UNIVERSITY:** University of Cambridge (UK) **TTO:** Cambridge Enterprise



### The context:

Established in 1209, the **University of Cambridge** is one of the oldest universities in the world and one of the largest in the UK. The university has more than 18,000 students, nearly 9,000 staff, 31 Colleges and 150 Departments, Faculties, Schools and other institutions. The World University QS Ranking lists the University of Cambridge among the top 3 universities worldwide.

The **University of Cambridge** is located in the East of England of the UK. In the 2015 EU Innovation Union Scoreboard, the UK was listed as the fifth most innovative country in Europe and the first among the second set of “innovation follower” countries. The UK has significantly improved its performance compared to last year. Between 2007 and 2014 the UK’s innovation performance has been steadily improving. The performance was at 9% above the EU average in 2007, and it was at 15% above the average in 2014. The best performing dimensions are Entrepreneurship, Innovative SMEs collaborating with others, Venture capital investments, and International scientific co-publications.

**Cambridge Enterprise** was established as an external **Technology Transfer Office (TTO)** by the University of Cambridge in 2006 to help students and academics form and fund spin-out companies, bring new ideas to market, and transfer university expertise to industry and government. Cambridge Enterprise provides support in protecting inventions, developing business opportunities, negotiating licensing and consultancy contracts, and obtaining proof-of-concept funding. Cambridge Enterprise has a team of about 50 people and is made of three business units (Technology Transfer, Consultancy Services, and Seed Funds) and there support units (Marketing & Communications, Finance & Operations, and Support).

Most of the people within the business units have an academic background.

### The problem:

The main channel to scout new ideas and technologies at the University of Cambridge is through formal invention disclosure system. Due to a Cambridge culture of academic freedom and its IPR Policy, **Cambridge Enterprise does not proactively scout for technologies**. Instead, through internal marketing Cambridge Enterprise tries to convince academics and researchers that it provides professional and high quality technology transfer services. Therefore, **the main problem was to increase awareness** about resources available through Cambridge Enterprise and establish trustworthy working relationships with department members.

### The solution:

In order to enhance the invention disclosure flow from researchers, Cambridge Enterprise launched a programme called **Champions Programme** which is made up of representatives of departments of the University of Cambridge who act as a two way channel of communication between Cambridge Enterprise and researchers. **The aim** is to inform Cambridge Enterprise about the key research done at the departments with commercial potential, and also to help disseminate information from Cambridge Enterprise. The champions are usually well known and trusted members of their departments that act as a first point of contact for their colleagues who want advice on bringing their ideas and expertise to market. These departmental representatives were initially recruited among senior academics.



After a few years of experience into the program, they realized that senior academics tended to have limited time to devote to such activity, therefore they decided to involve as champions mainly research coordinators or senior research administrators. This decision was taken after an internal review on the role of

**Champions**, which involved the Heads of Departments. Nowadays, the Champions' network represents 50 areas of the University and Cambridge Enterprise constantly tries to expand this network by recruiting new champions. Every three months these champions attend term meetings to discuss critical issues and get updates. These meetings also help to bring together all people in the University whose work is related to technology commercialization in order to coordinate actions and to avoid duplicative activities. Champions work on a voluntary basis, and there are no monetary benefits attached to them. They are understood as some of the roles that academic people perform, such as taking a role in committee or an institutional role. Being a Champion, however, provides benefits in terms of networking and in terms of being constantly updated on issues related to commercialization and innovation.

Considering the incentive systems at Cambridge University to involve researchers in technology transfer activities, a major component is represented by a very generous revenue sharing policy. Cambridge Enterprise handles the sharing of licensing revenue with inventors and departments. According to the University policy, inventor(s) receive 90% of licensing income (less relevant expenditures) for the first 100,000€ (5% for Departments and 5% for Cambridge Enterprise), and 60% of income for the next 100,000€ (20% for Departments and 20% for Cambridge Enterprise), and 34% of income above 200,000€ (33% Departments and 33% Cambridge Enterprise). Such revenue sharing policy was generated by Cambridge academics themselves and represents therefore a bottom-up policy. Although patents and technology transfer activities are typically not recognized in career promotion, they provide opportunities for potential research income through research projects and funding programmes that in turn may lead to more academic publications.

## Alignment to PROGRESS-TT:

This case is a good illustration of the "Innovation Scouts" Best Practice in PROGRESS-TT Critical Area of Focus 1 "Scouting ideas/technologies from the PRO and incentivising researchers to disclose IP".

The implementation of **the practice leads** to successful results. The number of invention disclosures increased significantly, although it stabilized in more recent years. The number of new patent filings increased from 124 in 2009 to 268 in 2014, the number of consultancy agreements increased from 124 to 268, and the amount of income from knowledge and technology transfer increased from £8 million to £16.5 million.

From the **Champions Programme launched** at the University of Cambridge other TTOs may learn how to establish a network of academics, researchers and facilitators that may act as a first point of contact for their department members and provide a valuable link between a TTO and researchers at university departments. The Champions Programme is a tool for penetrating departments and encouraging researchers to contact their TTOs as early as possible to commercialize their research. Although Cambridge Enterprise has unique features in terms of size, resources and organizational configuration, the experience of Champions can be easily replicated by other Universities, as it does not require a significant commitment of time and money. It raises the awareness by researchers of services offered by a TTO. In order to do that, it is important to have a reference person within the Department who understands its culture and who is known and trusted by his/her colleagues.

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