

Case Study 18.2. Commercialization Bootcamps and Venture Launch Accelerator at University College Dublin (UCD)

CRITICAL AREA OF FOCUS 2: “Assessing IP potential, validating technologies and incentivizing for commercialisation”

BEST PRACTICE FOR: “Technology Accelerators” and “Commercialisation Boot Camps”

AIMED AT: TTO/Researcher

UNIVERSITY: University College Dublin (UCD) (Ireland) **TTO:** UCDInnovation



The context:

University College Dublin (UCD) is Ireland’s largest university with over 30,000 students and around 1,500 academic employers. It has its origins in the Catholic University of Ireland in 1854. The university consists of seven colleges which represent the full spectrum of academic sciences.

The technology transfer office of UCD, **UCDInnovation**, was founded in 1985 and has more than 20 employees.

The problem:

Cultivating entrepreneurship is a hard task in a university setting. The **gap between academics and business** is often large and there are barriers to communication. Without an overarching mission/vision it is impossible to truly create an entrepreneurial culture within the university.

Researchers, staff and students might be extremely skilled in their academic research field and in creating radically new inventions and technologies, but they often **lack the awareness of the steps leading to successful commercialization** and the required competences.

The solution:

The **UCD Commercialisation Bootcamp** is a support program for academics and staff at University College Dublin. It takes place twice a year in spring and autumn, and it is delivered by the UCDInnovation Team with the aim to impart knowledge, skills and understanding of the commercialization process.

The objective of the Bootcamp is to **provide** academic researchers, staff and postgraduate research students of the University College Dublin and National College of Art and Design with the knowledge, **skills and understanding of the technology commercialisation process**. It aims to strengthen the pipeline of commercial opportunities arising from UCD and NCAD research programmes.

The **UCD Commercialization Bootcamp** consists of five 3-hour workshops delivered over a 5-week period. On completion of the Bootcamp participants will have developed a solid awareness of what it takes to build a commercialisation plan which covers the following areas:

1. Market problem/need
2. Proposed solution/technological innovation
3. Market opportunity and market validation
4. Commercial exploitation route(s)
5. Project team
6. Technology roadmap
7. Commercialization work plan
8. Funding requirements and funding plan.

Attendants will also create a commercialization canvas, based on the Business Model Canvas framework, and it incorporates Design Thinking and Lean Start-up techniques and helps them to map out the most optimal commercialization route. Through such techniques participants are encouraged to obtain an early and fast feedback from potential users on their ideas, so to identify promising areas for development and abandon less interesting avenues

The method will generate a so-called „living document“, which is not a static structure for the commercialization but gives room for pivoting and updates. The idea is to actively and dynamically develop a commercialisation route, especially using user feedback and an experimentation-driven approach. The programme also assists participants to explore key elements required when applying for commercialization funding.

Programme workshops are practical and hands-on and project teams are mentored in-between workshops by UCD Technology Transfer Case Managers. Applicants will have to fill out an application form, asking for their project name, up to four other project members that attend the bootcamp, whether the project has an invention disclosure with the UCD TTO, a short description of the market problem, the current stage of development and a question about the current funding of the project.

UCDInnovation also runs the VentureLaunch Accelerator program, a complementary programme with the aim to support the creation of new ventures based on UCD intellectual property. Ten three hour workshops over three months will help the researchers acquiring the knowledge, skills and understanding that will be required to develop teams and technologies into commercial ventures. At the end of the year, a winner is chosen who will get 10.000 Euros of seed money plus 15.000 Euros usable for professional services, as a way to foster the grow of the new venture.

Alignment to PROGRESS-TT:

This case is a good illustration of the “Commercialisation Boot Camps” Best Practice in PROGRESS-TT Critical Area of Focus 2 “Assessing IP potential, validating technologies and incentivizing for commercialisation”.

In 2013, 37 and 17 researchers attended the first two UCD commercialization bootcamps, representing a total of 30 potential commercial projects. The third one was completed by 24 researchers in 2014, to a then-total of 78 participants.

Overall, 270 companies and early-stage projects where supported at NovaUCD (the incubator of UCD where UCDInnovation and the bootcamps take place), 140 companies where incubated and 30 new UCD spin-out companies incorporated.

The UCD commercialization bootcamp is part of a larger initiative to foster the entrepreneurial spirit of researchers. First, they can attend “sprints”, one-day activities that help commercialization, going deeper with bootcamps and then use the VentureLaunch program which should ultimately lead to new companies created. This process streamlines and refines the commercialization process that the researchers started. Using the well-known Business Canvas Model and improving it for the specific demands of university staff that want to commercialize their research, providing a flexible route and utilizing user feedback, the bootcamp at UCD is a good example of experimental, hands-on approach for validating and maturing technologies.

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