Case Study 20.2. POC program and Green Light Startup Accelerator at Technical University of Ostrava

CRITICAL AREA OF FOCUS 2: "Assessing IP potential, validating technologies and incentivizing for commercalisation"

BEST PRACTICE FOR: "Proof of Concept Programs"

AIMED AT: TTO/Researcher/Industry **TTO**: Innovation Support Centre

UNIVERSITY: Technical University of Ostrava and related partners (Czech Republic)

The context:

VSB Technical University of Ostrava (VSB-TUO) was founded 1849. It has an academic staff of 670 and 24.000 enrolled students and is a university specialized in mining, engineering, environmental sciences and nano technology.

The **Innovation Support Centre** is a specialized unit of the VSB-TUO for developmental activities in the field of science-industry collaboration and knowledge transfer founded 2012.

The problem:

Like many Eastern European countries, the Czech Republic is pushing to make its economy more knowledge-based. To make this switch, it is important that the research being conducted is relevant, and helps change the landscape.

The share of private (corporate) resources on expenditures in university-conducted R&D was only 2%, in the governmental sector conducted R&D 3% in 2013. These values are significantly below the European average: the EU28 achieves 8% of private resources in the university-conducted R&D, and 7% in the governmental sector. In this respect, we are making effort to increase the extent of cooperation in R&D between the academic and corporate sphere.

The solution:

With the aim of improving the cooperation with the application sphere, the VSB-Technical University of Ostrava established its Innovation Support Centre in which are interconnected the activities of supporting the university's know-how and technologies commercialization with the grant management activities, and the start-up support. The Innovation Support Centre every year supports financially several interesting R&D results with commercial potential through the proof-of-concept scheme (between 30,000 - 200,000 EUR per case). Funding can cover the entire process or development including testing, designing prototypes, market analysis. Representatives of the application sphere are involved in the decision-making process - in this context was established the Commercialization Council. Funds are primarily coming from special-purpose grants.

In the framework of the **Innovation Support Centre** has been created a team aiming at facilitation of cooperation with the application sphere. Various tools are used to achieve this goal: Brokerage events with the aim of establishing project consortia for the H2020 programme; a contact point for cooperation with industry, including mediation of the companies' demand, e.g. in the framework of the regional system of innovation vouchers; or legal support for contracted research cases, etc.

Establishing a **start-up company** seems to be a suitable path of commercial application for some of the university know-how (particularly in the field of ICT). In this respect, the Innovation Support Centre operates its business incubator with specific programmes like the Green Light Start-up Accelerator. Green Light is a programme for supporting business development, and its aim is to motivate and support university students and researchers in particular to help them achieve their own business objectives. It is a joint project of Ostrava universities and their partners, and its implementation is ensured by the Innovation Support Centre at Technical University of Ostrava.

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme and Euratom research and training programme 2014-2018 under grant agreement No 643486.

The aim of the GREEN LIGHT programme is to support interesting and implementable business ideas with facilities and services, and thereby to help entrepreneurs to improve quality and speed up thelaunch of their projects. Participants to the programme have the possibility to win one of the prizes in total amount over 150 thousand CZK, to present their project in front of media and investors at the biggest startup event in Moravia-Silesian, and the possibility to engage in startup visit travel.

Alignment to PROGRESS-TT:

This case is a good illustration of the "Proof of Concept Programs" Best Practice in PROGRESS-TT Critical Area of Focus 2 "Assessing IP potential, validating technologies and incentivizing for commercalisation".

Between 2012 and 2014, the volume of contracted research at the university amounted to more than 3.3 million EUR annually, which was a growth by 100% in comparison to the preceding five-year average. In the monitored period of 2012 - 2014, more than 30 projects were supported in the form of proof-ofconcept. Gradually are from the close-to-zero values emerging revenues from the sale of intellectual property. Number of applicants for implementation of their business idea grew from the level of less than ten applicants to several dozen per year.

The principal source of funding for implementation of activities is currently the EU structural funds. It is evident that the ultimate impact on successful commercialization cannot be implemented in the horizon of only a few years. In this respect it seems necessary to provide a sufficient period of time for implementing such systems at universities. On the other hand, it is very important that the grants would not become an obstacle in the decision-making process of academic entrepreneurs, when it comes to risk assessment, which is an inevitable part of the commercialization of research results. The grants must not become a substitute, but a catalyst to look for additional funding from corporations and external investors.

In order to avoid some of the rigidities which often characterize the academic environment, the experience of the Innovation Support Centre of Technical University Ostrava suggest the importance of working with the so-called "islands of positive deviation", i.e. motivated teams, on awarding the best teams, or making the best cases visible.

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