

Case Study 19.2. Proof-of-concept funding at University College London

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

BEST PRACTICE FOR: “Proof of Concept Programs”

AIMED AT: TTO/PROs/Researcher

UNIVERSITY: University College London (United Kingdom) **TTO:** UCLBusiness



The context:

University College London (UCL) is a college of London University and a full-scale university founded in 1826. UCL has more than 20,000 students and 4,000 staff. It is part of the Russell Group.

Founded in 1989, **UCL Business plc** is the technology transfer company of University College London and several hospitals of the National Hospital System in the UK and has more than 40 employees.

The problem:

Many promising technologies emerge from UCL. They can be from different sciences, scales and turning them into a product will involve varying degrees of risk and financial means. One effective method to screen these technologies is Proof-of-concept programmes, to support the precommercialization development of these technologies.

The solution:

UCL Business is responsible for UCL’s technology transfer. Their directory of technology describes UCL’s IP available to license. UCLB is responsible for technology development and commercialisation transactions for UCL. Offering world-class expertise in areas from life sciences to engineering and from the arts to the built environment, they work to make commercial connections between the expertise and innovations of UCL’s academics and the needs of industry and the wider marketplace.

By bringing expertise and experience into the mix to add real benefit, through financial investment, strong intellectual property (IP) strategy, project management, prototype design, securing regulatory pathways and enabling access to markets they support the technology transfer at the UCL. This foundation of support is invaluable in ensuring more **novel ideas make the transition into marketable innovations for societal benefit and impact**. UCL has established different types of internal funding schemes in order to support the transition of early-stage technologies from its labs to the marketplace. It is focusing on assessing IP potential, validating technologies. Every technology requires different strategies to take it to market and the different funds available can be used to generate data to support commercialization, produce prototype devices or even undertake pre-clinical activities in the case of life sciences.

Proof of concept (PoC) funds can be used to support the pre-commercialisation development of promising technologies emerging from UCL. Every technology requires different strategies to take them to market and the different funds available can be used to generate data to support commercialisation, produce prototype devices or even to undertake pre-clinical activities. Currently UCL Business manages five different POC programmes. The specificities of these programs that differentiate UCL from the majority of universities setting up similar programmes, is the fact that some of them are specialized by specific technological or therapeutic area.

- **CBRC (Comprehensive Biomedical Research Centre):** a maximum of £50,000 per award can be applied for using a standard UCLB application form. Applications for CBRC funded awards require approval by the CBRC Advisory Board.



- HEIF (Higher Education Innovation Fund): applications under £25,000 per award can be applied for using a standard UCLB application form and will be approved internally by UCLB. Applications exceeding £25,000 will be submitted to the Office of the Vice Provost for Enterprise for approval.
- J&J (Johnson & Johnson) POC: Awards of up to £75,000 are available on a call by call basis. Preliminary abstracts can be submitted to UCLB and forwarded to J&J. If the abstract is approved, the PI will be invited to submit a full application to the UCLB/J&J committee for final selection.
- MIMIT (Manchester Integrating Medicine & Innovative Technology): Open to applications on a case by case call only. Applications can be made to MIMIT using a dedicated MIMIT application form.
- Moorfields Fund: The Moorfields Fund is open to applications of up to £50,000 for projects relating to ophthalmology. Applications over £25,000 require external independent approval by a dedicated selection committee.
- UCLB Fund: A UCLB controlled fund of up to £100,000 per annum. This award is approved and managed internally by UCLB.

For all the POCs, application forms should be completed by the principal investigator (PI) and UCLB Business Manager (BM). When the form has been completed the BM will present the application internally. If it is agreed internally that the application should be progressed, the application will be forwarded for external review, if applicable. External review is required for HEIF applications in excess of £100,000, CBRC, J&J, MIMIT and Moorfields funds.

Once the application has been approved and signed, the PI will receive an award letter outlining the terms of the awards including award value and the milestones on which the award will be funded. Upon signature of the award letter by the PI, an account will be requested through UCL Finance and the Departmental Administrator for use by the PI for the duration of the project.

This account will hold milestone payments and be used for paying costs related to the award. When milestones are completed the PI is expected to submit a progress report to UCLB in order to review progress and release further tranches of money.

This report should also be submitted with more detail upon completion of a project with a balance and transaction report of the PoC account. Each PoC should be planned against a Fund Return Date, whereby the remaining balance on a PoC account should be returned to the fund if the project remains uncompleted, expired or abandoned. Projects which are unlikely to be completed by the original fund return date can be extended by issuing a further PoC award letter.

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 commercialisation”.

UCLB has a significant track record in technology transfer activities. In 2012/2013, it had a turnover of £9.3 million, it completed 51 new licenses (267 total), it filed for 41 new patents (306 patent families total), it provided £945,000 funding for POC projects, and it held 60 equity holdings.

Firstly, the scale of UCL is large. They find themselves in an interconnected network of top universities, and produce large amounts of good research. Their diversifying strategy allows them to better valorize this research, but it might not work for TTO’s where the university’s research output is lower.

This is also a very old TTO, having been around for 26 years. The time it takes to build a network, expertise and reputation cannot be emulated.

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