

RSC response to the EPSRC Knowledge Transfer and Economic Impact Strategy consultation

The Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Research Councils *Knowledge Transfer and Economic Impact Strategy*.

The RSC is the largest organisation in Europe for advancing the chemical sciences. Supported by a network of 43,000 members worldwide and an internationally acclaimed publishing business, our activities span education and training, conferences and science policy, and the promotion of the chemical sciences to the public.

This document represents the views of the RSC. The RSC's Royal Charter obliges it to serve the public interest by acting in an independent advisory capacity, and the RSC is happy for this submission to be put into the public domain.

The RSC believes the following comments are relevant to the EPSRC strategy.

- The EPSRC should be funding excellence in scientific research and training, and this should not be disadvantaged by new drives for increased economic returns.
- The RSC recognises that the UK falls behind many of its global competitors in terms of economic gains from public funded research and that this gap needs to be addressed. The EPSRC, as a distributor of public funds to the engineering and physical sciences research community, should play a key role in any future knowledge transfer strategy. This should be co-ordinated with other organisations who facilitate knowledge transfer.
- It is important that the EPSRC defines and understands its role in the knowledge transfer process and does not replicate services already available through knowledge transfer networks (KTNs), University-based technology transfer offices, regional development agencies, devolved administrations, independent KTNs and venture capital providers.
- The EPSRC proposes to achieve improved knowledge transfer by the re-focusing of internal staff resources. It is unclear where the technology transfer expertise will come from to achieve this, and the RSC suggests that high-level training of EPSRC staff in this area will be required.
- There are perhaps two strategies for increasing economic impact of EPSRC funded science: firstly, increase the number of targeted programmes, or, secondly, improve the mechanisms by which the research community develops current research for economic exploitation. Both of these could involve exploitation by University technology transfer offices or an increase in collaboration with industry.
- Whilst targeted programmes are useful in achieving both economic and societal gains, there is a need to retain an appropriate balance between them and responsive mode funding. The RSC believes the latter is crucial to the flexibility and creativity of the UK's research community and helps keep scientific standards high.
- The RSC also believe that there is a need to consider both long-term and short-term economic gains, and that fundamental, as well as applied, research can contribute to both. There is a need to ensure that a drive towards short-term economic returns does not damage the long-term economics of the UK's science base.

- The RSC recognises that there is a need for better coordination of knowledge exploitation. The DTI funded knowledge transfer networks have a key role to play in this, as do professional and learned societies, such as the RSC, who have memberships comprised of both academics and industrialists.
- There is a requirement for the EPSRC to be knowledgeable about the science and technology needs of a diverse range of industries. It is not currently clear how this information will be gathered and handled.
- The RSC believes that encouraging cross-discipline research within research institutes will increase the benefits of collaboration for industry.
- A raised awareness of the benefits that can be brought to academic research through knowledge transfer and industrial collaboration is essential to this process. EPSRC should also publicise best practice of knowledge transfer as part of any of their grants and publish case studies in the area.
- The EPSRC needs to encourage a greater awareness within academic research institutes of not only the research needs of industry but also their sensitivity and confidentiality requirements.
- The RSC recommends that an awareness of technology transfer should be engendered in postgraduate researchers. Funds could be ring-fenced by the EPSRC for technology transfer training, or GradSchools could be encouraged to implement a technology transfer component in their courses.
- The RSC welcomes the proposed involvement of industry in the training of postgraduate students, and the secondment of EPSRC staff with user organisations.
- By focusing significant resources on those Departments that receive the largest amount of EPSRC funding the council should take action to avoid the creation of an elitist knowledge transfer group. The EPSRC's knowledge transfer activities and services should be available to all EPSRC funded scientists.
- The RSC believes that the EPSRC should engage better with Europe on issues related to innovation and knowledge transfer. In particular the RSC believes that the EPSRC should have much greater dialogue with the European Technology Platforms.

The press release for this consultation was released by the EPSRC on March 8th, with a consultation submission deadline of March 16th. The RSC is concerned with the short consultation period and would like to note that it is not in agreement with the Government's code of practice for written consultations in which a minimum of a 12 week period is recommended.

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