

Press release: Universities and Science Minister calls on universities to do more to commercialise UK research and innovation

- new proposals to develop a Knowledge Exchange Framework to compare how effective universities are at business engagement and knowledge exchange are outlined
- the Minister also announced the first successful projects from the £100m Connecting Capability Fund and the successful regions selected for the third wave of the Science and Innovation Audits

Universities and Science Minister Jo Johnson today (12 October 2017) outlined his vision to secure the UK's status as a pioneering nation and called for universities to secure more return from the research conducted by institutions across the UK.

Speaking at the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) annual conference, Jo Johnson reinforced the importance of science and innovation in the Industrial Strategy and urged universities to deepen collaborative relationships with businesses to ensure the UK's innovative strength has real-world and economic impact.

As part of this, new analysis published today by HEFCE of the Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey highlights the progress already being made in improving knowledge sharing between UK universities and the commercial sector, which has continued to grow in 2015-16, with income reaching a record £4.2 billion. Despite this progress, the UK still lags behind comparable countries like the United States in terms of intellectual property income per research resource and the number of successful spin-off companies.

Jo Johnson said:

Universities have a vital role to play in their local communities and in the national economy. Given the record levels of public investment in R&D, it is essential that universities engage with businesses and communities to make the most of their knowledge and research.

There are great examples of this across the country but the system needs to find a new gear. University income from business engagement is growing more slowly than the economy as a whole, with British universities producing fewer spin-outs and less licensing income per pound of research resource than US counterparts. As a greater proportion of R&D takes place in universities in the UK

than in other countries, it's especially important that we get this right.

To help close this gap, the Science Minister announced plans to ask Research England within the new UK Research and Innovation body to consult the sector on the development of a new, public Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) to benchmark the performance from university-business collaboration and knowledge exchange. This builds upon the work undertaken by the knowledge exchange steering group led by Professor Trevor McMillan, and complements his proposal that the sector should develop clear statements of purpose in order to increase the effectiveness of engagement with business and the wider community.

Alongside the Research Excellence Framework and the Teaching Excellence Framework, the KEF will act as a benchmark for universities to ensure they are making the most of the opportunities available and help ensure that the UK benefits from the research, skills and knowledge in the higher education sector.

Additional funding for the Rutherford Fund:

The Government has been clear on its ambition to foster greater international collaboration in science and innovation, recently signing a Science and Technology Agreement with the United States and outlining plans to seek an ambitious science and innovation agreement with the EU. Celebrating the important contribution international scientists and researchers make to UK innovation, the Science Minister pledged an additional £18 million for the Rutherford Fund budget to attract the brightest minds to the UK. The funding is on top of the £100 million the Government has already invested and will enable an additional 200 fellowships to start this year, ensuring the UK remains the go to place for innovation and scientific discovery.

Connecting Capability Fund:

Jo Johnson also announced the first four projects to receive funding from the £100 million Connecting Capability Fund. Focused on university collaborations to boost the commercialisation of research, the first round will see groups of universities from England share £20 million to address areas such as age-related diseases, access to finance for spinouts, and support for SMEs as they scale-up.

Science and Innovation Audits Wave 3:

Emphasising the value of greater collaboration to further innovation, Jo Johnson confirmed the next 12 regions that will undertake a Science and Innovation Audit (SIA) to map their local research, innovation, and infrastructure strengths. Now in its third wave, the SIA process has already brought together businesses, universities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and the Devolved Administration equivalents to identify the opportunities for inward investment and regional growth, and will explore strengths in a number of sectors and disciplines across the UK including the marine economy in the

Highlands and Islands and applied digital technologies in the North East of England.

NOTES:

The twelve consortia that will be part of the 3rd wave of the Science and Innovation Audits are:

1. Cyber Resilience Alliance (led by Worcestershire LEP with support from The Marches, Gloucestershire and Swindon and Wiltshire LEPs)
2. Maximising the Marine Economy of the Highlands & Islands (Led by Highlands and Islands Enterprise)
3. North West Nuclear Arc Consortium (led by Bangor University with support from Welsh Government and North West England LEPs)
4. North West Coastal Arc Eco-Innovation Partnership (led by Lancaster University with support from North West England LEPs and the Welsh Government)
5. Northern Powerhouse Chemicals & Processing Science (led by Tees Valley Combined Authority with support from North East, Humberside, and Liverpool City Region LEPs)
6. Northern Powerhouse in Health Research (led by Northern Health Science Alliance and includes LEPs, universities and teaching hospitals from across the Northern Powerhouse)
7. The South Wales Crucible (led by Swansea University)
8. Upstream Space (led by UKSA/Scottish Enterprise comprising Scotland; Leicester; Belfast and a corridor between Cambridge and Portsmouth)
9. Precision Medicine Innovation in Scotland (led by the University of Glasgow)
10. Applied Digital Technologies (led by North East LEP)
11. Sustainable Airports (led by Brunel University, looking at Heathrow)
12. The Knowledge Quarter, London

The first four funding projects within the Connecting Capability Fund are:

1. East of England – Essex University, University of East Anglia and University of Kent will collaborate on a project which aims to address the region's productivity challenges by supporting company development and entrepreneurial skills growth
2. North of England – Higher Education Institutions in Manchester, Leeds, and Sheffield will collaborate on a project which aims to establish an investment fund to improve access to finance for university spinouts
3. South of England – this will be an extension of an existing collaboration between the universities of Bath, Bristol, Exeter, Southampton and Surrey (the SETSquared Partnership) which aims to better support SMEs as they scale-up
4. The universities of Oxford, Birmingham and Dundee, and the Francis Crick Institute are collaborating on a project which aims to support the development of new therapeutics to tackle age-related diseases

Knowledge Exchange Framework:

Following the Innovation & Science Strategy 2014, HEFCE sought to increase

the effectiveness of university knowledge exchange by establishing a knowledge exchange (KE) framework and steering group. The Vice-Chancellor of Keele University, Trevor McMillan, was asked to champion this within the sector. A number of tools and good practice guides for KE (such as “Good practice in tech transfer”) have already been developed and have been used by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) when developing their KE strategies.

Extensive data is already collected about universities’ KE performance via the Higher Education Statistics Agency’s (HESA) annual Higher Education Business Community Interaction Survey, and Research England will consult the sector as to how this data can be used to develop a balanced scorecard. Other recommendations from the McMillan Group are being taken forward, including the sector developing a set of common principles for effective KE, and the leadership of HEIs committing to adopting these principles.