

Enterprise Training for researchers a real discovery

Catherine Mansell, University of Birmingham, UK

Catherine Mansell MInstKT describes how breakthrough Birmingham programme is having impact.

At 9.05 am, 10 September 1984 Professor Sir Alec Jeffreys (then plain Dr Jeffreys) was working on DNA samples in his lab at the University of Leicester when he stumbled upon the world's first genetic fingerprint. Professor Jeffreys recognized the potential of the discovery and, in so doing, opened up a totally new area of science. The technique was initially used for solving immigration and paternity cases and in 1987 it was made commercially available when ICI started a blood testing centre. The rest, as they say, is history....

This distinct moment of scientific creativity is just one example of how university researchers are changing the world with their ideas. The University of Birmingham's Enterprise Training Programme is designed to equip researchers with some of the knowledge and skills needed to develop their research for the benefit of society.

The Enterprise Training Programme started its life back in 2002 as the Medici Programme, a HEIF-funded collaborative project led by the University of Birmingham. This was a fellowship programme for academics interested in developing their research commercially and included both a 12-month buy-out of time and a training programme. Over the years, Medici has trained more than 200 researchers and has developed into a standalone training programme, with no external funding.

Each year the training is refined and developed and we are now launching the 2012 programme which, we believe, will exceed all others in terms of the quality of the experience for the researchers who attend. To reflect this, we are re-launching this year as: 'The University of Birmingham Enterprise Training Programme.'

But why is enterprise training important for researchers?

In July 2006 the Research Council Economic Impact Group, chaired by Peter Warry, reported to the Director General of Science and Innovation at the DTI. The Warry report stated that Research Councils should:

'Encourage the universities to make enterprise training widely available for researchers in all disciplines'

Then on 15 June 2006 the Science and Technology Committee published its Third Report of Session 2005-06, Research Council Support for Knowledge Transfer [HC 995-I]. Recommendation 20 stated that:

'We welcome recognition by the Research Councils of the importance of enhancing business skills and we encourage them to further develop training activities in this area, making them available to as many researchers as possible'.

This indicates an understanding by government and RCUK of the need for enterprise training for the researcher community. The University of Birmingham has always been keen to offer Medici, our flagship programme for enterprise training, to other higher education institutions.

The overall aim of the training is to give research staff some of the basic tools to:

- evaluate their research in a more critical way with respect to potential commercial outputs
- understand better how the business world works and equip them with the tools to engage effectively with commercial collaborations
- give them a better understanding of the routes available for knowledge transfer and commercial development
- give them an appreciation of the benefits of becoming involved in the commercial development of their research

The training plan which we are offering this year will be broadly made up of the following components:

- Four residential modules, each two days in length;
- 25-30 delegates from around 10 different universities. The majority of delegates will be research staff (from RF to professorial level) but, in the past, we have also had facilities and lab managers attending;
- The key subject areas include business knowledge (business strategy, market analysis and planning, and finance), technology transfer knowledge (funding streams available, identification and protection of intellectual property, exploitation of knowledge and IP via licence, spin-out or other means) and skills training (networking, negotiation and pitching an idea). The programme culminates in the development and presentation of a business plan;
- The training makes significant use of the critical analysis of case study material and group work;
- The trainers are a mix of academics, professional training providers and practitioners;
- Presentations from enterprising academics who will talk about their experiences of developing research commercially for economic and societal benefit.

The training will be beneficial to research staff ranging from those who are relatively inexperienced and use the training to give them some of the skills to start to engage with external organisations more professionally, to research staff already

involved in the commercialisation process who need to understand the process that they are involved in.

To this end we ask prospective delegates the following questions;

1. Have you ever thought about the commercial potential of your research?
2. Would you like to feel more confident when collaborating with business?
3. Are you interested in different ways to use commercial development to demonstrate 'Impact'?

If an academic / researcher answers 'yes' to any of these questions then this training programme will respond to their need for skills development in this area.

But what do people find most useful about the Medici programme?

Before re-commissioning the training for 2012 we ran an evaluation of the outputs created by Medici training (from the University of Birmingham delegates) over the past few years. We found many examples of benefit derived from the programme, not just to the individual researchers concerned but to the university as a whole. There were the obvious outputs of patents filed and spin out companies created but delegates reported a number of other benefits as well:

- Career progression.
- Progression into an industrial secondment.
- Setting up of an UG Enterprise module within a masters course.
- Setting up of CPD programmes.
- More professional engagement with industry.
- Confidence to engage in commercial projects.
- Use of knowledge and skills acquired to lever development funding (in particular the marketing training is cited as being important in gaining
- Research Council funding such as follow-on funding.)
- Use of the trainers for specific project related support; most of our trainers offer the delegates post training advice.
- Experience of working in multi-disciplinary teams.
- The intensity of the programme creates a real 'buzz' and the delegates often become very excited about the opportunities in their area.

To find out more about the University of Birmingham Enterprise Training Programme contact Catherine Mansell on 0121 414 4905 or email c.mansell@bham.ac.uk

Dr Catherine Mansell MInstKT leads the University of Birmingham's Enterprise Training Programme