

PROTON EUROPE: BUILDING SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Turin, Italy, February 1, 2008; ProTon Europe calls for greater consistency in the strategies and agendas of Government Departments, Agencies and Public Research Organisations to maximise support for the development of Strategic Partnerships

European competitiveness and sustained economic growth and prosperity are increasingly dependent on the generation of new innovative products and services, many of which have their origins in the knowledge created through research undertaken in universities and other Public Research Organisations (PROs). In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that successful Knowledge Transfer is dependent on the generation of strategic and sustainable partnerships between those who create knowledge and those who exploit it for the benefit of the economy and society.

Therefore, it is not surprising that over the last 4-5 years, the development of Knowledge Transfer as a profession and as a formal activity has become a priority for many European countries. This can be seen not only from the ProTon metrics but also from the cultural shifts within universities and changes in government policy. The debate has moved from what needs to be done to how we can deliver in ever more effective ways.

At European level, the principal issues around Knowledge Transfer are about developing a coherent and less complex system, both within and across Member States, embedding Knowledge Transfer in policy and practice in all aspects of the overall ERA 'ecosystem'. The Knowledge Transfer system, and much of the national legislation surrounding it, needs to be rationalised to ensure that all stakeholders (universities, public research organisations (PROs), funding bodies, industry and the wider community) find the processes involved in Knowledge Transfer easier to manage and to understand. While the increasing emphasis on Knowledge Transfer is clear, European competitiveness is dependent on the introduction of speedier and more cost effective processes which will benefit all of the stakeholders involved.

The policy issues around delivery of effective Knowledge Transfer through partnership are on the agenda at both European and Member State level. The significance of these issues is recognised through the growing level of support for collaborative research and through initiatives such as the European Institute of Technology, the development of national Codes of Practice, the ERA and other Commission communications. The need for ProTon to work with the national Knowledge Transfer associations in providing a pan European voice for the profession is increasing critical.

This is clearly an opportune time for industry to avail of the opportunities for partnership in research and commercialisation arising from the growing level of public investment in research. In order to encourage industrial involvement universities need to place greater emphasis on the use of the programmes and tools available to market the scientific excellence and interdisciplinary skills that are key drivers of collaboration.

A major element in ensuring successful partnerships is the strength, and the flexibility of the partnerships created. Long-term arrangements involving strategically selected partners speaking a common language are most effective. True partnership depends on the trust and commitment generated through project champions with strong personal relationships and shared values. Professional behaviour leading to good project management based on a real understanding of the goals and objectives of all parties and a recognition of the need to share both risks and rewards is also essential. An appropriate balance always needs to be achieved between academic objectives and industrial priorities. In the medium to long term successful partnerships must have a positive impact on the achievement of the mission of the university including the generation of further research opportunities.

To assist in the development of successful partnerships, ProTon Europe believes that some core actions and strategies need to be put in place by the European Commission, national governments and universities, themselves acting in partnership. These include:

- **Development of greater consistency in Government strategies and less complex legal arrangements for management of IP:** If universities are to focus on the promotion of innovation, technology transfer and collaboration with industry then it is essential to ensure that they are not distracted by conflicting Government strategies and concerns such as the impact of their activities on their charitable and tax status. This can be achieved by greater consistency in the strategies and agendas of Government Departments, Agencies and Public Research Organisations to maximise their support for Partnership and Knowledge Transfer. While the new State Aid Framework is a considerable improvement, further clarification is required on the implementation of State Aid Regulations at National level. There is also a need for legal arrangements, particularly around the management of IP, to be harmonised and for the complexity of the European patent system to be reduced in line with the recommendations contained in the policy statement released by ProTon in August 2007.
- **Increased support for Knowledge Transfer and the development of the Profession:** ProTon should work in partnership with the Institute of Knowledge Transfer to increase the status of the Knowledge Transfer profession across Europe. Support should be provided for the development of professional standards for the Knowledge Transfer profession in all sectors of the economy and for the provision of relevant training and experience. At national level recurrent funding streams should be established to support the development of knowledge transfer capacity within the universities and to recognise and retain skilled personnel.
- **Development of Innovation Ecosystems in areas of strategic importance:** Innovation ecosystems and districts should be developed involving networks of large companies and SMEs with access to world-class university researchers working in areas of strategic international, national and regional importance. Such initiatives would be based on innovation agreements between all stakeholders, universities, Government and industry, consistent with Responsible Partnering.
- **Increased SME involvement and sharing good practice:** Continued support should be provided by Governments at European and national levels to encourage SME involvement in collaborative research and in the commercialisation of the resulting intellectual property. In order to enhance European performance, greater understanding of good practice models and effective tools and mechanisms for management of collaborations and Knowledge Transfer should be shared across partnerships, universities, companies, governments and regions.