

01/07/07

Chris Shaw
Clerk to the Committee
Science and Technology Select Committee
7 Millbank
House of Commons
London, SW1P 3JA

16 February 2006

Dear Mr. Shaw

Further to the invitation to submit evidence to the Select Committee on Science and Technology inquiry into Research Council Support for Knowledge Transfer issued on 1 December 2005, please find the response of the 1994 Group attached.

Paul M. Marshall
Executive Director

The 1994 Group (membership, aims and objectives detailed in Annex A attached) **offers the following evidence for the Select Committee on Science and Technology inquiry into Research Council Support for Knowledge Transfer**

1. General Points

Knowledge transfer is an area of increasing interest and activity on the part of the Research Councils, but there is considerable variation between them in effort, approach and success. One reason for this is that there are numerous and potentially competing initiatives which must all work in harmony, for example, Research Councils, Regional Development Agencies, City Councils (i.e. Science City), HEFCE, DTI etc, not forgetting the Treasury encouraging knowledge transfer schemes on a more international basis (MIT/Cambridge). The Research Councils (and all the others) must take cognisance of these existing schemes and work within a coherent framework. Often, too much energy goes into understanding how all the layers may work together (or not) rather than in delivering clear outcomes that are well resourced. It is important not to create new layers just to demonstrate an initiative has been taken. Finally, it is essential that the Research Councils do not become too distracted from their primary mission to fund long-term research. It is important that scarce resources are not spread too thinly over too wide a remit of activity.

2. Promotion of collaborative working between researchers and partners in industry, including in the creative industries and in SMEs

In the past, the focus has been on academia going out into industry, rather than encouraging industry into the academic community. Apart from studentships, most Research Councils do little actively to promote and reward collaborations between academic researchers and business. The new Arts and Humanities Research Council Knowledge Transfer Fellowship proposals, however, are an interesting new development in this area. There is clearly a role for Research Councils to encourage business to make use of university facilities, for example Research Council Fellowships and secondments for business to allow staff to work in Universities to undertake research projects.

In this context, it is important that the breadth of potential engagement is recognised. The establishment of the AHRC has provided the opportunity for a broadening of the understanding of knowledge transfer to include the impact of research on areas that include not only business but also museums and galleries, the heritage sector, the cultural sector, broadcasting and public policy, as well as a basis for attending specifically to the creative industries. This broad approach is welcomed, and it is important that it is maintained in the future. There are, however, challenges in relation to knowledge transfer in the creative industries because existing business models are of only limited help. It is very important that the DTI and OST continue to be open to the approaches being developed by the AHRC to address these challenges.

Despite this support, there remains an overriding concern that there will be no new money for knowledge transfer awarded to the Research Councils forcing them to divert sums away from basic research grants. Knowledge transfer cannot happen unless the basic research is being done in first place.

3. Stakeholder engagement and communication

Not surprisingly, the Councils appear to consult primarily with those on their Councils and Boards. We understand that they hold high-level discussions with the RDAs, but

there does not seem to be much exchange at senior working level between those delivering RDA support and those managing Enterprise and Innovation offices in the universities. The result is that coordination between the various funding streams is poor, with the universities being expected to join up and make sense of sometimes disconnected policies. Multiple funders and stakeholders make management and accountability complex and in some cases unnecessarily burdensome

The engagement of academic staff in knowledge transfer activities is one of the primary goals of university HEIF-funded staff. The Research Councils have a role in stimulating that engagement by emphasising the Knowledge Transfer element of their awards – requiring evidence of commercial or societal need, possible applications, and future benefits to society from research, if funded. We have observed that in the case of Research Councils (such as BBSRC) where questions are explicitly asked at the time of a grant application, we have had an opportunity to educate and engage with academic staff with respect to the Knowledge Transfer agenda. We would support Research Council policies that required the anticipated or hoped-for Knowledge Transfer routes to be explored and articulated as an essential part of the funding application process.

4. Results and Performance Management

If knowledge transfer is to become genuinely a core business of UK universities alongside teaching and research then the RAE needs to clearly recognise and reward academic engagement with the enterprise and innovation agenda so that it is not seen as a distraction. Without this, it will be difficult for universities to change their internal reward and recognition systems so that knowledge transfer sits as an equal alongside teaching and research. Is it possible for the Research Councils to show leadership here?

On one detailed matter, Research Councils essentially place the onus on HEIs to commercialise or otherwise transfer new knowledge, and this is as it should be. It is especially helpful that Research Councils make no claim to ownership of resulting intellectual property, nor do they expect to share in any income that HEIs might enjoy from licensing or equity deals. However, we would welcome a clearer directive from the Research Councils regarding their expectation that the proceeds of commercial success should be shared with the HEI generating the new knowledge. This could help HEIs to better-manage the expectations of commercial partners, would simplify and speed up commercial negotiations, and might allow more licence and option agreements to be concluded.

Finally, we would like to see all Research Councils adopt the same approach to Follow-on-Funds as that embraced by the BBSRC – i.e. a call open to all, to support development from *any* former research that was funded by that Research Council.

5. Co-Ordination between the Councils and the role of RCUK

Co-ordination and, more importantly, joint working across the councils must be improved. Many opportunities to link the university research base with business lie across the responsibilities of the Councils. There are isolated examples of joint programmes but in general, their work in this area does not give enough attention to joint approaches. For example, the recent call by the EPSRC for Integrated Knowledge Centres is an interesting development but since it was issued by the EPSRC on its own and not in collaboration with other councils, it rules out some of the most innovative and exciting possibilities such as Biorefining.

The 1994 Group

The 1994 Group of internationally renowned universities engaged in leading-edge research and high-quality teaching is committed to meeting the diverse needs of students, staff and policy makers. The 1994 Group provides a framework for collaboration between research-intensive universities in the UK. The aim of this collaboration is to enhance the ability of member universities to act collectively where appropriate whilst maintaining their individuality and thriving in the highly competitive higher education sector.

The Group's main aims are to:

- secure widespread recognition that enables it to influence decision and policy making groups;
- achieve awareness and profile that underpins the ambitions of member universities in global markets;
- promote the need for diverse and distributed centres for research and teaching excellence;
- share good practice that enhances the staff and student experience;
- provide services that enable members to respond flexibly and rapidly to developing market conditions.

Group members are committed to shared values. These are that:

- institutional identities and tradition can be respected and aligned with innovative thinking;
- research intensive universities should play a full role at local, regional, national and international level;
- high quality research and teaching are mutually supportive and should reinforce each other;
- students and staff from diverse backgrounds should be enabled to maximise their potential in a well-maintained environment that provides a stimulating choice of academic, cultural, and social opportunities.

The current members of the 1994 Group are:

University of Bath, Birkbeck College, University of Durham, University of East Anglia, University of Essex, University of Exeter, Goldsmiths College University of London, Royal Holloway University of London, Lancaster University, London School of Economics, University of Reading, University of St Andrews, University of Surrey, University of Sussex, University of Warwick, and University of York.