

MEDIA RELEASE

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Breakthrough in university knowledge exchange to business as Scottish universities sign up to single set of contracts

Professor Seamus McDaid, Convener of Universities Scotland, will today [24 November] announce that Scotland's universities have taken the unprecedented step of signing-up to a single set of contracts to aid the commercialisation of their research. The announcement comes at a conference on Scotland's universities held in the capital (1).

This step-change in process answers a call from Mr Russell, Cabinet Secretary for Education, in September, that universities should do more to engage with business and act to remove perceived barriers to the exploitation of university research (2).

This step replaces the diverse styles and processes for contracting across 19 universities, which was complex for business and industry to navigate. Scotland's universities are thought to be the first and only university sector in the world to take such a collaborative approach to producing a streamlined set of contracts to help commercialisation with the aim of greatly simplifying the process for business.

This move meets three of the challenges Michael Russell, Cabinet Secretary for Education, laid down to universities in his letter of guidance to the Scottish Funding Council. He had called on universities to work together more, to simplify systems and to do what they can to make access to intellectual property easier. This step-change is set to benefit businesses of all sizes but has the potential to have most impact with smaller businesses or those who have not previously worked with universities before.

Professor Seamus McDaid, Convenor of Universities Scotland:

"Scotland's universities have a strong track record when it comes to collaborating on research and knowledge exchange but we want to keep building on that. Coming together around a single set of contracts for commercialisation is a bold step which has the potential to streamline the process each time a business wants to work with a university. We're not aware of any universities in any other country working together in this way.

"Scotland has a great reputation for its research at home and abroad and universities are keen to do all we can to make businesses aware of opportunities to exploit this. University-Technology.com brings together opportunities from all of Scotland's universities in one place and can target these opportunities direct to business according to the industry the business operates in."

Michael Russell MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning:

"I am pleased that Scotland's universities have taken this step towards collaborative working. This voluntary agreement between our universities clearly shows that they are taking seriously the challenges I laid down earlier this year, to think collectively, simplify processes and make the most of their world-renowned research.

“I will continue to support the sector to put this simplified, common approach to commercialisation into practice more widely. Strengthening the links between Scotland’s businesses and universities is key to this Government’s ambitions for Scotland, something we will continue to pursue with the sector through our ambition for a Single Knowledge Exchange office.”

The single set of contracts covers “easy-access” IP licensing, confidentiality and material transfer agreements – all of which exist to protect both university and industry partners. The set also includes collaborative development agreement(s) for technologies accessed via *University Technology: Invented in Scotland*.

Dr Lesley Sawers, Chief Executive of SCDI (Scottish Council of Development and Industry) said:

“The world-class knowledge and innovation created in Scotland’s universities will be a key driver of our future economic success.

“All mechanisms which facilitate and fast-track collaboration between our universities and businesses, both here in Scotland and internationally, are to be welcomed.

“Today’s announcement is clear recognition that our universities, working together, are keen to ensure the knowledge and innovation created here has global impact and plays an important role in delivering sustainable economic growth for Scotland.”

The contracts can be found on the website, *University Technology: Invented in Scotland*, which is officially re-launched today. The new-look web portal (www.university-technology.com) publishes the latest technology opportunities from Scotland’s universities in a convenient single location as part of a concerted effort to make it easy for companies and investors from business and industry to access intellectual property from Scotland's universities. The portfolio of opportunities available are continually updated and cover a range of market sectors, including life sciences, electronics, energy and renewables, and ICT.

Scottish Development International and the GlobalScot Network are key mechanisms helping to expand international awareness of this unique initiative. Working together University Technology will use their extensive networks to continue to promote and encourage collaborative international knowledge exchange for Scotland.

University Technology was originally launched in 2004. At the time, it was the first initiative of its kind in the UK to bring together leading inventions and innovations from one country together in this way on one website.

The site appeals to industry across the globe with Europe and the US as the single biggest subscribers respectively. The last year has seen significant growth in subscribers from Asia, particularly India and China.

Recent opportunities available to industry through University Technology include anti-cancer therapeutic compounds developed by the University of Strathclyde and a modular reconfigurable robotic system, developed by the University of Edinburgh.

Catherine Ramsay, Technical Specialists at 3M Healthcare said:

“University-Technology is a wonderfully simple and easy way for me to keep up to date on areas of interest to 3M Healthcare on potential licensing and technology transfer opportunities for Scottish universities. No need to scan individual websites or newsletters for information in our particular areas as once registered it is automatic.”

The single set of contracts and re-launched website signal a real commitment from Scotland's universities to take a collaborative approach to build on knowledge exchange with business. This latest initiative builds on other successful collaborative initiatives on research and knowledge exchange including research pooling and *Interface*, which looks to match the innovation needs of small businesses in Scotland to the expertise in Scotland's universities.

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NOTES:

1. Holyrood's Conference on Higher Education is hosted at the National Museum of Scotland on Thursday, 24 November between 09.20 and 16.10. More information can be found at: <http://highereducation.holyrood.com/agenda>
2. Paragraph 21 of Mr Russell's Ministerial Letter of Guidance to the Scottish Funding Council, dated 21 September 2011, reads:

“The Government Economic Strategy sets Scotland the challenge of stimulating innovation and building on existing investments in research and in knowledge exchange. That requires a step-change in the engagement of business and industry with our higher education institutions. Therefore, any barriers to the exploitation of research for economic and wider societal benefit must be removed, so that the people of Scotland can benefit directly from the Government's sustained and generous support for research in our institutions.”
3. You can find the re-launched *University Technology: Invented in Scotland* site at this link: www.university-technology.com

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