



**Report on the**  
**AIREN Project Event**  
**North South Workshop on Industry Academia Research Collaboration**  
**Held on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

This workshop event presented and shared perspectives from different stakeholders – including funding body InterTradelreland, academia, and the technology transfer community - on optimising industry academia research collaborations. The event shared advice and tips on making industry academia collaborations successful.

We thank each of our presenters for their time and contribution at the AIREN event on 8 December 2021:

**Grainne Lennon, InterTradelreland (ITI)**, gave opening remarks outlining the role of ITI which was set up over 20 years ago, and is funded by Government Departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland, to support small businesses to explore and develop North-South cross border collaboration opportunities and markets. She spoke about some of ITI's suite of programmes including the Synergy programme that supports cross border collaborations that focus on developing all-island initiatives, such as the AIREN Project. She also spoke of the US-Ireland Research & Development Programme that supports industry academia collaboration across the 3 jurisdictions of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the US, noting the very strong track record between Ireland and Northern Ireland in EU collaborations - £110m was awarded under H2020 to projects that involve partners from both jurisdictions. ITI expects this will continue to grow and welcomes the recent UK Government announcement guaranteeing interim funding to support UK and Northern Ireland participation in Horizon Europe. Grainne closed with positive remarks on how ITI's annual Seed Corn Competition gives testimony to the great range of spin out activities and the important economic benefits of cross border collaboration - particularly in these times with the challenges and opportunities presented by Brexit, covid-19, climate change, and low-carbon developments.

**Janet Toal Operations Manager, Innovation Programmes, ITI**, outlined the range of innovation supports and services provided by ITI. They include the Innovation Boost programme which replaces the Fusion programme. It provides funding for cross-border collaborative partnerships between a company and an academic, and for the appointment of a high calibre science, engineering or technology graduate that is employed by the company as Project Manager for the 12/18mths project duration. There is also the Innovation Business-2-Business collaborative partnerships programme which comprises of two SMEs supported by an academic partner. On a larger scale, the newly launched Impact programme offers funding of up to £250,000 (Euro equivalent) for Business-2-Business collaborative partnerships aiming to deliver 'game-changing' innovation projects at an industry level. Janet explained that proposed projects for both Innovation Boost and the Impact programmes should focus on at least one of the following industries: Bio Economy; Advanced Manufacturing and Materials; and Life sciences. Interested parties, including any not currently in a collaboration, can contact Janet to find out more and details are also available on the ITI website.

**Marie O'Connell, Patent Attorney, FRKelly European Patent & Trademark Attorneys**, presented a whistle-stop overview of what Research Managers need to know about Intellectual Property. She explained and gave examples of Intellectual Property - including Trademarks, Patents, Design Rights, and Copyright. Elaborating further on Patents, Maura outlined the purpose of patents and the four essential elements they require – invention, novelty, technical in nature, an inventive step. Throughout the presentation the recurring important take home message is that the plan and timing for making a patent filing is crucial. Maura advised strongly that making any public disclosure (even verbally) without a non-disclosure agreement in place before a patent filing is made, is fatal ! This point was discussed further during the Q&A session in terms of making disclosures in funding proposals and the confidentiality of peer review. Maura also presented a case study on a patent legal case that highlighted many important issues relating to intellectual property ownership to consider and clarify particularly for instance when working in collaborations and with visiting researchers and students.

**Jim McLoughin, Professor and Director of NIBEC, Ulster University**, shared valuable insights on industry academia collaboration, drawing on his extensive experience of innovation that includes over 35 Patents in the medical devices area and healthcare technologies, various spin-out companies. He presented an overview of NIBEC – the Nanotechnology and Integrated Biotechnology Centre at Ulster - which has multiple links with companies and industry-led collaborations. He outlined the many differences between working with Industry and academic collaborators – including difference in the Technology Readiness Levels (TRL's), timescales and timelines they work to. Jim closed with important tips and advice on what to consider when working collaboratively with industry and when planning to move research into a start-up company. He reinforced many of the messages that were also conveyed in Maura's talk about having clear plans for patent filings, and to ensure that group members all understand the need, risks and challenges of their innovation route.

**Alex Chacko, Head of Innovation and Impact, Ulster University** chaired the Questions and Panel Discussion session. He opened the discussion asking how innovation and commercialising research benefits the academic career and how it is valued in the university promotions and rewards system. Other questions related to the importance of industry academia collaboration in specific sectors such as Pharma. The discussion highlighted how even the smallest of SME's are working strategically to find solutions to problems they have and to how they do things, and they benefit greatly from collaboration with academia. The session closed with comments about the myriad of career opportunities there are for PhD graduates to work in innovation and the intellectual property area.

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<sup>i</sup> The AIREN Project is being delivered with support from InterTradelreland's Synergy initiative. Synergy is a cross-border cluster initiative set up by InterTradelreland, the cross-border trade and business development



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body. It aims to scale cross border collaboration among SMEs and other players such as universities, third sector organisations and government agencies using cluster and networking supports.