



DEVELOPING BUSINESS COLLABORATIONS, INNOVATIVELY

By Sean Fielding RTTP, University of Exeter

University business collaboration is a contact sport. You can't do it from behind a desk, finessing IP or contracts. The more connections you make and the more you understand your target markets, the more you can help your academic and business partners. These are crucial skills that are often underplayed. But now the demand for talented, creative people who can engage effectively with business is growing.

There are several drivers for this. The increasingly applied focus of research funders, and the rise of the UK Industrial Strategy, means that well over half of all UK R&D projects now involve collaborative partners. The push for a more highly skilled workforce has led to growth in higher level training programmes like degree apprenticeships, executive education and industrial PhDs. Local Enterprise Partnerships and devolved governments look to universities to raise productivity amongst SMEs and to drive knowledge economies. And commercial innovation projects involving spin-outs and licenses remain an important, if small, part of our business.

The Impact element of the REF and the proposed new Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) drives further connection with communities of all kinds, including policymakers, social enterprise, cultural bodies and local government.

While most collaborators with universities report huge benefits, many have still never taken the plunge. Although the UK has over 5 million businesses, only 0.5% claim R&D tax credits. So our job is to stimulate demand rather than just respond to it.

There are great careers to be had for people who can turn ideas into opportunities, find new partners, win new business, project manage effective outcomes and turn one-off projects into highly productive partnerships. But gaining the kinds of business development skills that work in university or research environments is not easy. Many of the sales and account management techniques in the private sector just don't apply when the salesforce is often part of the product and has to evangelise in two directions. And researchers and academics have to learn new languages and new ways of doing things.

Luckily PraxisAuril's **Essentials of Business Development Course** is coming up in February. Designed specifically for people working in HE or research environments it has a long track record of spilling the secrets of university business collaboration and giving people new to HE or business development the tools and tips they need to succeed.

More details about Business Development and how to sign up to the course can be found on our [website](#).



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