

Careers in Technology Transfer



Dr Michael Bath

Technology Transfer Manager, Durham University

Michael has been working in technology transfer for 15 years. He began his first Technology Transfer role at RTC North Ltd in 1999 and today heads up the Technology Transfer team at Durham University.

“I enjoy working with world leading academics and business people.”

How did you get into technology transfer?

Prior to my involvement with Technology Transfer, I spent 12 years in various Manufacturing, Engineering and Materials Management roles, mainly at Rolls-Royce. Some projects used Intellectual Property to improve products and processes. This led to a general interest in the area and my first specific Technology Transfer role at RTC North Ltd in 1999.

I have a BEng in Mechanical Engineering from Huddersfield Polytechnic and an MSc in Manufacturing Systems Engineering and Marketing which was funded by Rolls-Royce and completed part-time during my employment there.

How has your career progressed from that point to where you are today?

During my employment at RTC North, I helped local SMEs, individual entrepreneurs and the NHS commercialise research outcomes. With my then boss, Richard Hoare, I set up NHS Innovations North. This was one of the first fully functioning NHS Innovation Hubs in the UK and was my main focus until 2005 when I joined Durham.

What training have you had which has been particularly useful?

PraxisUnico’s “Advanced Licensing Skills” and “Spinout Company Formation” courses have been very helpful in building my skill-set.

What does your day-to-day role involve?

I lead the commercial exploitation of Durham’s Engineering and Physical Sciences by securing patents, raising finance, negotiating licenses and

creating spin-out companies. I also act as a General Manager for spinout companies when required. I’ve raised £13.4m of funds for spinout companies and £5.7m for spinout-related university projects.

Which achievements would you describe as career highlights?

The creation of Applied Graphene Materials (AGM) PLC – originally called Durham Graphene Science, this company was formed to exploit an invention from Durham Chemistry’s Prof Karl Coleman. The invention (a novel graphene production method) was disclosed to me in 2009 and I took the idea from disclosure to stock market listing in 4 years. I took sole responsibility for AGM’s General Management until the second round of investment. After this, more Directors were able to join Karl and me on the Board. I stepped down from the Board in July 2013 and AGM floated on AIM shortly afterwards. It currently employs 34 people and has a market capitalisation of around £50m. This indicates a fifteen-fold return to the original investor.

What do you enjoy most about your role?

I enjoy seeing tangible results in the form of new businesses and new products. I also enjoy working with world leading academics and business people.

What advice would you give anyone looking to start out in TT/KE today?

Build a solid understanding of industry and commerce by working in industry for 5 years or more. This will give you insights that academics don’t normally have. The good ones will welcome your slightly different perspective of the world.