

Careers in Technology Transfer



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Rachel has been working in technology transfer since 2006. She has an undergraduate degree in Biology, a PhD in Virology and previously worked at a patent attorney's office. She joined Cambridge Enterprise in 2006 as a Technology Associate, and has been a Technology Manager since 2011.

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How did you get into technology transfer?

While I was doing my PhD I attended a Careers Day where I saw a presentation from a patent agent, which opened my eyes to the possibilities of moving field – I didn't want to continue to work in a lab after my PhD. I took up a role with a patent attorney but soon realised that drafting patents all day was not for me. A move to a career in technology transfer made sense as it offered me the best of both worlds. I can use my experience but I get to do a wider range of activities.

What training have you had which has been particularly useful?

I've had a lot of on-the-job training and been on training days to develop my negotiation and project management skills, which are vital to this role. PraxisUnico's Fundamentals of Technology Transfer was very useful as I was starting out, and their Advanced Licensing Course came just at the right time for me, when I had seen a few licences but was still gaining experience. It has been useful making contacts on these courses.

What does your day-to-day role involve?

Each day is different. Typically, I meet with academics to talk about their inventions or research; in the early stages it may be about developing a commercial opportunity and applying for translational grant funding. When we have a new invention we evaluate the opportunity and carry out due diligence to investigate any funding obligations, whether an invention is patentable and whether there are any associated third party rights. We may then work with patent agents to file patents but I also have other IP assets

including copyright and software opportunities in my portfolio.

We then look to find a partner to develop the technology whether through licensing or a spin-out company or sometimes investigating University funds to develop projects. Additionally, an important part of my role is raising awareness with the University and academics, as well as with the wider business community, of what we do.

Which achievements would you describe as career highlights?

The first high-value deal I closed was a licensing deal with a medical device company. There were so many challenges involved. I went to Paris to meet the company and we had many phone negotiations as well as a day of face-to-face negotiations. It was hard work pricing the deal, and I had to call on my contacts with external parties to achieve that pricing. It was a very exciting deal to work on!

What do you enjoy most about your role?

I enjoy the challenges and the variety – no two days are the same and each solution is different. You really feel you are making a difference. It's often up to me to find what needs to be done to make something into a commercial opportunity so we can apply for translational funding.

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

The structure of the office is quite important. In a large office like Cambridge Enterprise I'm exposed to a wider range of experience and projects. I'd also recommend that you use any opportunity you can to get experience and build networks.