

## ATN Response to the Review of the National Survey of Research Commercialisation Discussion Paper

The ATN makes the following submission to the review of the National Survey of Research Commercialisation (NSRC) against the key areas identified in the Terms of Reference and acknowledges that individual ATN institutions may make their own specific submissions.

### *Aligning the survey with emerging research commercialisation policy and performance measurement trends in Australia and overseas*

The ATN is supportive of aligning the NSRC with emerging research commercialisation policy and performance measurement trends in Australia and overseas. Encouraging collaboration and commercialisation is firmly on the Government's agenda around productivity and competitiveness gains for industry, with documents such as the Boosting Commercial Returns from Research (BCRR) paper. The ATN views the NSRC as a potential platform to collect a broader range of impact and engagement measures which are transparent, robust and fit for purpose. Changes to the NSRC need to be consistent with existing national data collections and parallel work being taken on assessing impact and industry engagement such as the ATSE trial.

The discussion paper is not explicit about whether data from the NSRC would in future inform government funding models for Universities. The ATN is supportive in principle of introducing incentives to encourage collaboration between industry and Universities. While not taking away from the importance of types of research such as pure basic research, the ATN believes that a greater balance between drivers in the allocation of Research Block Grant Funding should be considered. Currently, the split of block grants to support research activity is weighted in favour of research 'excellence' measures such as Category 1 income and research publications, over rewarding industry-engaged 'applied' measures such as Category 2, 3 and 4 income. As stated in the ATN's response to the BCRR paper, the ATN is keen to work with Government and industry to develop metrics that measure engagement and knowledge-transfer between researchers and industry.

In a comparable example from the UK, the Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF)<sup>1</sup> provides funding incentives for knowledge transfer, knowledge exchange and commercialisation activities based on the annual Higher education-business and community interaction survey (HE-BCI).<sup>2</sup> The ATN acknowledges that before NSRC data could be fed into funding models, sector confidence in the reliability and robustness of the data must be ensured. It is suggested that a phased approach be adopted with future analysis, consultation and review conducted at appropriate junctures. Suitable time must be given in order for institutions to develop and refine internal collection processes to meet the requirements of any changes.

In order to capture pathways to commercialisation activity in Australia, the ATN is supportive of including new measures, particularly:

- Income captured from licences, options and assignments
- Repeat business with industry (including amount in \$ of repeat business and number of repeat contracts)
- Publications co-authored with industry
- Patent citations

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/kes/heif/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/kes/measureke/hebci/>

Additional suggested measures to measure pathways to commercialisation not included in the discussion paper include:

- PhD students sponsored or co-supervised by industry
- Number of prior PhD graduates employed in industry
- Number of conjoint research appointments with industry
- Mobility of research staff between the institution and industry
- Customised Education as a broad measure of engagement between industry, business and Universities which is applicable across a range of disciplines and goes beyond commercialisation.

These questions could replace questions in the Skills Development and Transfer Skills section.

*Streamlining the survey to achieve improved accessibility and reduce administrative burden*

The ATN is supportive of:

- Removing unnecessary and unverifiable questions from the survey;
- Re-introducing the collection of case studies as an optional measure;
- Aligning towards other national collections (e.g. ERA, HERDC) and sourcing data externally (e.g. IP Australia) where possible; and
- Expanding the survey to include the Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDC)

*Improving data integrity and usability through changed survey design and collection methods*

As mentioned in the NSRC discussion paper, there is concern over the lack of clarity surrounding the purpose of the survey and the utility of the data. Given the context for the review of the NSRC is on improving research-industry collaboration and commercialisation, the NSRC should be a robust suite of metrics that assesses this performance and potentially incentivises better performance (e.g. via block grant allocation). Revisions to the NSRC to make it a more rigorous, reliable, valid and simpler method of capturing pathways to commercialisation is paramount. A more co-ordinated approach to supporting research commercialisation, backed up by the NSRC data and strategies for engagement with industry would be of benefit to the Australian economy and provide the Government and taxpayers with assurance of the benefit of publically funded research.

Other comments:

- Improved data integrity could be achieved by clearer definitions for questions and aligning definitions with other data collections where possible.
- Given that the context provided by the discussion paper is Australia's poor performance in translating publicly funded research into commercial outcomes in comparison to international competitors, the ATN welcomes expanding the international benchmarking of NSRC questions to comparable innovation systems and surveys including China, Japan, Korea, India and Singapore.
- The ATN is supportive of reporting data using a digital platform, which allows dynamic analysis and break-down by institutional level
- The ATN is open to improving data quality by adding a verification component (in the form of a DVC/VC or equivalent signoff) to the survey.