

# KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS CASE STUDY:

Catrin Williams | Cultech Limited



#### About Me:

*I'm a microbiologist and gained my degree and my PhD at Cardiff University.*



**Project duration: 18 Months**

**End date 30/11/2014**

#### How did you initially hear about the opportunity of becoming a KTP Associate?

I first heard about the KTP as there was another project taking place in the lab I was working in. Cardiff University also advertised KTPs quite a lot so knew a little about what they were and how to get involved. I found my specific opportunity whilst looking at jobs on indeed.co.uk, and as I was at a stage after my PhD where I wasn't sure if I wanted to stay in Academia or move into Industry, so the KTP opportunity was perfect as offered the best of both worlds. It allowed me to be based at the company whilst still maintaining ties to Academia so I could continue publishing my work.

#### Please could you provide a summary of the project, and what your role was?

I was based in Cultech; a nutraceutical company who develop products such as vitamins, supplements, minerals and probiotics. My role was to transfer the technology they had developed into a gut model system which would then allow the company to test their nutraceutical products. The end goal of the project was to ensure their developed products were tested and made available on the market.

#### How did you find the support once the partnership began?

I was really well supported from the start of the project both from Cultech and the University. The KTC team at Reading were great, and I was continuously supported by my Academic Advisor who was always happy to provide me with anything I needed, specifically with regard to project management. There was also a KTP Associate's forum where I was able to discuss my progress and

development with other likeminded Associates in the same or similar positions.

#### How did the triangular relationship between the business, the university, and yourself result in being a key factor in your development?

As the Associate I was put in charge of the project so it was my role to keep regular contact with all the relevant parties. This gave me a real opportunity to development my leadership and project management skills, and also gave me the opportunity to gain experience in communication with all different levels in different industries. Maintaining a good relationship with each party was key to the success of the project, and each partner played their part in ensuring that happened.

#### What impact could you see on the company as a direct result of your role as the KTP Associate?

The project progressed throughout its entirety and all started clicking into place in the last few months. My project was relatively short (18 months) so the early stages were predominately focussed on research and exploration, but towards the end we were successfully able to start running the gut model system and embed the developed technology within the company.

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### **Are there any other factors that aided your successful undertaking of the Associate position?**

The development budget was one of the main factors which contributed to the success of the project. Aside that, networking with both people in the industry and the University and by retaining a presence in the Associate forums really aided the success.

### **You had £2k each year to spend on your own personal career development; what was the most beneficial use and outcome for you?**

I utilised the budget mainly by attending conferences and training to help me develop and thus be better placed to effectively and efficiently carry out the project. Most notably I was able to visit research labs in Aberdeen where I could develop my technical skills necessitated for the success of my project and effectively embed those skills at Cultech. This was of personal benefit in terms of my development, but I could also deliver new and effective methodologies for the company. The KTP and Academic advisors were great when discussing how I could spend the training budget and spent a lot of time with me conversing options and providing invaluable insight as to how I could best capitalise on the financial benefit available to me.

### **Please could you describe the other benefits of becoming an Associate, especially with regard to after the project had finished?**

As an Associate I was able to take ownership of a project for the first time in my career. This was not only important for my future, but also very unique as it puts you in this position very early in your career which separates being employed from other post-graduate jobs out there. Additionally, as a result of the KTP I was able to redevelop my transferable, personal and technical skills, and was given the confidence to progress in my career and make informed, sensible choices on what I wanted to do moving forward. When the project finished I decided to return to Academia and apply for a fellowship, but without the project I never would have had the skills or confidence to go for such a prestigious award.

### **How do you think being employed under the partnership would differ from a standard post-graduate employment?**

The KTP Associate position gives you the opportunity to claim ownership of your own project whilst focussing on the growth of your leadership skills, all at a very early stage of your career. It presents you with support and opportunities that simply wouldn't be available to you in another form of employment.

### **What challenges did you face during your time as an Associate and what did you, the company, or UoR do to help you overcome these to ensure continued success within the KTP project?**

It was quite challenging and daunting at the beginning because it was the first time I would have full responsibility of a project, so there was a huge adjustment needed just to carry out expected day-to-day tasks. In addition to this, it was my responsibility to maintain constant communication between the company and the University which could be challenging at times as I simply wasn't used to working in industry and dealing with people from different areas at different levels. I also had to appreciate that the University and Cultech both had different objectives for the project, so to ensure I always bared the benefits for each party in mind. But maintaining the constant communication and utilising the LMCs made all these challenges manageable, working with each party to ensure everyone was on the same page and that I was getting the relevant support I needed to take the project to the next step.

### **What happened at the end of your KTP?**

I decided to return to Academia after the project finished as realised that this was my preferred area, so successfully applied for a fellowship from the Welsh government. Although I realised that industry wasn't for me, the KTP allowed me to work in both industry and Academia during a time when I wasn't sure which direction I wanted to take, so working closely with both meant at

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the end of the project I could make an informed decision for my future based on experience as opposed to either continuing in Academia after I got my PhD or diving head first straight into industry with no real indication of what to expect. Getting the exposure from both was a huge benefit for me and allowed me to gain first-hand experience from either side, and as a result I've now started my own research group with the hope that I'll be a research leader in the future.

## **Would you recommend KTP to other graduates? If so, why?**

I would definitely recommend a KTP; it gives you a really unique opportunity to develop your leadership skills, and exposes you to working in industry whilst still having the advantage of being linked to Academia. It also allows you to develop an extensive and invaluable network which will be useful throughout your career either in industry or higher education.

## **And finally, what one piece of advice would you give to a graduate considering KTP?**

Believe in yourself and your abilities. It is daunting at the beginning of the project when you're set milestones and objectives and handed a venture you need to take ownership of, but there's always support on hand from the Supervisors, the company, and the University so you'll never be on your own. Additionally, the skills that you'll learn are going to be so useful throughout your career, so I would just say go for it!