

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER CENTRE CASE STUDY:

Paul Cartwright | **EcolInsect** Co-Founder & CEO



About Me:

My name is Paul Cartwright and I am the Co-Founder and CEO of EcolInsect

How did you hear about the Knowledge Transfer Centre?

As a start-up, EcolInsect is currently in the R&D phase; we're designing an automated prototype production facility to breed and grow insect larvae. We're focussing on two core product lines and so we were looking for potential collaborators to help us trial and validate our products prior to commercial launch. In my search for universities with a strong biosciences department, I came across the University of Reading and in reading more about the establishment it quickly became clear that Reading had the expertise we needed.

How was your original contact managed? Did it meet your expectations?

I was immediately introduced to a member of the Knowledge Transfer Centre team, and within two-weeks I had been introduced to two Academics specialising in animal diets and gut health. All three of them expressed a strong interest in the project and we've been really fortunate to have such great support from the get go. I was not previously aware of the collaboration avenues available to businesses like ours, but we were provided with all the information we needed to work with the university and our options were clearly outlined.

Can you talk us through your experience of the process?

The process has been both helpful and really beneficial. After a series of initial meetings, we were able to match various resources together and were then offered their full support in the application process to Innovate UK.

Did you feel supported during the application?

We have felt very supported during the entire process. The KTC have facilitated all the meetings and we have benefited tremendously from the fact that they have previous experience with submitting Innovate UK applications. The Academics offered invaluable guidance on developing our research and getting the best outcome in validating our products.

Did you encounter any challenges? If so, how did you overcome them?

Start-ups face a lot of challenges, and we are no exception, however these challenges provide invaluable lessons in evolving the business. Our main challenge in this process has been the fact that our first application to Innovate UK was not successful. However, after review of the Innovate UK feedback and encouragement of the team we felt it was worth giving it another go. Innovate UK rules only allow for one opportunity to reapply for the grant so it was a risk for us, but fortunately with the right support and expertise we were successful on our second application.

Would you recommend getting in touch with the KTC to other companies?

I would certainly encourage other companies to use this resource. In my case my expertise is not in research, and being a new sector, research is key to the evolution of the business, and without the expertise and support from the team I've been lucky enough to work with it's very unlikely that we would have been successful, and it's been key to our business.

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How does working with the KTC compare to any other mechanisms you may have explored?

We did have the option to go to through another consultant firm who offered to draft the application on our behalf. Aside from the cost, something just didn't feel right, and we really didn't see any increase in benefit that was not already provided to us by the KTC, so we felt there was no need to work with any other resources.

Innovate Smart Grants are extremely competitive. How confident did you feel it was going to go through? How were your expectations managed?

We believe what we're doing has the potential to revolutionise various sectors and markets, so we were confident in our business case. It was daunting to compete in such an open contest across multiple sectors, but with the support and the encouragement we received from the KTC we had the confidence to go for it and I'm glad that we did.

How excited are you for the next steps, and how are you preparing for them?

The next 18 months are going to be a huge challenge but we're really looking forward to the next steps and continuing our partnership with the Knowledge Transfer Centre. We're working hard on the research areas in the hope that we can expand to commercial scale in 2021.

Do you feel that you would have got to where you are today without the support of the KTC?

We strongly feel that without the support and the expertise made available to us by the Knowledge Transfer Centre in a very competitive market for the Innovate UK grant, that we probably wouldn't have been successful. Without a successful application, we wouldn't have been able to launch our business, so for us it's been a huge win and we're very glad that we were lucky enough to find and link up with the KTC team.