

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER CENTRE CASE STUDY:

Rachel McCrindle | Professor of Computer & Human Interaction



About Me:

My name is Rachel McCrindle, I'm a Professor of computer and human interaction in the department of Biomedical Engineering at the University of Reading.

What are the key benefits of working with the KTC in enabling collaboration with partners?

There are many benefits of working with the KTC in enabling collaboration with partners, right the way through from the initiation of contacts and helping to prepare proposals, to helping manage projects and promote and market them once they are underway.

What's your motivation behind working with external partners?

It's really important these days to work with external partners. Many projects are multi-disciplinary and in doing those multi-disciplinary projects including multiple stakeholders it brings in various levels and areas of expertise in order to solve key strategic issues.

Has the KTC enabled you to work with companies that you might not otherwise have found / been interested in?

The knowledge Transfer Centre has been incredibly important in terms of delivering external partnerships, so very often external organisations have gone to the KTC with a problem that needs solving. The expertise they possess means they can find the right Academic, whether that be me or whoever, so that we can work on a solution to that issue and progress with a project.

What impacts and benefits have arisen / will arise as a result of the collaboration?

The benefits arising from collaborations with external partners are many; partly it's about a two-way transfer of knowledge, it's about working on key strategic problems with a real-world impact, and it's about translating research into the real world.

A concern for Academics has previously been raised in that they are not sure if they can still publish when part of KTP. Could you please share your experiences on this?

It has been raised at times that it's difficult to publish; it is possible to do, but it is a slightly different process. For instance, a lot of the material will be commercially confidential and therefore can't be shared, but by working with the external organisation and discussing this with industry it is still possible to publish in partnership with the company and make sure the work that's published is ok to be released. So, in answer to your question, it can be slightly more difficult, but it is possible, and you will be offered the right support to know how to go about getting your research out there.

How do you go about prioritising your workload when part of a project?

Prioritisation of workload is always going to be a challenge for Academics within a university; there are many different pools between research and teaching enterprises and projects both internal and external. I think the key is being organised and carefully managing your time to ensure you're keeping on top of your workload model, which is something that comes with experience. There is a strong element of scheduling and projection to see what's coming up and what the key projects will be to ensure that you diarise them

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accordingly and attempt to conduct them in an efficient, sensible order. Also trying to schedule your time to have a day where you're free of teaching can really be beneficial when taking part in a project, as you then have a day free to visit the company and spend some time with them. Communication is a key factor with the company to make sure everyone is on the same page, and that is just as important internally as it is externally.

Have the collaborations you've been involved in influenced your research at all? Have they opened up new areas of research interest?

Working with the Knowledge Transfer Centre has been incredibly important in terms of expanding my research. My key research areas have perhaps not changed too much, but the domains in which I have applied that research has expanded enormously. I have worked with education companies, broadcasting companies, manufacturing companies, health companies: a huge number of organisations across the whole spectrum who have been both incredibly interesting and state of the art. It's hugely rewarding to see the work that we've been doing within the University being applied in the 'real world'.

What are the key challenges to be mindful of when working with companies? How did you overcome them?

With any of the challenges we face when part of a collaboration it's important to remember that everyone has different priorities, different pressures, and occasionally different languages in terms of Academia vs. industry. The key thing is to be very mindful on both sides that there are often competing priorities for people's time, and that those priorities are completely subject to change quite rapidly, so there needs to be a degree of flexibility and understanding. I think most importantly the key thing is to establish a strong team ethic and determine how the team can best work together. I've been involved with many projects now and every project and every team are slightly different, but at the centre of it all communication is the key, so providing a high standard of communication and trust with each partner should help overcome any challenges. It's also important to remember to have fun; the biggest challenge is the project itself and trying to find a solution to a problem, so you have to step back sometimes and enjoy the work you're doing and the impact it's ultimately going to have.

Have the projects you've been involved with helped you develop any specific teaching materials, or realise any teaching and learning benefits?

Working with industry and external organisations has been incredibly useful for developing additional teaching material and enhancing the student experience. There are many ways in which our collaborators have helped us with this, including enabling us to develop case studies of the work that we've done, and reinforcing the research that we're carrying out at the University of Reading to show how that it's applicable in the real world, enriching lectures with examples. On occasion the projects that I've been involved with have resulted in the company physically coming in and giving a lecture, or running and sponsoring hackathons for the students, giving them some extra experience outside of the classroom. Working with the Knowledge Transfer Centre and taking part in projects has been a richly rewarding experience throughout for myself and my students.

How has the KTC been able to help you?

There have been many ways in which the KTC at the University of Reading has helped me individually. They have helped me find external collaborators, put proposals together, and they have helped me structure strong and effective teams. Many of the projects have been multi-disciplinary so the KTC have been able to bring other people from around the University to the team that I may not have known about or had access to. The KTC have also been able to help me with the whole recruitment process, they have helped me get the right Associate/staff on board, and they've also helped me with the accounting process so that I can concentrate on the project and the research side of things. Working with the KTC has also vastly increased my visibility within the University, and in



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having done that has helped me with my promotion to Professor and also put me in a position to win the awards I been presented with.

And lastly, why should other Academics consider working with the Knowledge Transfer Centre?

I would strongly encourage other Academics to work with the Knowledge Transfer Centre. The opportunities that can be opened up there are amazing, and once the centre knows you and the areas you're interested in, you are exposed to so many different avenues for your work to be applied, and again working with them helped with my promotion to Professor and the winning of various awards. The KTC staff are so incredibly supportive and showcase such a huge breadth of knowledge, offering great advice and direction, and nothing is ever too much trouble for them. We're lucky at Reading to have such an excellent Knowledge Transfer Centre; it's the best centre in the country.