Understanding the potential for sharing SHAPE commercialisation support

Feedback from the Devolved Nations Focus Groups
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Prepared Hamish McAlpine and Irene Dal Poz for Oxentia Ltd

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Preface

Disclaimer

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About the Project

The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), as the lead party acting on behalf of a consortium of five universities (LSE, Royal College of Art, University of Bristol, University of Leicester, University of Lancaster) successfully applied for a Connecting Capability Fund Research England Development ("CCF-RED") pilot grant for the project 'Creating the evidence base for shared TTO needs and opportunities in supporting SHAPE spinouts'.

This project seeks to establish a clear value proposition for shared Technology Transfer Office (TTO) models in SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities, and the Arts for People and the Economy) commercialisation. By creating a robust evidence base, it will identify how shared TTOs can best support the commercialisation needs of institutions of all sizes and disciplinary foci.

Ultimately, this initiative aims to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of spinout support across the sector, driving economic and social benefits through improved commercialisation pathways.

The project has four key objectives. First, it aims to engage a wide range of UK Higher Education Providers (HEPs) to deepen and formalise understanding of SHAPE commercialisation needs. Second, it seeks to establish a robust evidence base on current practices, highlighting capacity-building needs among HEPs supporting SHAPE spinouts. Third, the project will evaluate the merits of different "sharing models" for TTO functions. Lastly, it will offer evidence-based recommendations for strengthening SHAPE commercialisation, with a focus on England and relevant insights for devolved nations.

To fulfil these aims, LSE has commissioned Oxentia Ltd to support the consortium in the delivery of the project work packages:

- WP1: Literature Review
- WP2: Survey, interviews and focus groups with the UK HEP sector
- WP3: Report and development of a decision-making tool.

The outputs and findings from these activities will be disseminated by the consortium via a launch event in April 2025, and through a newly created webpage.

About this Slide Deck

- This slide deck is an output from WP2 and presents an analysis of the focus group results.

- This was an **interim deliverable** for the project. This analysis was shared with the project partners, and their reflections and inputs have subsequently informed the findings in the final project report (downloadable from the [project web page](#)).

- Data has been anonymised and/or aggregated in accordance with the privacy and confidentiality statement used for the focus groups.

- The slide deck is structured as follows:
  - Preface
  - Overview of aims and attendees
  - Devolved nations SHAPE support needs
  - Sharing models & devolved nations specificities
  - Reflections

Overview

What we aimed to achieve with the devolved nations Focus Groups

- **Aims:**
  - Understanding what's different about the devolved nations R&I commercialisation landscape
  - Understanding how they currently support SHAPE commercialisation
  - Understanding how their unique context affects the viability of some different shared SHAPE TTO models

- **Topics Covered:**
  - What is different about the R&I commercialisation landscape of each nation
  - What they are currently doing to support SHAPE commercialisation and how (/if) this differs from STEM support.
  - How their unique context affects the viability of the following shared SHAPE TTO models:
    - Share equally – in which resources are pooled across a group of institutions, with no one institution leading.
    - Hub and spoke – in which a larger 'hub' institution coordinates access across a group of institutions to TTO services.
    - Shared services hub - in which a group of universities contracts an external provider to coordinate and facilitate access a range of TTO services.
    - Procurement framework – which reduces friction in procurement processes across a group of universities but doesn't involve any wider collaboration.

Attendees

- Dates
  - 4th Feb (10am) – Scotland
  - 5th Feb (10am) – Wales
  - 5th Feb (3pm) – Northern Ireland

- Participation
  - 18 individuals
  - Representing 13 HEPs + 1 other organisation
    - 1 from Northern Ireland, 3 from Wales and 10 from Scotland
  - Overall a 50% responses rate

Country	Individuals			HEPS/ Organisations		
	Invited	Attended	Response Rate	Invited	Attended	Response Rate
Northern Ireland	3	1	33%	2	1	50%
Scotland	29	13	45%	18	10	56%
Wales	14	4	29%	8	3	38%
Grand Total	46	18	39%	28	14	50%

Devolved nations SHAPE support needs

How they currently support SHAPE commercialisation

We asked participants to assess the (1) **maturity**, (2) **size** and (3) **nature** of SHAPE commercialisation in their ecosystem & how (if) it is different from STEM commercialisation.

Key themes:

- With few exceptions (ASPECT members), no dedicated or expert staff/team focusing on SHAPE
- Lack of budget and/or funding for SHAPE commercialisation
- Prioritisation of STEM commercialisation (more tangible in an income-driven approach to deliver financial impact)
- Very early-stage SHAPE portfolio
- Lack of standardised approach to triage opportunities

Conclusion: Not that different to England, apart from specific references to levels of funding (e.g., lower levels of HEIF equivalent)

Areas of support from a national perspective

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We asked participants the areas their institution/ecosystem might benefit the most from additional **expertise** or **support**.

The top challenges from an institutional and ecosystem perspective are:

- Funding availability (government not following up with funding)

- No or fewer investors - Angels and VCs

- Importance of pipeline creation/Building capacity (ARC types of programme/activity)

- Raising awareness

- Access to expertise (e.g., mentors)

- Good practice/shared resources/tools

General considerations about devolved nations SHAPE ecosystems

- Geographic proximity and cultural awareness are relevant

- Low ecosystem maturity (very early-stage opportunities, lack of private investors/angel investors, not a lot of professional support available)

- Mismatch between government priorities and funding availability

- No clear cluster pattern

- Smaller size of sector and collegiate atmosphere makes it easier to collaborate

Sharing models & devolved nations specificities

Scotland- National considerations

Shared Model	Considerations *within your nation*	Considerations *across nations?*
'Share Equally'	Smaller institutions may not have resource to share (equally or otherwise). Sounds good in theory – hard in practice Who decides on priority for support? Equitable vs. equal Need to understand and be able to identify and articulate them	General consideration: need to access/convince academic colleagues to ID the pipeline – how do any of these sharing models help enable this? How is the 'championing' to be done? General consideration: don't want to create brain drain/increased competition for high potential researchers/ideas etc.
'Hub and spoke'	Example in student enterprise – but simpler as no IP issues and therefore governance/funding issues Seems to work in terms of research centres ARC – a bit like this – central money to offer a programme to all Hub would have to be physical space Potential to 'train the trainer' type approaches – upskill/culture change for everyone Doesn't need to be SHAPE specific, but more market intel – e.g., Health, which could be useful to STEM or SHAPE.	Hub would need specific national knowledge of e.g., funding schemes, eligibility etc. Legal terms, frameworks etc. vary Need deep understanding of own university culture, processes etc. Hard to codify, but key to success. Also potentially limited capacity to support as serving large institution

Scotland- National considerations

Shared Model	Considerations *within your nation*	Considerations *across nations?*
'Shared services hub'	*Red tape – hard to set up in terms of complex processes – esp. with transfer or use of institutional funds* *CEIS example – but have needed central funding –* *Danger of approach being too transactional – same person, consistent f2f support*	*would need specific national knowledge of e.g., funding schemes, eligibility etc.* *Legal terms, frameworks etc. vary* *How is the 'championing' to be done with less/no local capability?*
'Procurement framework'	*APUC – so already exists in this form.* *For smaller unis – still needs to manage suppliers internally, so benefits reduced* *Does nothing to promote culture change* *If framework had enough suppliers, could be a good source of very specific expertise – but might benefit from being wider than Scotland*	*e.g. Public procurements rules can differ across nations, making this harder to implement*

Wales National considerations

Shared Model	Considerations *within your nation*	Considerations *across nations?*	
'Share Equally'	*Easily done – not too resource intensive (see state of the sector atm – risk aversion)* *Appealing (Welsh Innovation Network → available resources – centralised repository of resources)*	**Cons**: *How would it be funded?* *Diff national priorities* *Geographical/logistic challenges. Relevance of geographic proximity (relationship building)* *Linguistic barrier? (more of a policy perspective consideration)* *Funding mechanisms/opportunities inequality*	**Pros**: *if there's a Knowledge Base higher on the other side → capacity to access knowledge/expertise* *Equal partnership* *Regional geographic proximity*
'Hub and spoke'	*Natural hub in Wales? Life Sciences Hub (Med Sector – Market research)*		
'Shared services hub'	*Academic engagement? External entity coming in to commericalise research Beneficial is some of the services are subsidized by the Welsh Gov*		
'Procurement framework'	*Academic engagement?* *Useful in some areas (e.g. legal services) – is the sector capable of supporting the framework tho?*		

Northern Ireland - National considerations

Shared Model	Considerations *within your nation*	Considerations *across nations?*
'Share Equally'	Not that compelling with only 2 institutions? We already work together – e.g. ESRC IAA clusters. No obvious leadership – could drift or lack direction/development	Not too many differences – should in theory work. Needs robust virtual contact – but might require some f2f contact
'Hub and spoke'	Tried and tested model – reassuring that someone is in charge/there when needed. Obvious issue with two institutions	Not an issue in theory, as long as equitable access Need to recognise regional differences – e.g. to local laws etc.
'Shared services hub'	Main concern is current scale – unsure on when and what we would need access to – e.g. demand uncertain – PAYG might be better.	
'Procurement framework'	How could competition between e.g. small local providers be managed to ensure fair opportunities for NI providers?	

Reflections

General considerations about devolved nation TTO models

- Concerns about IP ownership

- Is there a critical mass?

- How sustainable a shared TTO model would be? Who would 'own' it? Even obvious 'hubs' (e.g., Cardiff, Edinburgh) don't have capacity.

- Limited funding, hence limited institutional resources

- General economic conditions are impacting/limiting access to funding

Alignment with survey findings

- No strong preferences for any models emerged;

- Factors that must be taken into account when designing the shared model: geographic proximity, cultural awareness; funding levels

- No clear cluster pattern (Arts maybe?) about TTO support needed;

- A strong interest in extending accelerator type activities (e.g., ARC);

- Desire for shared 'resources' in terms of good practice around policy, training (resource limitations).

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Some reflections

- Devolved nations have more in common than different when it comes to SHAPE commercialisation

- In common with survey, lots of support needs reflect relative immaturity of SHAPE commercialisation – some of which might be considered 'pre-TTO',

- Cross-nation sharing doesn't seem to pose a major problem (i.e., any more so than sharing within a nation)
  - Geographic proximity/f2f support
  - Deep understanding of each university's context important
  - Tailoring e.g., to specific legal frameworks necessary
  - Language (e.g., Welsh) not flagged as an issue

- Where does this reinforce or contradict the survey findings and interview outputs?

- How should we reflect this learning in the project's output?