



As the economy struggles to recover, many institutions in the UK have faced reductions in funding and a loss of some Knowledge Transfer jobs. [Linda Baines](#), Secretary and Treasurer at [AURIL](#), rounds up last week's AURIL conference on delivering knowledge transfer for growth in a difficult economic climate, noting that those in the sector are rising to the challenge of "doing more with less".

For many people, September marks the start of a new school and academic year, with much anticipation at the prospect of new beginnings and new opportunities, especially for those of us in Knowledge Transfer (KT) and the broader BCE (Business Community Engagement) who are increasingly having to do more with less.

This year's **Association for University Research and Industry Links (AURIL)** conference, "*Reshaping Delivery: in the current economic climate how do we deliver KT in a more sophisticated way to deliver growth?*", aimed to give attendees an opportunity to look at the changes in the economic climate during the past year, take stock, and look ahead to the future to try to anticipate the changes that we need to make in the KT sector and how, as practitioners, we might adapt.

At last year's conference in Newcastle, delegates were wary about the impending outcome of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), and nervous to find out where the axe would fall. This year, everyone was much more upbeat. Although things are harder, with many English institutions having faced a reduction in HEIF funding and loss of KT jobs, and universities in Scotland and Wales still facing an uncertain future as the structure of knowledge exchange is considered, there seemed to be some relief: people know what they are dealing with and can now look at exploring the changed landscape, try to adapt to it and plan as well as they can for the future.

Looking for inspiration

The conference opened with the presentation of Lifetime Achievement Awards to some of the original players in and founders of the KT sector: Adrian Hill, the first chairperson of AURIL; Hugh Thomson, the first person in the UK to receive an OBE for Services to the Commercialisation of University Research; and Pat Frain, a Fellow and Board member of the [Institute of Knowledge Transfer](#). The Lifetimes Achievement Awards are a new initiative, and come at a time when cuts to the education sector mean many are looking for inspiration and opportunities to join new projects. Indeed, Hugh Thomson remarked that KT has "never been more important for the wellbeing of universities and our battered economy".

Adrian Day and Peter Seddon's update on developments at HEFCE covered the Strategic Statement, the Wilson Review and the related Skills and Innovation policy developments. They advised academics to "keep giving [HEFCE] the evidence we need". Dr Sue Smart presented a session on the RCUK Research Outcomes project, noting that "impact is everything, nothing is excluded".

New ideas in KT

The conference also brought out lots of fresh ideas in KT, such as Brian McCaul's session on KT2.0 which offered new approaches to developing KT models, drawing on innovation theory, market behaviour and motivation and social media tools. Deborah Lock's session on KT architectures attracted a large audience, exploring how KE services are structured and located in organisational structures, and offered alternative approaches, any of which could work, depending on the particular KE organisation, regardless of whether it is a university or PSRE.

The final session of the conference was industry-led with Tim Bradshaw on the CBI's priorities for the Government's new research and innovation strategy, particularly in ensuring economic growth. David Way, Technology Strategy Board (TSB) gave an overview of TSB's role as the UK's innovation agency, and the new Technology and Innovation Centres. Roger Leech of Unilever described how open innovation is impacting on their relationships with universities, and Steve Legge of IBM gave an interesting overview of the good and the bad in their collaborations with universities across the globe.

Realising the benefits of research

So what can we conclude about the future of KT following the conference? Mostly, we hoped that attendees gained new insights into how business perceive universities and PSREs, and that they took away new ways of looking to the future. Most important was the reaffirmation that KT professionals' willingness to adapt and change is critical to driving growth and ensuring that we realise the social and economic benefits of UK research.

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