



The Implications of Knowledge Transfer for Universities: The Case of the Arts and Humanities

WUN 'Ideas and Universities' Seminar
6 June 2008
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University of Sheffield



The Humanities Research Institute



'This splendid and unique Institute is testament to Sheffield's outstanding track record in arts and humanities research and to its long-term commitment to promoting cutting-edge collaborative and interdisciplinary working and supporting knowledge transfer.'

Philip Esler, Chief Executive of AHRC and Knowledge Transfer 'champion'
for Research Councils UK, May 2006

Unease with Knowledge Transfer

Definitions such as those cited in our abstract, and recommendations in reports such as the Sainsbury Review, cause unease in some quarters about:

- Threats to blue-skies research
- Excessive emphasis on user-driven, commercialisable research: e.g. workshop on 'The role of embedded professionals with industry backgrounds and skills embedding industrial practitioners in HEIs' (<http://www.cambridge-mit.org/events/article/default.aspx?objid=2487>)
- Deleterious requirement that research should have a demonstrable economic impact

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RCUK's response

- 'Blue skies here to stay, Esler says. AHRC chief tells angry academic entrepreneurialism is no threat to basic research.'
- 'What we are after is both excellent research plus, where we can get it, impact.'
Times Higher Education, 22 May 2008
- "'Economic impact" [...] goes far beyond monetary outcomes to embrace public policy and quality of life outcomes.'
Presentation to UK Subject Associations, 1 May 2008

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Does KT belong in the HRI (1)?

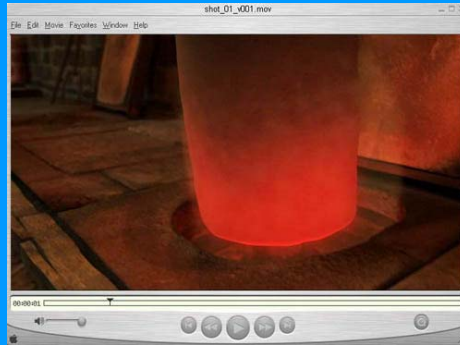
- Established 1991
- 1990s mission: 'To use new technologies to formulate and investigate research questions in the humanities which cannot be easily answered by the use of conventional methodologies'
- Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher Education, 1998, for 'taking a lead in widening and transforming access to the humanities in the UK and internationally'

Does KT belong in the HRI (2)?

2006 mission statement:

- To encourage and support the full range of research in arts and humanities, with particular emphasis on innovative and interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research
- To encourage and support, through HRI Digital, leading-edge application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to humanities research
- To maximise opportunities for knowledge transfer, in order to develop new audiences for the outputs of humanities research

HRI: practical involvement in KT (1)



Collaboration with Red Star Studios on digital reconstruction of Benjamin Huntsman's steelworks: funded as KT (<http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/huntsman/>)

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HRI: practical involvement in KT (2)



Planned collaboration with games companies to enhance virtual reconstructions of Cistercian abbeys produced by the Cistercians in Yorkshire project (<http://cistercians.shef.ac.uk/>)

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HRI: practical involvement in KT (3)



Support for Channel, a Sheffield exhibition of art produced in France, developed in partnership with local and regional partners (<http://www.shef.ac.uk/french/research/projects/artexhibition.html>)

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HRI: practical involvement in KT (4)



Kiosque: high-resolution digital imaging and exhibition displays: funded through KT Partnership (<http://www.shef.ac.uk/hri/projects/projectpages/kiosque/overview.html>)

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HRI: thinking about KT

- 2006 Away Day for arts and humanities researchers
- Roberts funding to develop research training for postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers: 'Applying research: critical engagement with the knowledge exchange agenda'
- Guiding (naïve?) assumption that the research community can still and should seek to shape the KT agenda

University of Sheffield KT context

A working definition (2007):

'Activities that are concerned with the generation, use, application, and exploitation of knowledge and other University capabilities outside academic environments.'

Our approach – external world

- Work with key funders to develop and shape the national KT agenda
- Ongoing development of successful external collaborations and partnerships
- Ongoing range of funding schemes to encourage all stages of KT work
- Established University based KT hubs to broker relationships e.g. Public Services Academy

Our approach – within the University

- University-wide – across all disciplines
- Central support team
- Recruitment of sector specialists to KT roles
- Department based Business Research Fellows recognise discipline specific practice and needs

Funding KT

- External funding:
 - Government including Research Councils
 - Commercial organisations
 - Regional funds
- University funding through Higher Education Innovation Fund:
 - Small scale collaborative KT projects
 - Larger scale Proof of Concept KT projects
 - KT Hubs
 - Corporate Industrial Advisers

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Facilitating Knowledge Transfer/ Knowledge Exchange

- Dedicated sector specific support
- Specialist people provide knowledge, experience, understanding and contacts
- Membership of relevant professional networks
- Attending and organising events
- Supporting the process of collaboration including the legal, technical and commercial aspects
- Horizon scanning with and without our external partners

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Opening Questions

- How, if at all, is our version of Knowledge Transfer understood
- a) in your country, b) in your institution, c) by your subject area and d) by you?
- What are the implications of this understanding in an increasingly global world?

Further Seminar Questions (1)

- Is KT a uniquely UK concept?
- Who defines KT and for what purpose?
- What scale does it have?
- To what extent is KT a mere matter of language? Or is it a matter of practice?
- Is there an inevitable tension between Government and Higher Education agendas?

Further Seminar Questions (2)

- How do we, or should we, react to initiatives seeking to translate University research into an 'industrial context'?
- Are we being asked to demonstrate KT without having defined it first?
- How do we measure the effects of KT?

Speakers

- Professor David Shepherd, Director Humanities Research Institute and Director of Research for Arts and Humanities
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