

A Year In Review

Unlocking Knowledge Transfer Webinar Series

December 2020

In what was the final edition of Knowledge Transfer Ireland's *Unlocking Knowledge Transfer* webinar series for 2020, attendees were invited to join a discussion on the extraordinary and unprecedented challenges which the knowledge transfer sector has experienced in 2020, and the outlook looking ahead to next year. Alison Campbell, KTI Director, was joined by; Maria Johnston - Operations & Enterprise Development Manager, DCU Invent; Helen McBreen - Investment Director, Atlantic Bridge; Josette O'Mullane - Innovation & Enterprise Manager, CIT and; Declan Weldon - Head of Office and Deputy Director, Office of Corporate Partnership and Knowledge Transfer, TCD.

Alison opened the discussion with thanks to participants and speakers from all of the webinars in the series so far, with a particular thanks to KTI's Siobhan Horan for organising the series and moderating the monthly events. Looking forward to what 2021 might bring in light of the lessons learned this year, both Josette and Declan spoke of the positives in terms of the transition to working from home, and being able to stay connected to their stakeholders as a key area of importance. Declan touched on some of the challenges they faced with engagement models, but there are positive signs to be considered for the future.

A fundamental area of knowledge transfer is that of business development, and while the speakers discussed being able to handle negotiations and contracts virtually, the idea of connecting people face to face to make connections and build relationships has been a challenge this year. Maria Johnston spoke about DCU Invent's flagship matchmaking event, which had to be moved online due to public health guidelines. Despite a new format, it was their best subscribed event in its history with several new participants and the highest number of companies and researchers attending – pointing to the strength of the knowledge transfer community and continued appetite for its growth.

Alison commented on the mixed feedback from spin outs this year, with institutions reporting a mix of increased activity, business as usual and a slowdown in some. Declan noted the stalled progress of many spin outs in the health sector whose clinical trials may have been put on hold, yet the increased activity of spin outs in the IT sector who could still progress their innovations. Also discussed was a note of caution in terms of funding outlooks, a point raised by others during the webinar, and in particular of seed funding in the €1m to €5m bracket. Despite the concerns, Helen McBreen was positive on the investment front, particularly in the second half of the year, and spoke of the €60m raised by spin outs in 2020 – pointing to a continued level of activity.

A particularly interesting point which Josette raised was the geographical spread of companies looking to engage with research through the technology gateways around the country. Traditionally, those working with CIT would have come from the south west region, but they are now seeing evidence of companies using Enterprise Ireland innovation vouchers from right around the country – suggesting a growing appetite for companies to focus resources towards innovation.

In rounding out the discussion, the conversation turned to the positives experienced by the speakers in a challenging year and what challenges will persist for 2021. Many of the speakers outlined the pivot to working from home and the adaptability that brought as a real plus in 2020, and likewise with the switch to virtual practices and the opportunities they carried. In terms of future challenges, funding

was a major concern along with the capacity issues in labs around the country. With researchers unable to get access to equipment, lab work has stalled with a knock-on effect on progress.

Perhaps the most poignant takeaway, and representative of the series as a whole, was raised by Helen when she commented on the swift reaction of the knowledge transfer community to provide solutions to the Covid-19 crisis with innovations in contact tracing and drone delivery of medication cited as examples.

The Knowledge Transfer Ireland Unlocking Knowledge Transfer series will return with an exciting line up of speakers and discussions in early 2021. Keep up to date on its return by subscribing to the KTI newsletter, follow KTI on our social channels and keep an eye out [on our website](#). A final thanks to all our speakers and attendees throughout the series, and we look forward to connecting with you all again soon.