

‘Bridging the Valley of Death’ Parliamentary Inquiry highlights Government’s need for coherent strategy to support UK’s commercialisation of technological innovation

22nd March 2013

In March 2013 the House of Commons published their report [*‘Bridging the Valley of Death: improving the commercialisation of research’*](#). AIRTO submitted written evidence to this Science & Technology Select Committee inquiry that led to this report, in 2012 and evidence was also submitted by a number of AIRTO members – BMT, LGC, NPL.

The report warns that the UK Government needs a stronger and more coherent strategy to support the commercialisation of technological innovation in the UK, and without it risks failing to secure the full economic benefits of Britain’s world-class science base. In summary the inquiry showed that:

- there is a gap (or ‘valley of death’) that prevents the progress of science from the laboratory to the point where it provides the basis of a commercially successful business or product;
- a key reason is the different skill sets, behaviour and even values of those conducting research & development and those who have the entrepreneurial skills to spot a market opportunity and exploit it;
- those developing the “new” are often so in love with their creation they assume the world will welcome “their baby” with open arms;
- those with the skills to move from prototype to (say) bulk production, those able to promote the benefits of the offering, those able to kick open the doors of opportunity, are often not recruited to the team;
- those working on products, services or processes that will address Climate Change issues face even greater difficulties, since they will often need to change people’s behaviour as well as have their new offering accepted;
- picking winners is a most difficult task—but often there is no plan or approaches to catch proposals that are not funded but that emerge as strong opportunities sometime later;
- work is already underway—The EU funded Climate KIC project—to increase the involvement of business and to help understand how to change behaviours;
- the focus of this work must not just be on research institutes, Britain needs to address those best able to commercialise the “new”—existing businesses. This process is not a sprint but a marathon and a great deal of work will be required to change UK businesses so they are truly innovative and seek and welcome the “new”.

In the main report AIRTO’s evidence was picked out to support the argument for better proof of concept funding being required, and for RTOs to have access to Research Council funding, and for a better approach to TSB funding allocation. The important role of Britain’s Research and Technology Organisations (RTOs) in supporting innovation was also highlighted in evidence given by CBI and ADS.

Notes to Editors:

AIRTO – The Association for Independent Research and Technology Organisations – is the foremost membership body for organisations operating in the UK’s intermediate research and technology sector. AIRTO’s members deliver vital innovation and knowledge transfer services which include applied and collaborative R&D, frequently in conjunction with universities, consultancy, technology validation and testing, incubation of commercialisation opportunities and early stage financing. AIRTO members have a combined turnover of over £2Bn from clients both at home and outside the UK, and employ over 20,000 scientists, technologists and engineers.

AIRTO members include commercial companies, Research and Technology Organisations, Research Associations and selected research and technology exploitation offices from universities, operating at the interface between academia and industry. Most of AIRTO’s members operate in the important space between pure research and the pull of the market for commoditisation of knowledge into new products and services.

AIRTO exists to assist members network and engage collectively with government and policy makers in the UK’s R&D landscape on matters of mutual interest, including research policy, innovation strategy, encouraging enterprise and developing the commercial take up of scientific and technological advances. AIRTO works to influence and improve the strategy and climate for innovation for our Members by forging links and progressing dialogue with key decision makers in government and industry across technology intensive sectors. Our interests cover the activities of the Research Councils, the TSB, the European Commission and a number of UK Government Departments, as well as topics such as the use of public procurement to support innovation, challenge led research, skills provision, support schemes such as SBRI and those that deal with contract and collaborative R&D.

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