



RESEARCH INNOVATION

2017

Building Meaningful
Partnerships for Improved
Collaboration and Research
Commercialisation



Research Innovation has continued to build momentum since the 2015 National Innovation and Science Agenda, with several moves towards improving commercialisation and collaboration including the review of R&D tax incentives in October 2016 and the revision of awarding grants – shifting the onus from publication to economic impact.

Although Australia is a benchmark for research excellence, it is still a minnow when it comes to commercialisation and industry partnership.

Ahead of **Research Innovation 2017** we chat with Dr. Leanna Read, Chief Scientist of South Australia. Leanna looks at the impact of new government incentives on Research and Development, and discusses the impact of meaningful research partnerships on overall collaboration and industry commercialisation.

RESTRUCTURING RESEARCH

"If you asked me what the most important thing I think I am doing as a Chief Scientist, and what sort of legacy I would like to leave behind from my time in this position – it all relates back to **actually delivering research outcomes benefitting the economic and social environment of this country**, through partnerships between research, industry and government," says Leanna.

Leanna works as Chief Scientist of South Australia, and is the first woman to hold the position – an advisory role to government, that provides advice on topics that are of interest to government, industry, the research sector, and the community.

"I have been Chief Scientist since 2014, and have recently restructured the primary way that the State government funds research. **We've looked at consolidating a whole range of different programs to ensure scale and strategic focus.** In South Australia, an important government fund provides \$6 million a year to R&D and that \$6 million was previously divided between 30 different projects.

While they are all good projects, they are only on a small scale and limit the opportunity to make a real strategic difference to the State. So I reviewed that process and considered what we really needed to do in order to drive economic development. From there we decided that our efforts and funds should be focused, through our new programme, on larger scale projects.

We now offer a grant of a million dollars a year, for four years to be matched by the applicant, with the aim of bringing together research organisations with industry and other end-users, with a strong outcome focus on areas that are of high importance to the state.

I am also a longstanding member of the South Australian Economic Development Board, which provides independent advice to the Government on economic issues. I am very pleased that this Board also sees innovation and research/industry collaboration as one of its priorities," says Leanna.

ENABLING INNOVATION

In working to better enable research innovation, Australia's Turnbull government introduced the National Innovation and Science Agenda in 2015.

The agenda aims to support innovation by investing in enablers such as education, science and research, and infrastructure; incentivising business investment; and removing regulatory obstacles and restrictions.

The Innovation and Science Agenda focuses on four key pillars:



Culture and Capital: Providing new tax breaks to remove the bias against businesses that take risks and innovate.



Collaboration: Change funding incentives so that more university funding is allocated to research that is done in partnership with industry.



Talent and Skills: Supporting all Australian students to embrace the digital age, and change the visa system to attract more entrepreneurial and research talent from overseas.



Government as an Exemplar: Leading by example by making data available to the public and making it easier for startups and innovative small businesses to do business with the government.

GOVERNMENT & RESEARCH

As a Chief Scientist, Leanna essentially act as a link between researchers, government and industry and is able to offer informed opinions regarding the areas where research innovation should be focused.

"Research is about more than just researchers. If you look at the industry from a university point of view, university incentives are extremely important – university researchers are smart people, and they're going to go where the government incentives are. So the government can play an important role by incentivising research that will encourage industry collaboration and from that, benefits to the national economy.

In terms of funding and grant programmes that actually enable innovation, there are a number of new grant programmes to encourage the link between research, government and industry, but in saying that the design and stability of programs is less than perfect in some cases, and red tape can hinder progress," says Leanna.

Overall though, enabling research translation into outcomes requires a culture change, and this change is two-fold; firstly a change in how Australian society views research, and secondly, how the research industry works.

"I think a key challenge for Australia is our culture. We have lived a long time on the benefits of primary production - mining and agriculture - which has served us very well so far, but if we want to be internationally competitive, we need to innovate to produce the high value-add products and services here.

Secondly, in the past research has been largely 'bottom-up,' with an emphasis on discovery research, whereas now federal funding programmes are becoming more outcome focused. For example, the CRC Programme (Cooperative Research Centres) brings together government, researchers and industry in long term partnerships and encourages a spirit of collaboration to solve a strategic problem. At the end of the day it's the relationships that really get things done," adds Leanna.

COLLABORATION

While changing culture and incentivising research is all well and good, without industry collaboration and the commercialisation of research into tangible products, we are failing to capture many of the benefits.

"South Australia now has a strong focus on growing research in our industry sector," says Leanna. She continues; "this is mainly because South Australia has gone through some tough economic issues – **and innovation is often born from difficult times.**

Due to South Australia's economic challenges, the state government has placed considerable emphasis on innovation to shift the balance of the state economy from its traditional manufacturing and primarily agriculture background, to a much greater focus on the knowledge-based economy.

For example, the government has established an Investment Attraction Agency to encourage major international companies to come to, and stay in South Australia, notes Leanna.

South Australia is also creating a number of innovation precincts that foster collaboration through partnerships. One such facility, Tonsley, in southern Adelaide, houses Flinders University TAFE, and a range of industry partners such as Siemens. The state government has contributed around \$250 million to this precinct, with several fold more contributed by the private sector.

"A key factor in the success of such precincts is to carefully vet the tenants to ensure there is a synergistic fit," says Leanna. "In the case of Tonsley, the 'magic glue' is high-value manufacturing in sectors such as resources and mining, clear technologies and renewable energy, health and medical devices, and sustainable building products. Another important part of the 'glue' is **leadership from people who understand the technology and the industry, so they can broker the entire relationship to bring ideas and developers together.**

This process, and successfully fostering the right relationships with the appropriate people is what will really encourage research innovation," concludes Leanna.



If you would like to hear more about building meaningful partnerships for improved research collaboration and commercialisation, then join Leanna at **Research Innovation 2017**.

Attend the event in Sydney on 4th - 5th April to hear from over 25 industry experts, including scientists, research partners and universities.

For special early bird pricing and to secure your ticket now, simply fill in the **form** and email to **registration@iqpc.com.au**