Society of Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom

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Academia & Industry: Accelerating the impact of Research

The Society of Spanish Researchers in the UK (SRUK/CERU) with the support of the Fundación Ramón Areces and Hughes Hall College (Cambridge), and the collaboration of the Office for Cultural and Scientific Affairs of the Embassy of Spain organized the open workshop "Accelerating the Impact of Research", last Saturday October 18th at The Pavilion Hall, Hughes Hall College in Cambridge.

This workshop, part of SRUK- Fundación Ramón Areces 2014 seminars, introduced participants to the broad range of possibilities open to scientists in academia looking to translate their research into the world of industry and business. This event counted with a panel of four leading experts with different backgrounds that discussed how their research careers and scientific backgrounds have led to consulting roles, participation in a range of private and public projects and the development of start-ups.

Four perspectives taking research further

Professor Sir Thomas Blundell is Director of Research and Professor Emeritus of Biochemistry at the University of Cambridge.

He did his PhD working with Dorothy Hodgkin supervision studying the structure of insulin, which they published in 1969. During the 80's structure-guided drug discovery led him to find HIV inhibitors through Rous sarcoma virus proteinases sequence homology, which has been one of the biggest success of rational drug design. During the 90's while he was appointed advisor for ACOST and Chief Executive for AFRC and BBSRC, he continued running his lab at the University of Cambridge and he also co-founded his first company, Astex Pharmaceuticals. The company is now a global leader in oncology drug discovery and since then several chemical compounds have been tested in clinical trials.

In Industry Sir Thomas Blundell has been also a non-executive director for Celltech and science advisor to Pfizer, UCB, Syntaxin and Isogenica.

He believes that the success of the Cambridge phenomenon is due to several factors including knowledge interchange, networking, no endogamy, little or any policies to follow, no government influence and very good connections to other hubs such as London.

Dr Manuel Pérez Alonso is entrepeneur, founding partner and director of several biotech companies (Sistemas Genómicos SL, Valentia BioPharma and Instituto de Medicina Genómica SL).

He was several years lecturer at University of Valencia, teaching Genetics and doing basic research in *Drosophila* genomics before founding his first company Sistema Genómicos S.L. to study genetic alterations in rare diseases. After the initial success he founded his second company, The Institute of Genomic Medicine. Now with more than 35 employees, their research focuses in genetic analysis services and products and they are pioneers in the field in Spain and Europe. In 2006 he also founded Valentia Biopharma, a biotech company that uses basic research and *Drosophila* genetics for drug discovery, which after 8 years led already to one chemical compound undergoing clinical trials.

He is science advisor to Roche Spain in the field of DNA sequencing. He has also collaborated with Life Technologies in the development of biomedical applications of Next generation Sequencing (SOLiD). He is the President of the Valencia BioRegion (BIOVAL) since 2012 and his research is now focused in the development of genomic tools for inherited diseases including rare genetic syndromes.

His code of good practice is transparency and ethic in science and respectfulness to science entrepreneurs.

Dr Isabel González is the Head of Biology at Proximagen since 2009, where she leads a group of scientists developing novel treatments for diseases of the central nervous system (CNS).

Following academic positions focused on neuroscience research for 12 years, she worked for Parke-Davis (Pfizer), Novartis and GlaxoSmithKline, within various CNS research areas. Her drug discovery experience includes leadership of a number of successful pre-clinical projects in neuroscience indications across several organizations and membership of clinical project teams within neurodegenerative therapeutic areas. Her research in neuroscience has resulted in 55 publications in peer reviewed journals and book chapters.

She demystified many of the differences between working in academia and working in industry. For instance, while research in academia has being always thought to be vocational, now the picture is changing. In industry on the other hand, research interest has been always thought to be restricted to financial goals, however it is possible to conduct vocational projects as long as the company budget allows you.

She also finds big differences between research in Pharma and Biotech companies. While in Pharma the research focus is wider, resources are cash generated,

development is wide, financial risk is medium and the internal culture is very structured, in Biotech the spectrum is the opposite.

Roberto Sánchez Sánchez is the Head of the cabinet of the General Secretary of Science, Technology and Innovation, where he is involved in the coordination and policy development of the Directorates-General for Research, Innovation and the Spanish Agency for Innovation (CDTI). Previously, he was Vice Director for Competitiveness and Enterprises Development in the R&D&I Secretary of the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, designing and developing the Spanish Strategy Plan for Science, Technology and Innovation and coordinating the development of Regional Strategies of Smart Specialisation. Formerly he was appointed as General Director in the Directorate-General for Telecommunications and Information Technologies. He has an industrial background in several sectors (electronics, health, aeronautical, telecom and environment).

He exposed the current reforms conducted by the Spanish Government to improve and boost research in Spain; starting from performing an analysis of the current Spanish science, technology and innovation system to improvement in the public investment current use; making people aware of public investigation and science with initiatives such as the open night or the science week; building bridges to connect academia and industry by funding PhDs in industry, implementing human resources and multidisciplinary projects between academia and industry.

Furthermore, participants had the chance to participate in the roundtable discussion and networking sessions throughout the day.