ICURe guidelines for TTOs supporting teams during application stage and programme delivery

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Introduction

The ICURe (Innovation-to-Commercialisation of University Research) programme, funded by BEIS and supported by Innovate UK, offers university researchers with commercially promising ideas up to £50k to 'get out of the lab' and validate their ideas in the marketplace.

ICURe funds teams to assess whether there is a market for products or services that utilise their research and then, where there is evidence of market demand, license or spinout the research into a company.

The SETsquared Partnership has been running the initial pilot since 2014. In 2018-19, the University of Warwick and Queen's University Belfast have been selected by Innovate UK to work with SETsquared to deliver an extension of the ICURe programme across the whole of the UK. In broad terms, SETsquared will cover universities in the south of the UK, Warwick (as "Midlands ICURe") the middle (including Wales and East Anglia) and QUB, the north (including Northern Ireland and Scotland).

An ICURe team has 4 core members: an early career researcher who is 'bought out' for 3 months full time to undertake the programme; the lead researcher or Principal Investigator (PI); a business mentor and a Technology Transfer Office (TTO) business development manager. The TTO plays a critical part in supporting the teams to ensure effective use of the ICURe programme.

The application process - preparing the team:

• The project <u>must</u> have a clear commercial objective and market rationale which needs validating by speaking with customers/users/influencers

• The process is not about selling a preconceived idea. It is about exploring, listening and analysis of a potential technology solution and market fit. Researchers should not view it as a linear extension of their research.

• The ECR must have a real interest in enterprise/commercialisation (and not just be about to run out of money and want to continue his/her research on this project) – there may be a telephone interview with the ECR - if so it is a critical part of the decision making.

• It is very helpful to the team (and to you) if you are able to identify a mentor for the team before the application (or at least the bootcamp). If you do have a mentor it adds real value to the team (and the mentor will better understand the programme) if they are able to attend the bootcamp. You will hear whether your team is successful on the ICURe programme very close to the bootcamp, so you are asked to have all team members lined up for the bootcamp days. If the team isn't successful on ICURe, you may want to get everyone together anyway to plan a commercialisation strategy to include market validation, or consider re-submission to a future programme.

• It is vital that <u>all</u> members of the team attend the bootcamp. The dates need to be blocked out in calendars before the application is submitted and failure to attend can result in the place being cancelled.

• The ECR must be dedicated to the programme <u>for 3 months</u> and will not be doing any research over that time. This is not flexible - make sure the PI and ECR understand and accept this.

A successful ICURe application – ongoing support:

• You need to be at the bootcamp to support and be a part of your team and understand what they are being asked to do. It is difficult to predict what support is required as all teams are different. However, be prepared to help your team understand the need for a budget, to keep within the budget guidelines, to expect that anything that is not deemed reasonable will be questioned, even if there is no specific written rule. Your role is often one of interpretation, to act as a bridge between the commercial world of ICURe and the academic world.

• Your team may look at whether the technology is appropriate for markets wider than the initial idea (a 'pivot'). This can be very useful but also make sure the team isn't diverted and still properly explores the initial ('obvious') market.

• The ICURe programme is not a grant award and pays expenses retrospectively against a budget that is agreed at the bootcamp. Make sure you are aware of the ECR's direct salary costs (including NICs and pension) before the bootcamp.

• Some teams forget that the IP belongs to the university (if it does) and get carried away developing 'their' company; an early reminder and staying part of the team helps avoid this situation

• The action plan developed at the bootcamp will specify trade shows and other visits. Ensure that the researchers have some idea of locations, dates and formats for available trade shows beforehand.

• If you are at the bootcamp you might want to/might be asked to support all teams on the cohort/programme, sharing your expertise in, for example networking, market knowledge and understanding, IP etc.

• ICURe is a flexible programme and continuously evolves – be prepared to be flexible too.

• Do read all the material on the VLE before the bootcamp. The pace is fast and assumes everyone is already briefed.

After the ICURe programme:

• One of the outcomes of the ICURe programme may be a recommendation to create a company. You (the TTO and HEI) need to have thought about how you would support the team if this is the recommendation. If you haven't done this before, various options exist, from looking for support and guidance from universities who have experience in taking equity in new companies to allowing the team to create a start-up and negotiating an arm's length licence. It is very helpful if you/your HEI have thought about this before the roundabout at the end of the programme.

Internal University things to be aware of:

• Internal University admin: in most institutions you need to set up a separate finance code so finance can easily recharge costs (after spend) to ICURe. The 'kick-off' is fast so it is good to get a finance colleague 'on board', understanding what can be recharged and when before the bootcamp. Details are contained in the award letter, but an early heads up can help smooth the path. The money is not 'R' coded: make sure the PI understands and accepts this - there is no full Economic Cost (fEC) – it's expenses only that are recoverable – make sure your finance team understands and accepts this.