

Introduction (Commercialising Public Research: New Trends and Strategies)

Public research -i.e. research primarily funded with public resources and carried out by public research institutions (PRIs) and research universities (hereafter both referred to as public research organisations [PROs])- plays an extremely important role in innovation systems. Its sphere of influence touches education, training, skills development, problem solving, creation and diffusion of knowledge, development of new instrumentation, and the storage and transmission of knowledge. But public research has been also the source of significant scientific and technological breakthroughs that have become major innovations, sometimes as by-products of basic scientific research goals and sometimes with no vision of any direct application to a valuable commercial activity. Well-known examples include recombinant DNA techniques, the Internet, the scanning electron microscope and superconducting magnets. While it is inherently difficult to quantify the impact of public research, it has been suggested that around a tenth of innovations would have been delayed in the absence of public research (Mansfield, 1991). In some sectors -such as pharmaceuticals and semiconductors- innovation is far more dependent on public research results.

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