

Background

Easy Access Innovation is a collaborative project between the University of Glasgow, King's College London and University of Bristol to promote new ways of sharing intellectual property (IP) and adopt new approaches to make it easier for universities and industry to work together.

A core element of Easy Access Innovation is the adoption of **Easy Access IP**, an initiative that offers certain IP for free, using quick and simple agreements. It aims to revolutionise the way IP is managed at universities in order to maximise partnerships with industry and ultimately, the transfer of university knowledge for public benefit.

Edith Cowan University (ECU) became an Easy Access Innovation university and an international partner of the initiative for Australasia. This new approach will help to strengthen our relationship with industry, by removing what they perceive as barriers to the process and making it easy for them to work with us.

Easy Access IP presents an opportunity for ECU to be leaders in university IP management, becoming a partner of choice for industry and to reach our goal of disseminating our knowledge widely.

Why follow Easy Access Innovation?

We recognise the value that relationships with external organisations brings both to ECU and the individual academic, where combining resources to focus on a problem and harness the power of different people helps create solutions. In addition to the knowledge transfer benefits Easy Access IP brings, this new approach will also help cement us as an institution that provides significant value to our economy and society: a reputation from which we will all benefit. For the individual academic, it also presents more opportunity for academic and professional recognition.

Easy Access IP fits well within the current environment, given the emphasis on industry research engagement in ECU's research strategy. This approach will make it easier for researchers to achieve knowledge transfer outcomes and impacts, and to demonstrate an innovative environment by demonstrating that we are removing the significant obstacles associated with contracting and with the licensing of IP.

What is Easy Access IP?

Whilst we will still protect and commercialise some IP as before, we will offer some of our IP (in our Easy Access IP portfolio) to entrepreneurs and SMEs for free, to increase the take-up of IP, accelerate the development of these opportunities and to encourage new collaborations and consultancy opportunities with business. Easy Access IP aims to make it easier for industry to work with us, by reducing the barriers to internal investment in development by offering the technology for free and using quick and simple agreements, removing the need for lengthy, costly negotiations.

In order for us to decide on the most appropriate licensee, those interested need to tell us how they will use the technology to benefit the economy or society. Technology offered under the Easy Access portfolio will have an additional three conditions:

1. They must acknowledge the ECU's contribution and report on the progress.
2. They agree that if they have not exploited the technology within three years, the licence will lapse and they would not be able to exploit the technology further.
3. There will be no limitations on our use of the technology for our own research, teaching and learning.

We hope that Easy Access IP will significantly increase our ability to develop relationships, raise our profile amongst companies and create beneficial new partnerships.

How will Easy Access IP work?

It will be driven by understanding the different types of value and most appropriate modes of transfer. Our approach is based on the following assumptions:

- All IP has inherent value, but only a very small proportion significant, defined and easily achievable commercial value to ECU.
- For that proportion of IP with commercial value, we will seek to exploit it with commercial partners through conventional routes of technology transfer
- For all other technology we will seek to transfer it for free to those partners who can demonstrate how they will develop it to benefit the society or economy.

What does this mean for ECU's academics?

We have always consulted with ECU inventors before conducting any licence agreement and this will not change with Easy Access IP. We will undertake the usual due diligence and market assessments and, where we have identified technology as a potential candidate for the Easy Access Portfolio, we will consult with these researchers on the options.

Often, because we already work closely with inventors in developing and attempting to transfer the technology, we anticipate inventors will already be aware of the barriers that might be surrounding their opportunity, and therefore understand how the Easy Access IP approach might be the only scope for ensuring the opportunity is partnered.

As per our usual operations, we will continue to provide support to academics whose IP has been agreed to license (whether through Easy Access IP or traditional means) to successfully transfer their technology to an external party and achieve the best outcome. This includes marketing, patenting, negotiation and processing agreements, as required.

FAQs:

How do you decide what is 'Easy Access IP'?

We apply the usual principles of evaluation and question whether we will get a better economic and social impact if we place it in the Easy Access IP Portfolio. If we have identified your technology as a potential candidate for the portfolio, we will consult with you on the options and it is your decision if you would like to participate or not.

What if an academic or funder does not want you to put the technology in the Easy Access IP portfolio?

We always discuss decision making with academics so this is no different. This is not about forcing them down a route. We perform usual due diligence including funder obligations. We will talk to funders if appropriate. If together we decide not to offer your technology under Easy Access IP, we will explore alternatives with you.

Is it not that the technology given away for free going to be perceived as lacking value by industry?

University technology is often at a very early stage of development and it will require significant investment in order to release the inherent value. Universities have limited resource to develop technology to a stage of significant commercial value. The Easy Access IP model accepts this and provides a mechanism for us to release a proportion of our technology portfolios to those who can develop it. It provides an opportunity for companies to take a risk without any financial obligations.

Is it not that there a danger that potential licensees will believe all IP will be free?

There will still be an appetite to gain early access through licensing to opportunities which have obvious commercial potential by a commercial partner who recognises that potential and is willing to make a financial commitment. No company would pass up the opportunity to obtain new technology which is vital to the business of their company. It's too risky.

How will we track outcomes?

One of the conditions for an Easy Access IP agreement is that the licensee needs to tell us how they will use the technology to benefit society and the economy. We will monitor this as we do for revenue bearing licences. Additionally, if the technology is not developed or commercialised in three years, it needs to be returned to ECU. Tracking impact is a core aspect of this initiative.

What is the benefit to the University?

Easy Access IP helps ECU fulfil its mission. Additional benefits include:

- A boost to our reputation through increasing our knowledge transfer;
- We become a partner of choice as we will be easy to work with;
- Closer relationships with industry which can lead to further engagements.

Enquiries:

Contact us at easyaccessip@ecu.edu.au

