BRINGING RESEARCH TO LIFE

The AIMday® concept was set up to address one big problem in removing the ‘Valley of Death’ between primary research and marketable solutions: the lack of a platform where traditional academics can meet industry experts with the capability to put research into practice.
BRIDGING THE INFAMOUS ‘Valley of Death’ between ideas and commercial exploitation has been discussed by science and industry stakeholders for years. But despite the sterling efforts of policy and decision makers worldwide, a gap still exists at which the expertise of academics and business leaders diminishes and both parties have to rely on one another’s knowledge.

In one unique day – an Academia Industry Meeting day (AIMday) – researchers can take part in face-to-face discussions of industry-led questions, fostering collaboration between scientists and organisations, as well as other academics, in a cross-disciplinary fashion. These organisations can be private, public or commercial and, importantly, participate in AIMday free of charge.

Lars-Eric Larsson, senior advisor at Uppsala University Innovation (UU Innovation) remembers the initial reaction to the AIMday programme: “The idea originated within the Ångström Materials Academy at Uppsala University, which arranged its first Materials Day in 2008, and the success was immediate”. Uppsala University has a strong tradition in supporting academic-led startup companies via UU Innovation, an organisation bridging the gap between the University and local industry. UU Innovation supports researchers with commercial ideas by providing help and support on patent protection, contracts and communication with government agencies and companies. The knowledge and expertise developed by UU Innovation designed for Uppsala University researchers has been used to feed the AIMday idea, but on a much larger and increasing scale.

AIMDAY ACADEMY

AIMday Academy is a training resource for those involved with setting up AIMday meetings to ensure their uniform high quality. It also facilitates communication between organiser of different events to ensure that the AIMday concept continues to develop and improve. AIMday Academy will be an invaluable tool in UU Innovation’s ambition to increase academia-industry contact internationally.

AIMDAY MATERIALS 2014

The seventh AIMday Materials meeting took place on 23 October 2014, in Uppsala, Sweden. Previous Materials meetings have successfully coordinated over 250 discussion groups involving at least 260 industry representatives and 600 academics.

This year’s list of questions was hugely varied and set by companies as small as Objectra, which creates instruments for in situ studies of large or heavy objects, and as large as Volvo Cars. Industry queries included:

By what experimental or theoretical methods can wear caused by chemical interaction between surfaces (e.g. between a stainless steel and a coated cemented carbide insert) be studied and better understood? – Sandvik Coromant, supplier of metalworking tools for industry.

Which evaluation methods are possible to measure the fraction of non-crystallised grains in the structure? – Uddeholm AB, producer of high alloy tool steels, in relation to processes occurring during forging and rolling a material.

The outcomes of the day were impressive: 13 funding applications for collaborative projects between the organisation representatives and academics present were submitted to UU Innovation.

A UNIQUE PROGRAMME

The AIMday concept has been successful for researchers at Uppsala University, and now UU Innovation is broadening its reach further afield. For example, AIMday meetings have been organised in Edinburgh, UK, and will soon be conducted in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. For Larsson and colleagues at UU Innovation, these are particularly significant. From the viewpoint of organisation representatives, the day gives them a chance to be informed about nearby expertise and networks of scientists in local universities that they might not otherwise have known about. This has the potential to bring about collaborations to facilitate specific product development and also serves as a recruitment tool; doctoral students are welcomed to the meetings, giving them a chance to meet with the organisations as potential future employers. “In most of the discussion groups during the meeting day, PhD students are invited,” adds Larsson. “They are thereby offered the opportunity to sit together with senior researchers and researchers from other universities, which will give them a broader network.”

From an academic’s perspective, taking part in these discussions can help drive new questions or directions for research in response to the real-world needs of the organisations present. The meetings can also offer new inspiration to the scientists and give them a chance to meet other academics from different disciplines. This multidisciplinarity is one of AIMday’s biggest selling points. UU Innovation additionally provides a small amount of funding for pre-
UPCOMING AIMDAY® EVENTS

24 MARCH AIMDAY® ADVANCED MANUFACTURING
REGISTRATION CLOSED
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University,
Port Elizabeth, South Africa

Questions include:
Can optical quality mirror surfaces with special dielectric coating for use in a high energy laser application be manufactured locally? – Denel Dynamics

What is the best way of adding value to crude glycerol as a byproduct of biodiesel manufacture? – Greentech Biofuels

23 APRIL AIMDAY® FLUIDS & FLOW 2015
REGISTRATION OPEN
University of Edinburgh, UK

Questions include:
Which, in your opinion, is the most effective instrument type for measuring varying process water flowrates: ultrasonic or magnetic? – Scotmas Ltd

How can numerical techniques help with prediction of free surface behaviour during filling of solid/liquid mixes of food? – Campden BRI

22 OCTOBER AIMDAY® MATERIALS 2015
REGISTRATION OPENS MAY 2015
Ångström Laboratory, Uppsala University, Sweden

Questions not yet confirmed.

There were 13 applications for ‘seed-funding’ of collaborative projects out of 20 parallel workshops at AIMday Materials 2014

STUDIES IN ORDER TO FACILITATE COLLABORATIONS INITIATED BY THE MEETING DAY. LARSSON LISTS A FEW OF THE MANY BENEFICIAL OUTCOMES OF THE EXPERIENCE: “COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH, CONTRACT RESEARCH, PHD PROJECTS, DIPLOMA WORK AND A LOT OF USEFUL CONTACTS BEYOND OUR ABILITY TO FOLLOW UP ON!”

A NEW DAY FOR AIMDAY®

Along with UU Innovation’s aims to expand the tool internationally, Larsson mentions ideas of a ‘reversed AIMday’, where academics are able to pose the questions instead of organisations. He also advocates a change to the organisation of the day: “We can be more restrictive regarding what questions we take in and, as a result, better prepare for the meeting with both researchers and organisations,” he suggests. “Additionally, we can expect to see more AIMday events targeted at issues in the public sector.” Already there has been AIMday Sustainable Solutions for Cities in 2013, and some on broader topics such as religion, ageing and welfare.

The AIMday meetings have been a great success: a recent survey by Uppsala University, for example, showed that 86 per cent of the industrial participants felt that the tool enabled fruitful interaction with academics. To date, there have been around 30 AIMday meetings arranged in total, in areas including Science and Technology, Medicine and Pharmacology, and Humanities and Social Sciences. As the AIMday concept continues to expand and diversify, the tool will be refined to ensure better connectivity between local industry and academics.

http://aimday.se/