

BioPhoT training: Generating new business opportunities from your research

16 – 17 September 2026

Riga, Latvia

Course leader: Jeff Skinner.

Programme Overview and Objectives

This short course has been designed for researchers who want to develop skills to actively engage external business partners and investors. It will be of particular interest to those who are intending to apply for 'Proof-of-Concept' funding.

Over the course of two days we'll use examples of academic-led technologies to explore how you, as researchers, can drive the process of commercialising your technology, drawing on the expertise of your Technology Transfer Office.

Through the use of these examples we hope to show you that there is a methodology for 'commercialising' research capabilities and that you are capable to take the lead in this process. This is certainly my experience. I've worked with hundreds of academics over many years and it's my observation that the vast majority 'get it' very quickly and make great commercial managers. If they put their mind to it. This isn't to say that it's easy, just that the underlying thinking is within reach of you all. The advent of AI is helping considerably by doing much of the background research on market and industry.

We will give you some practical, tried and tested frameworks, models and tips that you can use immediately and help you avoid the most obvious mistakes.

The journey begins with spotting opportunities; trying to discover technology-market fit; identifying and approaching potential partners; gradually introducing them to the potential of our ideas until they are ready to invest and absorb our ideas; and finally building up small-scale projects into strategic partnerships.

The sessions rely heavily on case studies and real projects, putting you in the position of the researcher to 'commercialise' the idea or technology. Often we ask you to read the cases in advance so that we can dive straight into group discussion. We then collect together your solutions and strategies (as a whole group) before combining relevant management frameworks and experiences.

Programme Director and Organisation.

The course is designed and delivered by Jeff Skinner who both has decades of experience leading technology transfer. He is past chair of the UK and European Knowledge Transfer Associations and deeply involved in academic knowledge transfer professional training across Europe, all of which is based on his own experience and portfolio projects, and references research studies and published data.

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The course is organised through ASTP (www.astp4kt.eu) a non-profit membership organisation committed to knowledge transfer among universities and industry and whose focus is to further improve the quality of impact that public research has on the economy and society.

ASTP was established in 2000 by a group of leading practitioners. ASTP's focus is to provide outstanding training and practice that supports member special interests, to advocate for the profession on the international stage and to enable the building of professional networks.

Course Programme

(Timing of breaks and lunches is indicative)

DAY 1 16th September 2026

09.00-09.15 Course Introduction

We set the context for the course – positioning you as the generator of new KT projects and engagement with potential users of the technology

9.15-10.00 Thinking like an investor

In the first, quite quick session, I use the example of a new battery technology to explore how investors think when they decide whether to back your technology. Summed up as, “I’m sure I can make it work, but will it make me any money”?

10.00-10:30 Break

10:30-11:30 Developing a route map for commercialisation.

We introduce the concept of a ‘commercial hypothesis’ as it applies to technologies that you may want to commercialise in the future. We use a simple example to argue that there are five elements to such a strategy and thinking through these elements provides a useful vector for execution.

11.30-12:30 Thinking through the value proposition.

Every technology needs investment and no business will invest without seeing profit or some other return. There needs to be a ‘value proposition’. In this session we examine some seemingly promising technologies and think through those value propositions and how we might charge a partner for access.

12.30–13.30 Lunch

13.30-14.30 Starting a venture without investment

Not all new ventures will be able to secure funding. When this happens (most of the time) the founders can either give up or find another, slower but less cash-intensive, way of getting going. In this session we explore what this means in practice using the example of a new software platform to explore alternative business models.

14.30-15:00 Break

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15:00 – 15:45 Why are potential partners reluctant to engage?

Businesses may not want to commit to and invest in your service or technology even when it's clear to you that the innovation is a vast improvement on their existing way of doing something. This reluctance can seem irrational and is often frustrating – but it's a fact of life. We use a real scenario to diagnose the reasons for this resistance and develop strategies for overcoming them.

15:45-16:45 Finding potential partners

We think through how you find potential partners and somehow interest them in talking to you. Though we will eventually work with a business, the first 'sell' is to a person within that business who is willing to invest a bit of time in you and your project and be prepared to 'sell' internally. How do you find and contact them?

DAY 2 17th September 2026

09:00- 10:15 From meeting to the first deal.

Once you have identified the right people to talk to, you need to make the most out of your initial meeting with them – to find out whether the 'value proposition resonates with them, and if (and only if) it does, how to build enthusiasm to the point where you can propose something you can work on together.

10:15 – 10:30 Break

10:30 - 11:15 Pitching opportunities to partners and investors

There are times when the researcher needs to bring a potential partner or investor up to speed quickly - to pitch the technology. How should you structure and what should you include and leave out given limited time.

11:15- 12:15 Negotiating with Research Partners

Researchers are heavily reliant on their own knowledge transfer departments for negotiation of research collaboration agreements and it can sometimes be a frustrating process. It's important that you (the researcher) is aware of the major issues in any research Agreement so that you can act in partnership with your KT

12:15 – 13.00 Lunch

13:00 - 14:15 Seeking investment for spin-outs.

At some point the spin-out will probably need additional investment to progress. The temptation is to wait until you have the perfect plan before pitching to investors. In this session we study the tactics of a PhD founder as he seeks investment for his spin-out. In so doing we develop a theoretical framework for

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fundraising and gain a better understanding of how we should engage with investors.

14:15 – 14:45 Break

14:45-16:00 Negotiating equity in spin-outs – equity as 'fairness'

In most spin-out equity negotiations there are four parties – academic, university (represented by the TTO), management and investor. Negotiations between them can easily become personal (even childish), especially when the basis of discussion is over relative shares rather than the actual value of contributions past and future. In this closing session we split the class into 'factions' who need to agree over who gets what from an equity deal before it can go forward.

16:00 – 16:15 Closing Discussion and questions