

Government Office for Technology Transfer

Accessing External Experts in Knowledge Asset Commercialisation

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Contents

1.	**Scope**	**4**
2.	**Introduction to external experts in Knowledge Asset commercialisation**	**5**
2.1	What are external experts?	5
2.2	Benefits of bringing in external experts	5
3.	**How to access external experts**	**7**
3.1	Routes	7
3.2	Roles and responsibilities	9
4.	**Making external experts work in practice – steps for success**	**10**
4.1	Deciding on need and developing an approvals process	10
4.2	Finding the right individual	10
4.3	Managing expectations	11
4.4	Setting objectives	11
4.5	Pre-employment and security checks	11
4.6	Onboarding – integration into public sector	12
4.7	Conflicts of interest	13
4.8	Knowledge Assets created by external experts	14
4.9	Exit of external expert	14
Annex A: External expert appointment checklist		**15**
Annex B: Case study		**17**

1.

Scope

The purpose of this guide is to support public sector bodies (PSBs) that wish to access external experts to accelerate the commercialisation of their Knowledge Assets (KAs).

This document sets out the benefits of accessing external experts and explains how to appoint them. It includes information on why an organisation would use this option, recruitment routes and mechanisms, as well as an annexed checklist for organisations making an appointment.

This guidance is part of a suite of publications by the Government Office for Technology Transfer (GOTT) which expand upon concepts established in the Rose Book.

Organisations in scope of this guidance are those headed by an Accounting Officer who is responsible for upholding Managing Public Money. These organisations are mainly those classified as central government by the Office for National Statistics, but others will be in scope. In this guidance these organisations are referred to as PSBs.

2.

Introduction to external experts in Knowledge Asset commercialisation

2.1 What are external experts?

These experts are often experienced entrepreneurs embedded within host PSBs. They are typically external to the host PSB prior to appointment and bring knowledge of the startup/innovation ecosystem, for example, as a founder or industry expert. They bring business and innovation expertise into public sector contexts. They can also help bridge and access external networks, such as potential investors or commercialisation partners. This can lead to the acceleration of commercial outcomes, such as licence deals or spinouts.

2.2 Benefits of bringing in external experts

Across public sector organisations and higher education institutions, external experts are used to achieve a range of benefits. The benefits are varied and will often depend on the objective of the external expert. For example, a long-term appointment brought in to work across a range of projects may deliver different benefits from a fixed-term appointment working to accelerate a specific commercialisation opportunity. Benefits are detailed in the following table.

Objective	Improving commercial processes	Networks and engagement	Culture development	Skills development
Benefits	• External experts act as a catalyst for moving research towards real-world application. By bringing commercial focus, prioritisation, and an external perspective they can accelerate decision-making and help PSBs move quickly from discovery to market-ready outputs. • External experts can often contribute to designing or strengthening structured innovation activity, such as pipelines, an IP policy or Knowledge Asset Management processes. This shifts PSBs from ad hoc commercialisation efforts to more systematic, repeatable programmes aligned with strategic priorities. • Accelerating the translation of promising KAs into viable companies, increasing the number of spinouts formally incorporated.	• External experts can leverage their own pre-existing networks and experience to support engagement with investors, industry partners and potential licensees. This can help the PSB build lasting relationships and have a wider range of contacts for future commercialisation work. • External experts can help structure and negotiate commercial agreements, including licences, to ensure the PSB gets sufficient value from any agreement. • The presence of an experienced entrepreneur signals intent and capability to external stakeholders. External experts can act as credible intermediaries who ‘speak the language’ of investors and industry, improving trust and increasing the likelihood of meaningful engagement.	• By working alongside teams and demonstrating commercial decision-making in practice, external experts help build confidence across senior leaders and operational staff. Over time, this reduces risk aversion and supports more informed, evidence-based decisions on commercialisation pathways. • External experts can positively influence culture change in a PSB. For example, they can provide validation of knowledge being developed by internal teams, enhancing their credibility so they feel empowered to present potential commercialisation opportunities to senior leaders in the future. • External experts can challenge assumed ways of working, introduce new approaches based on industry experience and embed a commercialisation focus into the PSB.	• External experts can support researchers by making commercialisation more accessible and relevant. Through mentoring and direct support, they help researchers understand the potential pathways for their work, leading to increased participation in innovation activity and stronger pipelines of opportunities. • External experts provide hands-on mentoring and coaching, transferring practical skills such as opportunity assessment, negotiation, investor engagement, and deal structuring. This builds longer-term capability within innovation and technology transfer teams, ensuring that expertise remains after the external expert’s role ends.

3.

How to access external experts

3.1 Routes

PSBs can appoint experts through a range of recruitment and procurement routes. For all routes, it is important that the appropriate HR policies and procedures within your organisation are followed. Clear responsibilities and expectations, including around compensation, should be communicated from the outset.

Potential recruitment routes include:

- open recruitment
- secondment
- public appointments
- fixed-term appointment

Procurement routes include:

- contract via an open competition
- contract via framework of pre-selected suppliers
- contingent labour

Open recruitment
This is a recruitment route where the role is publicly advertised, external to the PSB. This typically involves setting clear role criteria, advertising widely, for example, through public sector recruitment platforms, and assessing candidates objectively against published requirements to identify the individual best suited to deliver the required objectives.

Public appointments
This is the appointment of an individual as a public office holder, rather than an employee or contract. They are not a civil servant and don't have an employment contract and are appointed through the public appointments processes. This may be appropriate where a more ambassadorial role is required, or for someone whose objectives are to provide advice and insight at senior levels.

Contract via an open competition
A contract via an open competition is usually a temporary measure to cover a specific project or task, the contractor has a contractual agreement with the PSB to deliver services, which may be defined in terms of the activity or the outputs. This involves advertising a requirement directly to the market and conducting a full competitive procurement exercise.

Contingent labour
Contingent workers are temporary workers of all levels of seniority engaged to cover business as usual or specialist activities. They can be appointed without competition.

Contingent workers are often not direct employees of the PSB. They will likely be employed by the third party who the contingent worker is contracted to, for example, a resourcing company.

Secondment
A secondment is the temporary assignment of an employee from one organisation to another, such as between government organisations. The secondee remains employed by their home organisation and the individual typically stays on their home (external) payroll with costs reimbursed by the host PSB.

Fixed-term appointments

For time limited projects, a fixed-term appointment (FTA) may be appropriate, and you will probably wish to advertise the role. An FTA can also be made for a period of up to two years without advertising the post, if doing so to fill an urgent or short-term business need. If recruited on an FTA, the individual becomes a public sector employee, is paid according to public sector pay bands, and sits on headcount.

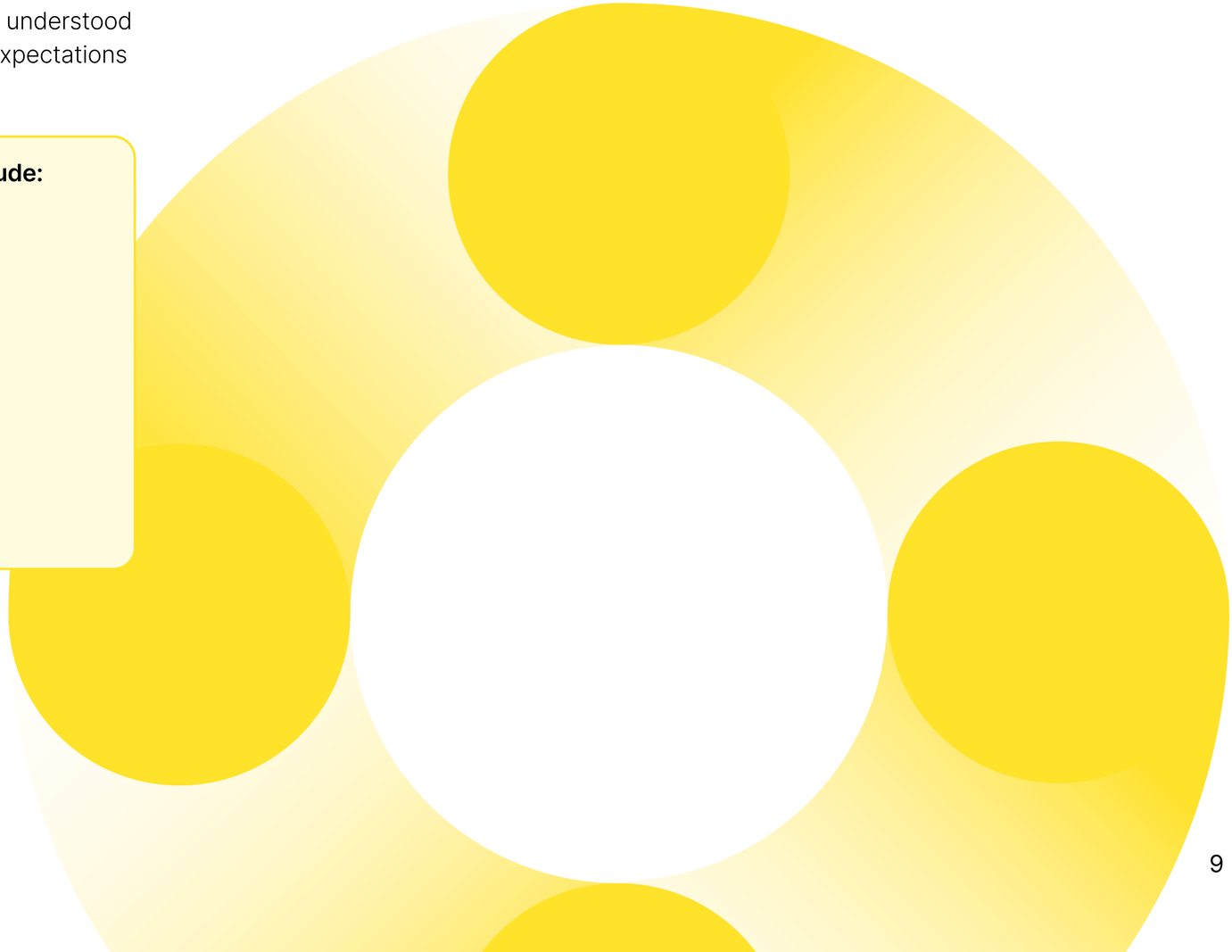
Contract via a framework of pre-selected suppliers
A contract via a framework of pre-selected suppliers is usually a pre-procured agreement where suppliers have already been evaluated and appointed, reducing the due diligence required.

3.2 Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities should be guided by the PSB's business and commercialisation needs. Roles and responsibilities should be decided before appointment, as they are used as a basis for decisions on how to recruit, salary and the model to use. These should be understood by both parties prior to appointment. The responsibilities set will affect the salary expectations of the individual.

Examples of roles and responsibilities an external expert could undertake include:

- mentoring and coaching existing innovation staff, improving internal capability
- upskilling them in commercialisation capability
- commercialisation strategy
- IP and KA portfolio review
- spinout support
- investor and partner engagement
- cultural challenge and decision-making support



4.

Making external experts work in practice – steps for success

4.1 Deciding on need and developing an approvals process

Successful appointments require clear roles, a supportive culture, and strong institutional buy-in, and these should be considered before recruitment. A PSB will need to consider these elements and capture them through internal approvals processes, which seek permission to recruit and recommends the most appropriate route.

These approvals will feed into the recruitment process, for example, the job advert and contract to ensure both parties are clear of the desired outcomes, objectives, roles and responsibilities expected of them.

4.2 Finding the right individual

Selecting the right individual is highly dependent on the task and PSB, as the role relies as much on judgement, credibility, and interpersonal fit as it does on technical expertise. An external expert typically operates across multiple levels of a PSB, engaging with researchers, advising senior leaders, and interfacing with external investors and partners. A well-matched external expert can build trust, act as a credible bridge to external networks, and accelerate both commercial outcomes and longer-term capability development. Careful selection is critical to ensuring the external expert adds value as a targeted, high-impact intervention.

Risks of a poor fit include:

- an external expert without the right experience or approach may struggle to identify viable commercial opportunities, engage effectively with researchers, or progress deals
- misalignment in working style or expectations can create friction with internal teams, reducing trust and impact
- unsuccessful engagements can provide a reputational risk, reducing confidence in the external expert model among senior leaders and external partners, making future adoption more difficult

It is advised that PSBs should look for evidence of a positive track record of collaborative delivery prior to making an appointment.

4.3 Managing expectations

When recruiting an external expert, there should be a shared understanding of expectations for how each party will work and conduct themselves. It may help to draft a 'code of conduct' between the PSB and the external expert to sit alongside a contract.

4.4 Setting objectives

Objectives should be agreed at the outset and linked to the activities, intended outcomes, and the responsibilities the PSB sets out, for example, mentoring, spinout creation etc. Reporting should be proportionate to the length of the appointment, with clear agreement on how progress will be measured and reviewed. Regular feedback on both delivery and mutual ways of working is important to ensure performance. At the end of the term, it is good practice to review whether objectives have been achieved.

4.5 Pre-employment and security checks

Anyone employed within the Civil Service must undergo pre-appointment checks in the same way as any new joiner (exclusions apply for contracted services). Any right to work requirements and security checks required should be undertaken as part of the onboarding process. There should be consideration of any additional security checks or approvals which may be required for the external expert's role.

For more information on security clearances visit National security vetting: clearance levels on GOV.UK.

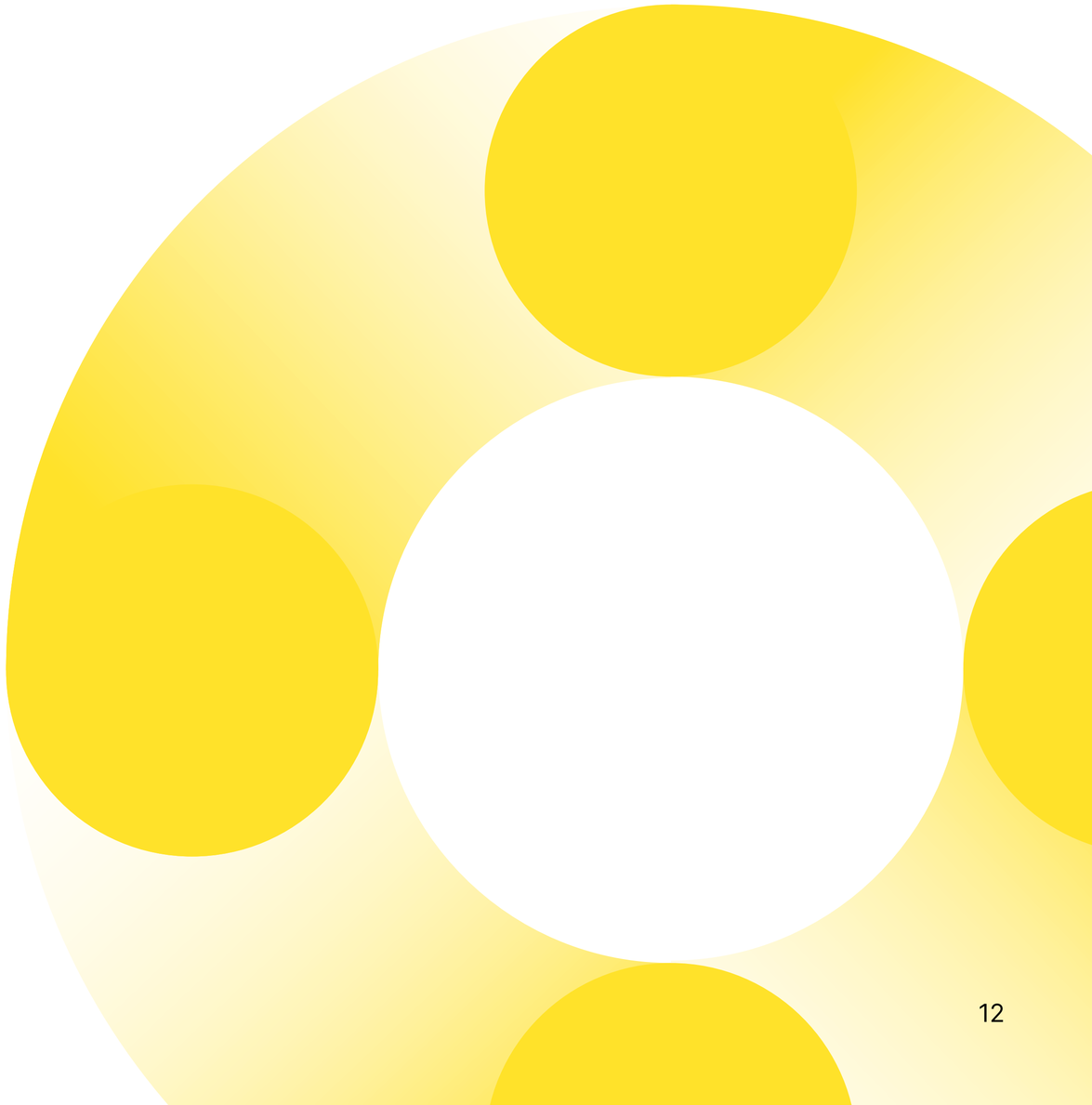
4.6 Onboarding – integration into public sector

Appropriate integration of external experts into the PSB is critical but can be challenging. Without this, external experts risk being under-utilised or facing cultural barriers as outsiders. Ensuring strategic alignment, mutual understanding and support to navigate the PSB are essential to harness their potential. It is best practice to plan for an intensive onboarding period where the external expert is introduced widely within the host PSB.

To ensure this happens:

- secure top-level buy-in and communicate and reinforce the external expert's role to staff
- pair the external expert with internal sponsors or 'buddies' and include them in relevant teams and committees from the start
- empower them with access to information and resources, for example, provide a workspace, support staff, appropriate accounts and access to information
- proactively identify where internal knowledge and expertise will be required, for example, to navigate internal governance and stakeholders

While integrating external experts, the PSB should ensure consistent messaging with them and colleagues of their remit and how to engage, including where the external expert may have other roles outside of the PSB.



4.7 Conflicts of interest

These experts are often experienced entrepreneurs from the private sector. Therefore, they may have conflicts of interest (CoIs) to be managed. For example, pre-existing business interests could conflict with impartiality or objectivity, or future ambitions may inform their proposed approach.

CoIs, both real and perceived, should be identified prior to appointment. There should be a clear plan to manage these conflicts and this plan should be approved and reviewed regularly by senior stakeholders. CoIs are likely to exist and the focus shouldn't be to wholly eliminate them, but instead to identify and manage them appropriately, so any advice given can be transparent.

Prior CoIs

CoIs may exist before the appointment, for example, the expert might have shares in companies that could benefit from recommendations they make or from access to public sector IP. This includes associations with companies operating in an adjacent field such as holding equity, sitting on advisory boards, and formal appointments. In these scenarios, any CoIs should be declared in advance, in line with Cabinet Office guidance.

Developing CoIs

CoIs might also develop over the course of their appointment at a PSB. For example, the expert might support the development of a KA which could potentially spinout, and there might be scope for them to gain equity or a role in the spinout. This could impact their advice on the commercial direction of the KA, as they could stand to benefit individually from this outcome, even though it might not be the best option for the PSB. In this circumstance, the PSB should be aware that any advice isn't wholly impartial. Given this concern, PSBs should be clear when appointing the external expert whether equity or a role in a spinout will be an option. If the PSB sets that it is an option, then they can consider the advice given by the expert accordingly.

To manage CoIs, expectations need to be set early. Organisations should consider discussing at the outset whether involvement in spinouts may be possible. Setting clear expectations can help avoid misunderstandings and reduce the likelihood of conflicts developing later in the appointment.

Best practice

- Discuss potential roles or equity in spinouts at the start of the appointment.
- Document any governance processes for managing and raising CoIs, for example, going through a process of listing real and perceived CoIs, then record any actions that are taken to mitigate any of these CoIs.
- Ensure that any transition from external expert to working in a spinout or equity holder is managed transparently, for example, by setting clear deliverables that set a clear boundary between the advisory role to the PSB and any role in the future spinout.
- Ensure confidential information is protected. Where experts have access to commercially sensitive or proprietary information, PSBs should put appropriate contractual and governance arrangements in place to protect that information.

4.8 Knowledge Assets created by external experts

Ownership of KAs created by external experts depends on their work relationship with the PSB and the chosen recruitment route. Generally, KAs created by employees in the ordinary course of their duties belong to the employer (the PSB) unless there is a specific agreement to the contrary.

KAs created by non-employees (such as a consultant or contractor) will usually be owned by the non-employee, rather than the PSB, unless there is a contractual agreement to the contrary.

It is good practice to include in any contractual agreement with external experts specific terms defining who will own the KAs created in the course of the work relationship, irrespective of the employee or non-employee status, to provide clarity and to avoid potential disputes. However, it is important to note that additional terms in employment contracts may not be enforceable if they diminish employees' rights, contradict statutory provisions or are unfairly broad.

Where KAs are generated by external experts in their own time outside the scope of the work they were contracted to do by the PSB, the KAs will usually belong to that individual.

A PSB should keep detailed records of external experts, KAs created by external experts and any contractual agreements relating to the creation of the KAs.

4.9 Exit of external expert

From the outset, there should be a clear pathway for the external expert to exit the PSB once the outcomes have been met or the contract has finished.

Well before the end of an appointment, PSBs should ensure that knowledge and outputs are transferred to appropriate internal owners and that any ongoing activities have a clear path forward. A formal exit review should assess whether objectives have been met, plus whether secondary benefits have been achieved. Lessons learned should be captured to inform future appointments and maximise long-term benefit.

There should be careful consideration of contractual provisions needed, such as handling of sensitive information and how long these provisions should last upon exit. Appropriate security, information governance, confidentiality and CoI arrangements should remain in place following departure. The PSB should consider how they will meet the needs of the project post-completion and if there will be any capability gaps.

GOTT can provide further information on how to access this expertise in the public sector. Please contact GOTT@dsit.gov.uk.

Annex A: External expert appointment checklist

Practice	Benefit
Before appointment	
Define desired outcome and objectives	Allows external expert's work to support host PSB's priorities and business needs, so their impact is relevant and valued.
Define roles, responsibilities and reporting, supported by an appropriate legal agreement	Prevents role ambiguity and misalignment, which can lead to expert under-utilisation, drifting focus or overstretch.
Obtain executive sponsorship and internal buy-in	Mitigates internal resistance or indifference by giving the external expert visible backing. Reduces cultural barriers by signalling leadership commitment to integrate external expertise.
Identify most appropriate recruitment route	Ensures the appropriate external expert will be appointed with relevant experience and on appropriate timescales.
Define confidentiality requirements through legal agreements (for example, non-disclosure agreements)	Ensures the PSB can share confidential or commercially sensitive information with the external expert without concern that it will be exploited separately.
Complete governance, approvals and selection processes	Governance – provides appropriate approvals and oversight. Commercial – financial, compliance and contractual due diligence. Capability – skills, experience, track record and references.
When expert joins the organisation	
Thorough induction (systems, processes)	Avoids slow start or integration delays by equipping the external expert with tools and knowledge to operate effectively from day one. Also addresses potential compliance issues (security, CoIs) upfront.
Identify and address current or potential CoIs	The PSB should go through an exercise with the expert to declare any real or perceived CoIs, the organisation should assess which are relevant and decide whether mitigation is necessary. The PSB should then record any mitigating actions (including exclusion from certain activity) as appropriate.
Cultural orientation and relationship-building	Reduces potential public/private sector divide or bureaucratic friction, fostering mutual understanding instead of tension. Encourages trust and collaboration rather than suspicion of the outsider.
Resourcing and support infrastructure	Providing a small budget, admin support, commitments to collaborate etc. avoids the risk of the external expert being a 'figurehead' who can't implement ideas. Giving the external expert confidence and the ability to focus on achieving the desired outcome.
Setting milestones and identifying early wins	Mitigates credibility risk – delivering quick wins builds the expert's legitimacy and counters scepticism.

Annex A: External expert appointment checklist

Practice	Benefit
Throughout the duration of the role	
Regular check-ins and mid-course corrections	Prevents prolonged drift or miscommunication. By monitoring and adjusting, avoids the scenario where issues fester and the expert's contributions stagnate or diverge from needs.
Embedding in appropriate governance and routines	Tackles isolation risk – instead of being peripheral, the expert becomes part of decision processes, mitigating the 'outsider' status and under-use.
Capturing knowledge and legacy planning	Avoids loss of institutional learning when the expert departs. Ensuring insights, networks and processes introduced by the expert persist and continue benefiting the host PSB.
Close to expert's departure	
Recognition and closure	Prevents demotivation (for the expert and colleagues) by acknowledging achievements. Also reduces stakeholder cynicism by demonstrating that the expert role had concrete outcomes worth celebrating.
Stakeholder communication	Ensure all parties are aware of departure and next steps and avoids dependency on one individual by informing relevant staff and partners of the expert's departure and clarify future points of contact.
Revoke access to internal systems	Ensures the external expert only has access to organisation systems and potentially confidential information for the duration of their appointment.
Confirm continuing obligations relating to confidential information, intellectual property, data protection, future commercial engagements with the PSB	Ensures that any commercially sensitive knowledge gained over the duration of the appointment is protected from being used in a way that would harm the PSB's interests.

Annex B: Case study

Accessing external commercialisation expertise to help build an investable deep-tech spinout – K3 Metrology Ltd (K3M)

GOTT supported the National Physical Laboratory (NPL) with spinning out K3M – a company set up to commercialise Metralis, a next-gen metrology system developed over more than 15 years of research.

We were able to provide commercialisation expertise, advice, support on routes to market, market analysis and providing grant funding at an early stage. This helped NPL navigate key decisions and progress the technology towards a point where they identified that creating a spinout was the most appropriate option.

As part of this process, NPL came to the decision that they needed to bring in external expertise.

The need

The founders at NPL were research professionals with deep understanding of the technology. However, they had limited experience of the spinout process, so NPL decided to approach an external expert with experience in company formation and raising funding to assist them in turning the research into an investable company.

The approach

Coaching and mentoring the founders was at the core of the external expert's contribution. They worked hand in hand with the founding team and were a sounding board and support, from short calls, to in depth sessions as required. The expert aimed to improve individuals' capability so they could ultimately be self-sufficient once their contribution had ended.

Delivery

Through the expert's experience in entrepreneurship and investment, they were able to help the founders define a clear commercial framework setting out:

- an investor-facing narrative
- a defined go-to-market strategy
- a coherent business model and pricing logic

This provided the founders with structure and an understanding of how they were going to navigate the spinout process.

Outcomes

This contribution enabled NPL to successfully spinout K3M with £2.75 million of seed investment and a credible plan to generate £20 million to £25 million of revenue within five years.

What this demonstrates

This shows that targeted support, including mentoring and advice, can allow organisations address capability gaps. The expert was able to provide specialist advice which allowed the founders to take their exceptional research and turn it into a successful spinout. It also enabled one founder to transition from research professional to becoming the successful CEO of K3M.

£2.75 million
Seed round secured

Over £20 million
Revenue scale (5 years)

Over 15 years
R&D translated

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