



The route to market...

Alta Innovations Ltd provides specialist support to academics at the University of Birmingham as they take their ideas to market.

Commercialisation process

At the University of Birmingham, academic staff and doctoral researchers pursue ideas, undertake research and transfer their knowledge to create significant global impact. Through **Alta Innovations Ltd**, the University's technology transfer company, these ideas can be developed into products or services either through licensing to a commercial partner or, in exceptional cases, through the creation of a new spinout company.

The Alta Innovations team is made up of highly experienced and skilled professionals who guide researchers through the steps needed to take their inventions to market. The following information summarises the main steps and answers frequently asked questions.

Alta Innovations has developed effective relationships with myself, and my colleagues, and is always available to give practical advice and support on new inventions from my research group. I have worked with Alta Innovations to file eight patent applications which has helped to create industry funded research projects and studentships generating in excess of £1.5m over the past two years.

Professor Ian Norton, School of Chemical Engineering
College of Engineering and Physical Sciences
University of Birmingham

Research

Research can generate discoveries that can be protected by patents or copyright. To decide if an invention is patentable Alta Innovations needs to understand the novel features, the problems associated with existing products or services and how the invention represents an improvement.

Invention disclosure

The Inventor provides Alta Innovations with an outline of the invention or idea on a 'Record of Invention' form. This document may help establish the University's background Intellectual Property (IP) in collaborative projects and the date and ownership of the invention should future disputes occur.

Assessment

Alta Innovations assesses the patentability and commercial potential of the invention and decides whether to file a patent application or apply for other protection such as trademark. A patent may cost in excess of £50k over its lifetime so it must have a reasonable prospect of earning back the University's investment.

Patent protection

Alta Innovations and the inventor file a UK patent application. Alta Innovations progresses the patent to the international phase if further market and financial assessment proves positive.

* see separate flow chart

* Patent protection

Provisional UK patent application

Accumulated cost £5k

The inventor provides Alta Innovations with a 'Record of Invention' which is processed rapidly for patenting and Alta Innovations carries out an initial analysis of the market opportunity.

12 months

International (PCT) application

Accumulated cost £10k

The inventor provides Alta Innovations with further results to support the initial filing and Alta Innovations develops a marketing strategy and starts discussions with potential customers.

30 months

National application

Accumulated cost £20–35k

The inventor works with Alta Innovations to discuss the key market, patent territories and potential licensees. Alta Innovations aims to negotiate a deal with a licensee before entry into national phase.

from 33 months

Examination of national filing

Accumulated cost £25–75k

The inventor provides comments on the examiners' objections to patentability and Alta Innovations manages the examination process.

Granted patents in specific countries

Accumulated cost £30–100k

The inventor provides supporting information if/when the patent is challenged and Alta Innovations maintains the patent in collaboration with a licensee.

Patent maintained whilst in use

Increasing renewal cost

Patent usually expires 20 years after initial filing date.



Did you know?

- The service provided by Alta Innovations is financed by the University and the inventor does not incur any patent costs or any fees.
- Nearly 60% of all inventions protected by Alta Innovations are licensed or assigned within 18 months of disclosure to Alta Innovations.
- Researchers can enhance their reputation, create impact and gain income from their inventions.

Route to market

Alta Innovations and the inventor assess whether to do one of the following:

Find a licensee

Alta Innovations seeks licensees to commercialise the invention and negotiates the deal. The licensee commercialises the invention and the income is shared between the University and the inventor.

OR

Easy access IP

The patent could be submitted to Easy Access IP, a collaborative programme with other Universities whereby IP is provided to third parties free of charge with a view to fostering long-term relationships with commercial partners.

OR

Form a spinout

In exceptional cases it may be more appropriate to commercialise IP through formation of a spinout company. In such cases, a business plan is prepared and validated, a management team assembled, and investment secured. After approval from the Alta Innovations Board and the University Executive Board the company is launched with the inventor, the University, the management team, and investors having a shareholding.

Frequently asked questions

Question	Answer
What is the first step for a researcher looking to protect an idea?	They complete and submit a 'Record of Invention' form, available on the Alta Innovations website www.alta.bham.ac.uk or via the contact details below.
How does the University decide whether it will protect an idea?	Alta Innovations use the information provided to assess the idea against a set of defined criteria. They will also initiate a search of published patents and papers to establish that the idea is novel; that there is an 'inventive step' and that the invention offers advantages over competitive technologies. Alta Innovations will also need to establish that a commercial route could exist to recoup patent costs and that the idea fits with University strategy.
Who else is involved with the decision?	The researcher's Head of College or delegate such as the College Director of Knowledge Transfer and the CEO of Alta Innovations/Director of the University's Research and Innovation Services.
How long does it take to protect an idea and can it be published in the meantime?	Alta Innovations will typically complete the initial stage of the patent application process in about four weeks. Once the application has been filed with the UK Patent Office the work can be published and presented. However, it is important that further information isn't disclosed at this stage (such as the results of recent related research) as this may make it impossible to strengthen the application later or file further patent applications.
What is involved in filing a patent?	Alta Innovations pass a full and complete disclosure of the invention to a patent attorney who prepares a draft patent application for review. The final patent application will be filed at the UK Intellectual Property Office.
Who pays the fees to protect the inventions resulting from research at the University of Birmingham?	Alta Innovations and the University pay the patent costs. No fees are incurred by the researcher for the services provided by Alta Innovations.
Who helps with the legal details?	The team at Alta Innovations is highly experienced in dealing with intellectual property law and supports researchers through the process, explaining the language that patent attorneys sometimes use.
Once an idea is protected, how can it be exploited commercially?	Normally through a license deal, however, in exceptional circumstances Alta Innovations may advise that the formation of a spinout company might be appropriate.
If an idea is to be licensed, what happens next?	Alta Innovations will undertake market research to identify potential licensees who they then approach with a view towards commercialisation. Any net revenue after deduction of patent costs, such as patent filings, is divided between the researcher and the University in accordance with University policy.
How does the process for setting up a spinout company begin?	Alta Innovations in collaboration with the University's Head of Spinout Portfolio assess the opportunity to understand whether the formation of a new business could be viable. If so the Head of Spinout Portfolio will then guide and assist the researcher in developing the proposition and enlist support of management and investors. A formal presentation will need to be made to the Board of Alta Innovations.
What is Easy Access IP?	A collaboration of several UK universities who offer some of their IP to business free of charge, in return for the opportunity to establish long term relationships with commercial partners.

What's next?

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