

# Is Innovation and Commercialization has become a High Political Priority Everywhere?

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**Received date:** December 1, 2021; **Accepted date:** December 15, 2021; **Published date:** December 22, 2021

## Description

The river of research, ideas and innovation does not know its source—in this case, the origin of national investments into them. Researchers are increasingly expected to show entrepreneurial spirit and recognize the commercial potential of their work; universities are encouraged to protect and capitalize on their intellectual property; and students are being trained to fill the gap between discovery of new knowledge and its development in the context of application [1]. Entrepreneurs have become a much sought-after resource in Europe; venture capital, which in Europe is currently far below the US level, should be raised to be on a par; and citizens should become more involved with research, development and innovation. Indirect discrimination is disadvantaging women in their battle to build an academic research career [2]. That's the conclusion of a report published just before Christmas which looked at the grant application behaviour of men and women at U.K. universities. The study shows that qualified women are less likely to apply for grants and, when they do, ask for less money than their male colleagues. The report's authors cite a number of contributing factors, including the dearth of women in senior research positions. In 1997, two Swedish researchers, Christine Wenneras and Agnes Wold, made a startling discovery: Women submitting applications for funding to the Swedish Medical Research Council needed to be 2.5 times more productive than their male colleagues in order to achieve the same peer-review rating [3].

The report prompted some immediate soul-searching at the welcome trust research charity. A limited trust study found that women who applied for welcome grants were just as likely to be successful as men. But the study also uncovered the fact that women were applying for project grants in smaller numbers than would be expected. So the six research councils and the trust combined forces and commissioned national center for social research researchers Margaret Blake and Ivana La Valle to find out why.

## River of Research

Scientists often learn more from studies that fail. But failed studies can mean career death. So instead, they're incentivized to generate positive results they can publish. And the phrase "publish or perish" hangs over nearly every decision. It's a nagging whisper, like a Jedi's path to the dark side [4]. The scientific process, in its ideal form, is elegant: Ask a question, set up an objective test, and get an answer

repeat. Science is rarely practiced to that ideal. But Copernicus believed in that ideal. So did the rocket scientists behind the moon landing. But nowadays, our respondents told us, the process is riddled with conflict. Scientists say they're forced to prioritize self-preservation over pursuing the best questions and uncovering meaningful truths.

## Proportional Share of High-Impact or Highly Cited

In doing so, he identified three challenges facing EU member states in the years to come. First, he said that Europe is lagging behind in transferring the results of research into new products and services: too often, new technologies that are developed in Europe are commercialized elsewhere. Second, Europe needs to improve the quality of its research output: although the EU generates more scientific results and publications than any other region in the world, it does not capture a proportional share of high-impact or highly cited landmark publications. Third, he noted that Europe punches below its weight in international science and science diplomacy: Europe's voice should be more actively raised in global debates. Recent discussions and moratoria about gain-of-function experiments in virology or about modifying the human germ line confirm the Commissioner's point: they are mostly initiated and driven by US researchers, and the USA is still the most influential country in terms of international science policy debates [5].

Acknowledging openness in this triple mode certainly reflects the contemporary transformation of science and innovation and how both now function in a global context. Science and innovation are open enterprises and neither can be contained within disciplinary, institutional, national or regional boundaries. At the same time, more openness to the world also increases international competition. Both Europe and the USA have seen their overall share of global research activities, scientific publications and claims of discovery decrease. Not because they have become worse, but simply because other countries and regions have begun to catch up after investing massively into research. Likewise, innovation and commercialization has become a high political priority everywhere [6]. But, like science, innovation does not respect national boundaries. The relationship between a country's investment into research and the benefits it reaps in terms of innovative new products and services is far from simple and involves many actors, factors and conditions.

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