

Turn academic research into commercial success, business study says



Ron Gaudet has been appointed to a new position at the University of Windsor on November 27, 2012.



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Turning research at Ontario's universities into commercial success stories is key to improving the province's economy, says a study released this week by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

While the majority of 2,400 businesses surveyed are confident about their future, the report makes a number of recommendations for improvement. They include commercializing research, bridging the skills gap, providing easier access to startup funding, providing easier access to federal Scientific Research and Experimental Development funding, fostering entrepreneurship, and streamlining business and government interaction and regulations.

Ontario universities are world leaders in research and development but far too little of their work gets commercialized, the study says.

“I really believe commercializing research is a key factor in economic growth,” said Ron Gaudet, special adviser for innovation strategies at the University of Windsor. “A lot of research which takes place never percolates into the commercial world and we’re missing out on opportunities.”

One of Gaudet’s responsibilities is to encourage collaboration between researchers at the university’s Centre for Engineering Innovation and the manufacturing, commercial and information technology sectors.

Matt Marchand, president of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, said he’s heartened by the results of the study.

“We’re on board with commercializing research and we’ve already had discussions with the university about how we can help develop those relationships,” he said. “If you don’t do R&D today, you’ll have no jobs tomorrow.”

Access to government funding is critical because of the large amount of research and development work being done in the region, Marchand said.

Two local examples of how university-led research has moved into the commercial sector are Tessonics Inc. and the Institute for Diagnostic Imaging Research, both led by U of Windsor physics professor Roman Maev. The companies use diagnostic imaging technology to help clients in the manufacturing, medicine and military sectors as well as the art world.

The chamber study cites as another example Toronto’s Banting and Best Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship which helps develop early-stage enterprises and spinoff companies to commercialize academic discoveries. The centre has created 79 private-sector jobs and raised almost \$23 million in private and public sector investment since it was established in September of last year.

“We’re planning to see the Banting-Best centre because we’re always interested in studying best practices to see how they might apply in Windsor,” said Gaudet.

Overall, the chamber study makes 43 recommendations for bringing government, private and institutional sectors together in helping businesses survive and prosper in an ever-changing environment. They include using Ontario’s immigrant population to stimulate exports, tackling the underground economy, changing the province’s employment and training services, establishing FedDev as a permanent funding agency and promoting entrepreneurship in classrooms.