

### **Session 3: Plenary Session**

**Title:** Globalisation from the perspective of the private sector: public-private sector partnerships

**Speakers:**

Ms Lee Bee Wah, Partner, LBW Consultants, Singapore

Dr Jeff Southerton, Portfolio Head, Strategic Alliances, Pfizer Limited, UK

**Chair:** Dr Graeme Fogelberg, Vice-Chancellor, University of Otago, New Zealand and Vice-Chair of the ACU Council

**Rapporteur:** Dr Nigel Voak, ACU

**Ms Lee Bee Wah** spoke first on behalf of LBW Consultants, a civil construction consultancy firm based in Singapore. She began by emphasizing that whereas public-private sector partnerships were previously bilateral and nationally based, multilateral and global partnerships have now become much more common. Yet the prime motivation for private companies remains financial, as they seek to gain a competitive edge by engaging in multiple network occupancies. She then went on to give examples in Singapore (and Japan) of a range of public-private sector partnerships:

- private sector/local government partnerships. Firms notionally in competition with one another have worked together on public projects.
- private sector/university partnerships. In Singapore research and development is often undertaken in universities on behalf of private sector companies. The ownership of intellectual property will depend upon the resources the company has put in. If the financial burden has been shared then the university will share the rights, otherwise the private sector company will hold them in full.
- university/government partnerships. The example given here was of co-operation between an American and a Singapore university on a water-purifying scheme, with funding from the Singapore government. It was noted that such public projects have obvious benefits for the lives of Singapore citizens.

*There was a suggestion, albeit far from explicit, in this presentation that private sector companies assert their rights vigorously to intellectual property in Singapore in a way that may disadvantage universities. There is perhaps an issue here for ACU to explore.*

**Dr Jeff Southerton** then spoke on the way in which Pfizer, a major international pharmaceutical company, interacts with universities, and what in particular university institutes need to bear in mind if they wish to gain funding from Pfizer for research projects. Pfizer conducts a good deal of research internally, having an overall research and development budget of \$4.5 billion per annum. At various stages of their research process they will, however, work with universities, where they need access to expert knowledge.

Dr Southerton emphasized throughout his presentation that the institutes that succeed in collaborating with Pfizer have the following characteristics:

- an understanding of Pfizer's business and values
- an active wish to collaborate, in a timely fashion
- transparency and care as regards the costing of university expenses
- flexibility, and honesty about expectations

In short, the more a university looks like a commercial organisation the more it will be treated like one.

He considered the skill and expertise of a technology transfer office to be central in facilitating the liaison between universities and private sector companies. Where there are poor relations between institutes and this office, partnerships with private-sector companies are likely to be damaged.

Regarding the question of intellectual property, and universities receiving a share of the financial benefits, Dr Southerton urged universities to realise that research and development was a high-risk process for Pfizer, and that not many projects bore fruit. He also noted that the creation of spin-off companies by universities to exploit their research was often a problem, as such companies would then be competing with Pfizer. As far as the question of publication is concerned, he acknowledged that academics often sought total freedom here, but observed that since Pfizer often required a delay of only a few months, a compromise could usually be reached on this issue.

More generally, Dr Southerton noted that collaboration has become more multi-party and international, but that bilateral agreements still predominate, and in his opinion will continue to do so. Multi-party arrangements allow diverse expertise to be applied to a project, and can avoid the duplication of effort, but it can also take longer for decisions to be reached, and language and time-zone factors can create problems. He emphasized, though, that Pfizer is a global company, and will go wherever it is necessary to gain the expertise it seeks.

## **Discussion**

In the questions that followed, Dr Southerton was asked about longer-term collaborations, and he replied by emphasizing that their schemes are short-term, and that if they are not delivering after two years then they will be abandoned. Fears were also expressed by one vice-chancellor, with evident agreement from some others, that universities were in danger of becoming too commercialised, and that they needed to retain their values when co-operating with commercial companies. Dr Southerton in reply noted this concern, and accepted that universities would, for instance, wish to publish negative results, which he did not object to as long as he could have an input over the question of presentation.