

# EFFICIENCY FOR ACCESS DESIGN CHALLENGE: CONNECTING ACADEMIA AND INDUSTRY

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KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE  
EVENT HOSTED ON 13 MAY 2021



Recognising the importance of forging long-lasting relationships between universities and the off-grid appliance industry, a key objective of the Efficiency for Access Design Challenge, the team hosted an event to provide a platform for private sector companies and academia to meet and explore these collaborations.

This consisted of a presentation on a working collaboration, guided discussion on the benefits of such a relationship and how to foster them, and a networking session to try to begin nurturing some. Here are the key takeaways from the event.

### SPOTLIGHT: THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL (UOB) AND PEOPLE, ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (PEEDA)

**Our speakers, Sam Williamson, a lecturer at UoB, and Biraj Gautam, CEO of PEEDA, presented on how their fruitful partnership between academia and industry formed, what its benefits and challenges are, and advice for how to foster similar relationships – a clear picture of a positive collaboration.**

- Their relationship came through a chance encounter and mutual interest and grew from there
- Co-developed several small grant proposals since: A hybrid microgrid project which led to further rural electrification project; why microhydro fails; turgo turbine development – bringing two new turbine designs to the Nepali Microhydro market; and an e-cooking proposal which has since cemented the PEEDA-UoB team as a key e-cooking player in Nepal
- Joint published two academic papers
- They received follow-on funding for projects

#### **Key lessons from the UoB & PEEDA collaboration:**

- Facilitating experimentation in the field and input and diversifying ideas and perspectives can help enhance academic research
- Continuous technical support from the academic team improved work quality and confidence of the PEEDA team members
- Collaborating with international experts on both sides improved motivation and exposure
- Partnership has helped to develop new projects and connect to new funding sources

#### **Key recommendations:**

- Develop a friendly relationship
- Understand and appreciate your individual cultural differences, strengths, and weaknesses
- Build on small projects



### FACILITATED DISCUSSION – KEY TAKEAWAYS

Following the presentation and Q&A, representatives from companies and universities were split into breakout rooms groups to discuss how to build successful relationships between academia and industry and potential benefits.

#### **What are the most important ingredients in a successful partnership between academia and industry in the off-grid appliance industry?**

- Mutual interest and commitment to a project
- Funding to take the relationship beyond sharing ideas and will continue to support the project through setbacks or potential failure.
- Flexibility and willingness to create contracts and MoUs that benefit both parties equally and set out clear responsibilities and objectives for each party
- Sensitivity to the conflicting interests of academia and industry in sharing findings
- Understanding that each party has different areas of experience and expertise

## EFFICIENCY FOR ACCESS DESIGN CHALLENGE

### For industry, how can academics help you in your work?

- Academia can help identify gaps or needs for innovation better than other people working in industry
- Academia can help answer questions that those in the industry might not have the time or resources to explore
- Academics can support in the analysis of data and assessment of industry projects
- Universities can provide fresh perspectives and ideas to industry projects
- Academics can provide long-term ambitions as industry typically works on shorter timelines
- Access to research equipment that industry might be unable to afford
- University's typically greater international reach can provide opportunities for connections

### For academics, what kind of input would you like from private sector representatives?

- Access to market knowledge and practical case studies for both academics and students
- A greater understanding of in-country contexts and ground level needs – and advising on curriculum and research to meet these needs
- The ability to expose students to work in the field
- Industry involvement can attract funding as it provides the potential for monetary returns
- Support student in transitioning from academia to industry e.g., through mentoring/internships
- Allow students to take part in and provide insight to industry projects
- Test out innovative ideas in the field as proof of concept

### NEXT STEPS

If there is an Efficiency for Access Design Challenge industry partner or academic that you would like to collaborate with, or if you want to participate in the Efficiency for Access Design Challenge, please get in touch with us:

**[EforAchallenge@est.org.uk](mailto:EforAchallenge@est.org.uk)**

### What else is missing?

- Spaces for initial contact to be made and ideas to be shared, which is particularly difficult internationally
- An understanding of how to keep these relationships going long term
- Channels for visas to be granted – an obstacle to international in-person collaboration
- A need to consider other project stakeholders such as the impacted communities
- An understanding of what the combined strength of these partnerships can have in influencing policy and community changes
- Careful measurement of the benefits and impacts of collaborations and their outputs
- Developing a budget and policy within the institutions of academia

