

University spin-offs and technology transfer

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The University of Basel and the Department of Biosystems Science and Engineering of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Basel are important sources of new companies. Their inventions are managed by technology transfer offices, which negotiate licence agreements and equity participations with the founders. Unitectra, the technology transfer organisation of the Universities of Basel, Bern and Zurich, was established in 1999 as a joint company of these universities.¹ The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich has its own technology transfer office, which also serves the Basel department.

Swiss universities generally own the inventions of their employees under cantonal university law or under the employment provisions of the Code of Obligations, which allow the employer to claim inventions made in the course of employment.² The terms on which universities transfer their inventions to start-ups are therefore a central question for founders. A university may take shares in the company, a royalty on future sales, or a combination of both. Investors watch these terms carefully, because a university's stake or royalty that is too high can make a company unattractive for later financing. The Swiss Innovation Agency, Innosuisse, supports the transfer process with grants and coaching programmes for start-ups.³

1 Notes

1. On Unitectra AG, the technology transfer organisation of the Universities of Basel, Bern and Zurich, established in 1999, see its annual reports. To be verified. ↩
2. Art. 332 of the Swiss Code of Obligations on inventions made by employees in the performance of their duties, together with the cantonal university legislation on the ownership of research results. To be verified. ↩

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3. On the funding instruments of Innosuisse for start-ups and innovation projects, see the Federal Act on the Promotion of Research and Innovation (RIPA) and Innosuisse's annual reports. To be verified.



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