LINKING INDUSTRY TO UNIVERSITIES

(Applicable to Q23: How should an Accord help Australia increase collaboration between industry, government and universities to solve big challenges?)

I have been a university researcher in Australia for 48 years. Throughout those five decades, successive enquiries have regularly identified that Australian university research is very strong, but translation into innovation with commercial outcomes is weak by international standards. Correspondingly throughout those decades, governments have pressured universities to align their research more closely with the needs of industry. Ever-increasing shares of government research funding require linkage, in one form or another, to end-users. Statements of applied or national benefit are part of every proposal. University research offices strongly pressure new lecturers to focus their attention on applied funding. Surely it has become sufficiently clear that the problem with translation lies with the Australian commercial and industrial sector not with Australian universities? It is no use continuing to pressure universities about this. Indeed it risks damaging Australia's strength in basic research. What is needed is more effective incentives for companies to work with universities. The R&D Tax Incentive is a very large government expenditure. It would be worth asking why more of that expenditure does not make use of the talent in Australian universities