

## From Friction to Fit Innovation Toolkit

Universities are increasingly expected to produce impactful innovation, not just patents or publications, but real ventures, founders, and societal value. Yet too often, the systems designed to support this work operate in silos. In particular, the relationship between entrepreneurship centres and tech transfer offices (TTOs) is frequently fragmented, misaligned, or under-leveraged. This toolkit helps address that gap.

### Who is it for?

This resource is designed for institutional leaders, research office leaders, TTO directors, entrepreneurship centre directors, and others responsible for supporting entrepreneurial activity in higher education. This toolkit can help you better understand the structural tensions in your system and think about pathways to improve collaboration.

### What does it do?

The toolkit contains four components:

#### 1. **Fault Line Typology**

A framework for diagnosing where and why tensions emerge between entrepreneurship centres and TTOs and what to do about them.

#### 2. **Institutional Design Principles**

Practical, transferable principles.

#### 3. **Self-Assessment Tool**

A structured reflective instrument to help you evaluate the state of collaboration in your institution and identify areas for improvement.

#### 4. **Alimetry case**

Illustrates the collaboration between an entrepreneurship centre and TTO.

### How to use it

- As a strategic conversation starter between units
- In team workshops or innovation retreats
- For new leader onboarding
- As a starter for ecosystem mapping and redesign

This toolkit supports the presentation *From Friction to Fit: Helping Entrepreneurship Centres and TTOs Work Together*, delivered at the Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centres (GCEC) Conference 2025. It reflects lessons learned through more than a decade of collaboration between the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) and UniServices. Contact: Rod McNaughton, Academic Director CIE – [r.mcnaughton@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:r.mcnaughton@auckland.ac.nz)

## 1. Fault Line Typology

Use this table to diagnose common sources of tension between entrepreneurship centres and tech transfer offices. Reflect on where your institution sits across each dimension.

Dimension	Entrepreneurship Centre Logic	Tech Transfer Office Logic	Why it can be a source of friction	Ways to reduce friction
<b>Incentives</b>	Student/founder learning and venture creation	Licensing revenue and institutional IP ownership	Misaligned success metrics: one values educational outcomes, the other financial returns from IP.	Define shared goals around founder success and societal impact; co-develop blended metrics.
<b>Access Model</b>	Inclusive, open to all students, staff, and alumni	Selective, focused on research staff with patentable outputs	TTOs may overlook non-traditional or early-stage ventures that fall outside IP pipelines.	Develop joint intake protocols and triage systems; clarify when and how ventures “graduate” from CIE to TTO.
<b>Time Horizon</b>	Short, iterative, agile cycles	Long, linear commercialisation timelines	Timing misalignments frustrate founders, especially when speed matters (e.g. early MVP testing).	Map venture timelines explicitly and build asynchronous support models with clear stage gates.
<b>Conception of Risk</b>	Market risk, iterative learning, validation via action	Legal/IP risk, institutional risk mitigation	Risk is interpreted differently: CIE encourages experimentation, TTOs may resist it without IP protection.	Build shared frameworks for risk staging; train staff on the other's risk tolerance and decision logic.
<b>Conception of Value</b>	Capability building, entrepreneurial mindset, and networks	IP protection, financial valuation, investment readiness	Founders receive mixed messages about what matters: learning or licensing? Purpose or protection?	Establish a shared venture development model that values both learning and IP. Use founder-centred messaging.

## 2. Institutional Design Principles

Use these principles to guide strategic alignment in your own ecosystem.

Principle	What It Means (Insight)	Why It Matters (Problem It Solves)	How to Implement (Examples)
<b>Design for overlap, not just handoff</b>	Entrepreneurship centres and TTOs share overlapping goals. Don't silo support into stages; build in collaborative ownership.	Founders fall between units when one exits and the other isn't ready to catch.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create shared intake forms and venture tracking systems</li> <li>- Assign co-leads for hybrid ventures</li> <li>- Embed observers from each team in major venture reviews</li> </ul>
<b>Start with the founder's needs, not internal roles</b>	Let venture type, founder goals, and development stage dictate who leads, not the org chart.	Founders receive contradictory or delayed support when structures override the journey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Map founder journeys across venture types</li> <li>- Publish clear entry points and support pathways</li> <li>- Create shared messaging across units</li> </ul>
<b>Decouple ownership from control</b>	Contribution ≠ control. Just because one unit files the IP or mentors the founder doesn't mean it controls the path.	Turf wars and credit-claiming discourage collaboration and confuse founders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Share success metrics and reporting</li> <li>- Build in joint venture support teams</li> <li>- Avoid a culture of "ownership" of startups</li> </ul>
<b>Build mutual visibility</b>	Make tools, policies, and processes legible and transparent to both units.	Shadow systems cause duplicative or conflicting support, and founders lose trust.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Co-develop a shared resource hub for staff</li> <li>- Offer regular joint briefings and newsletters</li> <li>- Maintain cross-unit calendars of key programmes</li> </ul>
<b>Create joint feedback loops</b>	Use founder experiences as a shared diagnostic, not just success stories, but friction points too.	Without joint feedback, systemic issues persist because no one sees the full journey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conduct joint venture debriefs every quarter</li> <li>- Collect shared founder feedback</li> <li>- Host annual strategy alignment workshops</li> </ul>
<b>Align around shared strategy and governance</b>	Collaboration needs strategic intent and institutional backing, not just goodwill. Embed partnership in university-level structures.	Without a formal strategy or governance, relationships depend on individual leaders and risk collapse when people leave.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Include both units in the institutional innovation strategy</li> <li>- Establish joint governance boards or working groups</li> <li>- Secure co-sign-off on policy updates (e.g. equity, IP, startup metrics)</li> </ul>

### 3. Self-Assessment Tool

#### Purpose

This tool helps evaluate how well entrepreneurship centres and tech transfer offices (TTOs) are aligned across six key design principles. It supports institutional reflection and team dialogue. For each statement, rate your institution from **1 (Strongly Disagree)** to **5 (Strongly Agree)**. Use the discussion prompt at the end of each section to identify concrete steps for improvement.

#### 1. Design for Overlap, Not Just Handoff

Statement	Score (1–5)
Our centre and TTO have a shared logic for when and how ventures are supported.	
Founders receive support from both units without repeating their story or requalifying.	
Hybrid ventures (e.g. student-led, research-connected) are supported collaboratively.	

#### Discussion prompt:

Where do ventures fall between units? What minimal structure would make support more seamless?

#### 2. Start with Founder Needs, Not Internal Roles

Statement	Score (1–5)
We understand and support different founder pathways (e.g. undergrad, academic, external).	
Founders encounter clear, unified entry points into the innovation ecosystem.	
Our support adapts to venture needs, not just who owns the programme.	

#### Discussion prompt:

Do you organise support around founder journeys or around team jurisdictions?

### 3. Decouple Ownership from Control

Statement	Score (1–5)
Programme ownership doesn't limit others from contributing valuable support.	
Our units share credit for success, regardless of which team led.	
Impact is reported at an institutional level, not only at the unit level.	

**Discussion prompt:**

Who "owns" your successful ventures? Is that ownership helping or hurting collaboration?

### 4. Build Mutual Visibility

Statement	Score (1–5)
Staff in each unit understand the other's programmes and policies.	
Regular cross-unit updates, training, or shadowing takes place.	
Founders experience transitions between units as coherent and consistent.	

**Discussion prompt:**

What do your colleagues in the other unit not know about your processes but should?

### 5. Create Joint Feedback Loops

Statement	Score (1–5)
We conduct regular joint reviews of current ventures.	
Founders are invited to reflect on their full journey across units.	
Feedback leads to structural or policy improvements, not just case anecdotes.	

**Discussion prompt:**

How do you learn from founders as a system? How often do your units reflect together?

### 6. Align Around Shared Strategy and Governance

Statement	Score (1–5)
Our institutional strategy includes both units as key contributors.	
Joint governance mechanisms exist (e.g. advisory boards, working groups).	
Executive leadership supports and publicly reinforces the partnership.	

**Discussion prompt:**

Is your collaboration backed by institutional design or held together by personal relationships?

### Suggested Uses

- **Individual reflection:** Have participants complete the form before a joint strategy session.
- **Team discussion:** Review the scores and prompts together to identify shared strengths and opportunities.
- **Ongoing alignment:** Use annually to track progress over time.

#### 4. Alimetry: From Idea to Impact



Alimetry is a med-tech spin-out from the Auckland Bioengineering Institute that demonstrates how an entrepreneurship centre and a technology transfer office can work together to turn research into impact. Its journey shows how capability building, venture refinement, and commercialisation support can combine to develop a world-class company.

##### **A breakthrough device**

At the heart of Alimetry is the Gastric Alimetry system, a wearable medical device that measures the electrical activity of the stomach through non-invasive sensors placed on the skin. Traditional diagnostic tools for gastric disorders are invasive, uncomfortable, and often inconclusive. Gastric Alimetry offers a painless, high-resolution alternative that provides clinicians with clear data on how the stomach is functioning. The value

proposition is straightforward but powerful: better diagnosis of disorders like gastroparesis, improved treatment decisions, and ultimately, better quality of life for patients who often endure years of uncertainty.

##### **Early capability building with the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE)**

The Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) is the University of Auckland's hub for entrepreneurial learning and venture creation. Its flagship programme, *Velocity: the \$100k Challenge*, gives students and researchers the opportunity to develop and pitch business ideas with the support of mentors and a structured curriculum.

It was here, in the early 2010s, that co-founder Professor Greg O’Grady pitched the first version of what would become Gastric Alimetry. Velocity taught O’Grady and his team how to write a business plan, communicate their vision, and think like entrepreneurs. Fellow co-founder Dr Armen Gharibans recalls that the competition gave them “our first steps” in entrepreneurship. These early experiences through CIE built their entrepreneurial skills, confidence, and networks, preparing them for the next stage of the journey.

### **Venture refinement and commercialisation with UniServices**

While CIE provided capability and inspiration, UniServices, the University of Auckland’s technology transfer and commercialisation subsidiary, helped transform the idea into an investable venture.

UniServices supported the team with intellectual property protection, regulatory strategy, and business development. Its *Return on Science* investment committees provided expert scrutiny, helping the founders refine their plan and validate the commercial opportunity. UniServices also played a financial role, investing directly through the University’s Inventors’ Fund and later co-investing alongside leading private venture funds in the company’s NZ\$16 million Series A round. Importantly, the spin-out was structured cleanly so the founders retained significant ownership while securing the capital needed for growth.

### **Complementary roles, shared success**

The story of Alimetry highlights how CIE and UniServices worked as complementary partners rather than competing silos. CIE gave the founders their first entrepreneurial experience and capability-building support. UniServices added the expertise in IP, venture structuring, and capital that enabled the company to scale. Both organisations focused on enabling the founders to succeed on their own terms. As Gharibans put it, “Between CIE and UniServices ... we would not have been able to get to where we are without that support at the start.”

### **From university labs to global markets**

Alimetry is now FDA-approved and expanding internationally, delivering real value to patients and clinicians. Its success demonstrates the strength of a founder-centred pipeline: entrepreneurial education and mentoring at the front end, combined with robust commercialisation pathways at the back end. Together, CIE and UniServices helped ensure that a promising piece of research became a global med-tech company with the potential to transform gastric care.