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WORKING PAPER

TRANSFORMING TRADITIONAL UNIVERSITY STRUCTURES FOR THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY THROUGH MULTI- DISCIPLINARY INSTITUTES

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ABSTRACT

Within the UK, considerable policy support has been provided to create multi-disciplinary institutes to encourage academics to develop new knowledge to address industry and societal problems. We consider four large traditional UK universities that have gained significant funding for such activities. We examine the changes in institutional structures necessary to enable universities to transform from single discipline based schools to multi-disciplinary institutes. New incentives for working across schools, the cross subsidy transfer of industry funded research and teaching income and senior role models are observed to enable the development of a multi-disciplinary research capability. Yet, this capability is not easily sustained. It appears that for institutes to survive beyond the initial funding round they regress towards traditional school activities of peer reviewed research and teaching. We conclude that to transform academic behaviour a fundamental shift in promotion procedures, that remain heavily weighted towards peer reviewed journal publication within single disciplines, is required.

Keywords: universities; research; knowledge; institutional theory; evolutionary theory.