



#### A Day in the Life of

## Fernando Conesa

**Deputy director  
Centre for innovation, research and technology transfer  
Polytechnic University of Valencia**

The Polytechnic University of Valencia has around 35 000 students, 2000 postgraduates and 2500 academics. The 30-year-old university has strong traditions in engineering, as well as schools of fine arts and humanities, and a business administration faculty.

Fernando Conesa's role is to help run a 25-strong unit that manages the University's research and its relationships with third parties, protects the intellectual property (IP) and promotes technology transfer. The unit manages around €45m of income per year, close to 20% of the University's budget, from the services it provides and the research contracts and licence deals it strikes.

Conesa starts his day with his email, paying particular attention to activities, such as invitations to other universities or offers of training, that help maintain the networks and skills he and his staff need. Email also keeps him in touch with the international boards and collaborations he is involved with, an increasing number of which are in Latin America.

Conesa then spends time checking the collaborative research contracts his team is negotiating. He checks that any background knowledge used in each contract has been identified and protected. He also wants to see that the expected results have been properly defined. Conesa has spent years writing research contracts and has help from two lawyers, but says: "It's not about being driven by the legal side so much as making relationships with companies work."

The Centre will use novelty studies and market research and, in close collaboration with the academics whose work is being protected, recommends the best way to protect the IP to the University board. Centre staff may also help make the first approaches in commercialisation discussions.

"We're managing public research funding so we have to keep track of the IP," Conesa said.

The University has a generous attitude to sharing the wealth from licensing, with 60% of the revenue going to the researchers and the rest to the University. Academics can also get paid for doing commercial consultancy and contract research on University time. "Co-operation with companies is a good way for our academics to get rich," Conesa said drily. "It's a more powerful incentive than the 60:40 split for licensing. It's also effective for technology transfer, since Spanish companies are not very familiar with buying in IP."

The flipside of the consultancy rules is that academics cannot have another job, such as being a director of a spin-out. So Conesa spends time developing effective strategies for transferring University IP and academic knowhow to new companies, in a way that will also attract investors.

“This sector is very badly organised in Spain,” said Conesa. “There are few venture capitalists and business angels here, although this has started to change in the past few years.”

A group of around 25 Spanish universities have now formed their own venture capital fund, as have other Spanish public bodies. Conesa’s university has established a research park and business incubator unit, and runs entrepreneurship courses for students and academics for some years.

“It has made creating a company a natural thing for a student or academic to do,” said Conesa, adding that culture change has been a key strategy for the Centre. “When we started, the most important thing was not to get a lot of income, but to get a lot of academics co-operating with companies.”

Conesa also spends time at business association meetings and University boards, explaining the Centre’s knowledge-transfer policies.

“It is really crucial to develop the trust of the University board, and of companies, that our knowledge-transfer policies are well thought out and that the co-operation agreements we reach are of benefit to both sides. Achieving greater and more consistent trust between the partners is a difficult and delicate thing to do.”

### Links

Polytechnic University of Valencia  
<http://www.upv.es>