

UNDERSTANDING TRANSFER OFFICES: THE GREAT UNKNOWN OF UNIVERSITY ENTREPRENEURSHIP

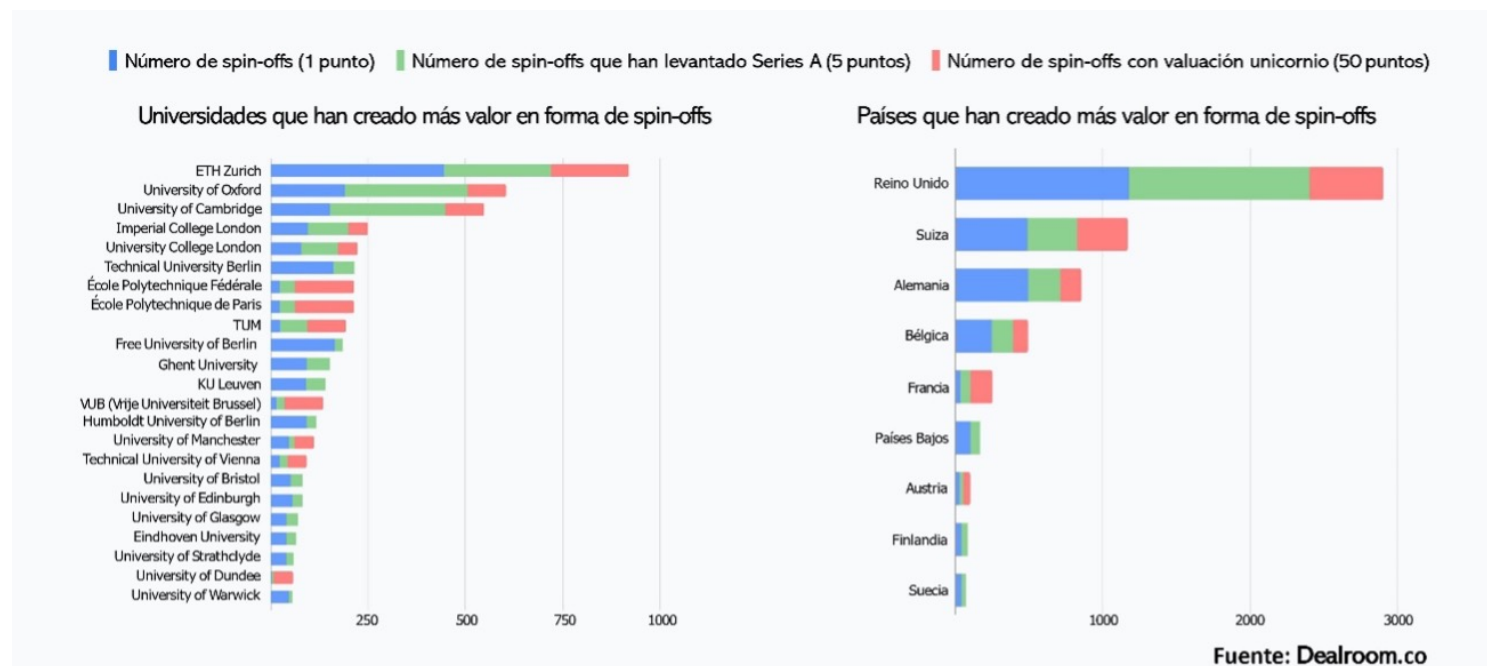
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Many researchers develop technologies that can have a major impact on society, but they often do not know how to proceed. In fact, words like patents, industry or commercialisation may sound daunting to them, unaware that there are departments in universities and research centres that do just that.

These departments are called offices for the transfer of research results, although everyone knows them as transfer offices, OTRIs or TTOs. They are responsible for managing the commercialisation of the research carried out in the centre. They advise the researchers involved on the best way to protect their technology (often in the form of a patent), manage intellectual property rights and try to find the best route to commercialisation. In this way, transfer offices become the bridge between academia and industry.

In many cases, transfer offices follow a traditional approach: they grant patent licences to companies in exchange for royalties, i.e. money that the centre receives in return for allowing the exploitation of its patents. However, there is a growing trend to create spin-offs. Spin-offs are start-ups, technological companies that have recently been created and that have their origins in the centre's research.

In our neighbouring countries, such as Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK, there is a clear commitment to this form of commercialisation. As a result, more and more researchers are leaving the academic world to become entrepreneurs. However, Spain is lagging behind in this form of technology commercialisation, as Dealroom.co notes in its [2023 European report](#) on deep-tech innovation (that is, innovation based on science or engineering).



This situation is due to the fact that most Spanish TTOs, including those in the Basque Country, do not have the resources or incentives to support this form of commercialisation, which limits the entrepreneurial aspirations of Spanish researchers. As a result, TTOs tend to explore more classical forms of commercial exploitation with less capacity for economic impact and return.

Nevertheless, there are some initiatives in the Basque Country that are well under way. On the one hand, [Mondragon Unibertsitatea](#) is in the process of setting up its own incubator to facilitate the creation and development of university spin-offs. On the other hand, the research centres that

make up the *Basque Research Technology Alliance* (BRTA) have their own transfer offices and are trying to commercialise in a way similar to countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands.

In conclusion, TTOs play a fundamental role in the commercialisation of technology developed in research centres, as we have seen in our neighbouring countries. If we want more researchers to create and manage spin-offs, we need to provide TTOs with the necessary resources. Otherwise, we risk falling behind in terms of competitiveness and technological and scientific innovation.

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