

# **ACOA fuels Atlantic university research, inventions: experts**

## **Activities thought to be even more extensive than statistics show**

**KEYWORDS:** "AIF" OR "ATLANTIC INNOVATION FUND\*", "ACOA", "INNOVAT\*" AND ("ACOA" OR "ATLANTIC CANAD\* OPPORTUNIT\* AGENC\*"), "ATLANTIC CANAD\* OPPORTUNIT\*", "AIF" OR "ATLANTIC INVESTMENT FUND\*", "ATLANTIC CANAD\* OPPORTUNIT\* AGENC\*"

CAMPBELL MORRISON,

After years of near dormant applications for patents and commercialization of intellectual property, East Coast universities are increasingly getting in the game. Statistics Canada reported yesterday that the amount of research and the number of inventions is growing in the region's universities, and experts are pointing to an **Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency** program as a key driver. "In recent years, Atlantic institutions have become more active in intellectual property commercialization," concluded researcher Cathy Read. In an interview, she said that the amount of non- university money invested in research grew from \$157-million in 2001 to \$227- million in 2004, and the number of disclosed inventions grew from 54 to 71 over the same period. But more than the data, she said that the universities themselves have been preparing for better commercialization, pointing to Springboard, a \$3.6-million three-year project that helps university researchers turn their inventions into marketable goods. Springboard is paid for by **ACOA's Atlantic Innovation Fund**. Examples of commercialization include Dr. Ghislain Deslongchamps and Dr. John Findlay at the University of New Brunswick who found a way to extract a cancer fighting chemical from hemlock and signed an option agreement with Atlantic Bioactives of Prince Edward Island. Dr. Kevin Englehart found a way of using technology to recognize voices and signed a two-year partnership agreement with Halifax-based Diaphonics Inc. to explore whether the technology can apply to security. At the Université de Moncton, Yves Gagnon and Gérard Poitras are mapping the New Brunswick wind patterns with an eye to finding the best locations for windmills. Fredericton Liberal Andy Scott said it is encouraging to see hard data that shows the government's investment in research and development at East Coast universities is paying off. "Our Atlantic Liberal caucus was behind this from day one and it is encouraging to see positive results. My sense is that there will be more to come with greater awareness and involvement," he said. The former government established the **AIF** in 2000 and re-funded it in 2004. The current Conservative government has said it supports all of **ACOA's** current activities. Springboard spokeswoman

Tanya Moxley said Statistics Canada's data on the commercialization of intellectual property ends in 2004 and Springboard will release data for 2005 shortly that shows further growth. "I can tell you it is going up. Not at a huge rate such as the difference between 2001 and 2004 but it is certainly incrementally higher." Springboard has "technology transfer" regional offices at UNB, Dalhousie University in Halifax and Memorial University in St. John's with satellite offices in 11 other universities. These offices assist researchers turn their projects into marketable products protected as intellectual property. "The point is to get some of these research projects out into the world where people can know about them and have access to them as products whether it is drugs or software or medical devices," she said. "We are working at identifying technology that can make a difference in people's lives and getting them out of the university and into the marketplace. "If you look around even Fredericton, Halifax and start talking to people who are in biotech or computer software companies, a lot ideas came out of universities. One way or another, a professor has spun out a company. "There is a lot more stuff going on than what the statistics are telling you. " The Statistics Canada study shows that in 2003 and 2004, Canadian universities and hospitals created 50 spin-off companies to commercialize their technologies. This brought the total created to date to 968. The spin-offs cover a wide range of industries.

615 words / mots.