

IOP/SUPA press release

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New doctoral training centres to boost the Scottish economy

The Scottish University Physics Alliance (SUPA) is celebrating this week after the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) announced that two of the three new doctoral training centres in Scotland will be situated in Heriot-Watt University and St Andrews University respectively, both part of SUPA.

Heriot-Watt will now host the Engineering Doctorate Centre in Optics and Photonics Technologies, while St Andrews will host the Scottish Doctoral Training Centre in Condensed Matter Physics. Both sub-disciplines are fast-growing fields of research that have successful spin-off technologies with large economic impacts.

Ian Halliday, Chief Executive Officer at SUPA, said, "We are delighted that these two centres now have the funding to proceed. We expect that it will lead to a significant increase in the number of economically successful spin-offs, helping the Scottish economy in a globally difficult time, and increase the number of well-trained physicists available to the Scottish economy.

"The funding awarded is a reflection of the strength of Scottish physics through the collaboration that SUPA has enabled. The Optics and Photonics Technologies Centre is a result of work undertaken jointly by Heriot-Watt, St Andrews and Strathclyde Universities, and the Condensed Matter Physics Centre has come about via similarly collaborative work by Heriot-Watt, St Andrews and Edinburgh Universities."

Both optics and photonics and condensed matter physics have a rich history of successful spin-offs: developments in optics and photonics provided the technology behind our communications revolution, designing optical fibres which dramatically increased the speed of our internet connections; condensed matter physics has led to the discovery of plastic electronics, cited as the most disruptive technology in the technological pipeline, used for visual displays in devices such as televisions, laptops, mobile phones, MP3 players, watches and poster advertising.

Alison McLure, National Officer for the Institute of Physics in Scotland, said, "We know from research undertaken last year that physics-based industries already contribute more than £8 billion to Scotland's economic output, with these centres introduced that statistic will undoubtedly keep growing."

The third centre in Scotland, the Doctoral Training Centre in Wind Energy Systems at the University of Strathclyde, will help Scotland become a world leader in wind energy technology training.

Last week, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) announced the £250 million investment in 44 new training centres across the UK which they hope will generate over 2000 PhD students.