

Investing in Cornwall's biotech future

A world-leader in accelerated drug development has picked north Cornwall as the ideal location for its cutting-edge research centre.

Overview

Across the globe, countries are competing fiercely to provide R&D locations for the major drug development companies. Hardly surprising, given biotechnology's huge potential to lift national and local economies.

So when US-based bio-informatics company Triplos Inc. was looking to expand its European research facilities, it was spoiled for choice. Its search criteria included a highly skilled workforce and a community that would support its expansion requirements. Various areas of France, Germany and the UK were all on the shortlist. But the location that finally won out was Bude, on Cornwall's north coast. Triplos had good reasons for its decision.

Workforce

Dr Hecht says: "We are quite fortunate and pleased with the high-calibre of scientific personnel that the area can attract and has to offer," adding that he they had no difficulty persuading more than 100 scientists to relocate. "Obviously the quality of life here has something to do with it. We are in one of the most beautiful parts of the country."

Clients

Triplos Receptor Research carries out R&D forlists most many of the world's top pharmaceutical companies in its client list. Recent contracts include a four-year, \$100 million agreement with Pfizer to design, synthesize and purify high-quality, drug-like compounds.

Technology

At the heart of Triplos' operations are extensive software-based informatics systems that the company has developed. Coupled with high-throughput medicinal chemistry, these dramatically increase the speed and efficiency of the drug discovery process – from design and production synthesis



In 1997 it had acquired a local company, Receptor Research Ltd, on the basis of its outstanding R&D record and shared vision of future development. And the renamed Triplos Receptor Research more than lived up to expectations: in 2000, it won a prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise for its contribution to pharmaceutical exports. In April 2002 Triplos announced it was to invest a further £16 million into a new R&D facility at Bude, tripling the size of its UK operation. Commenting on the company's decision, Senior Vice President Peter Hecht said: "We are extremely proud of the Triplos Receptor Research staff and facility, as it is widely viewed as one of our company's strategic advantages for delivering world-class drug discovery research to the leading pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies around the world."

through to storage and delivery. The company's new facility at Bude includes three main laboratories, to be used for fundamental research and, increased production capacity. There will also be a new nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) lab, a molecular design suite, and four mobile ventilated robotics enclosures.

Support

The South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) worked with partners to put together a wide-ranging package that helped persuade Triplos to invest in Bude rather than the other European locations being considered. This included a £2.4 million Regional Selective Assistance grant from the DTI and £1.3 million in funding from SWRDA.

In addition, Cornwall Enterprise put together a relocation pack detailing what Cornwall had to offer the company's employees, from health and education to cultural facilities, while Exeter University pledged to assist in the continuous development of staff.