



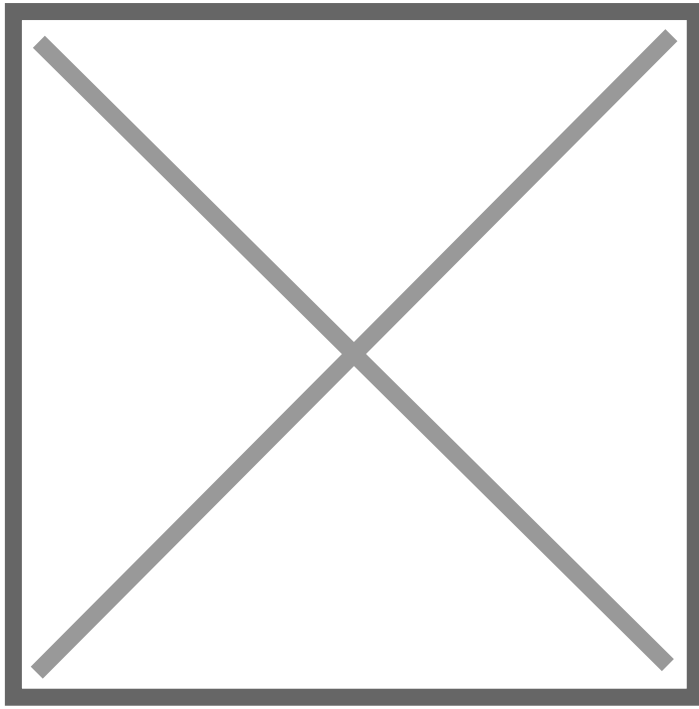
BioSpect

the business of Bio

24 years of leveraging the business of Bio
www.biospectrumindia.com

A Vital Piece of London's Infrastructure

07 September 2004 | News



London Technology Network

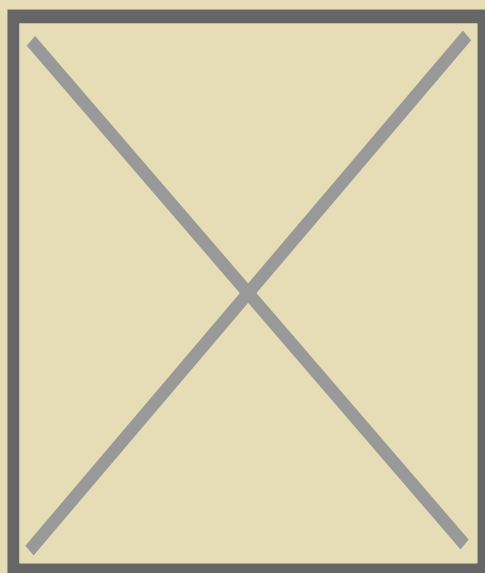
London Technology Network (LTN) is a private company under registered society (a not for profit organization) and has been in operation for 18 months now. Currently, the UK government funds LTN and the same is expected to continue for another 18-24 months. In these two years, LTN has tried to address the issue of how to turn the commercialization of technologies into reality. It has the structure, resources and the know-how to introduce a company to the person, which needs to meet with London's academic research base. It facilitates not just the companies in the UK to access London's academic base, but also those across the globe to engage with London's academics.

The background is pretty interesting. About four-five years back, there were some trends in the university-industry engagements in the UK, which were seen as not favorable. There was some reduction in the industry-academia engagements by some measures. This was a considerable concern for the government. The concern was for two distinct reasons. One, this leads to funding shortfall in the colleges. Second, if industrialists were not engaging with the academics, then there was little reason for the industries to set up centers and offices within that area. But the industry was fostering around academic centers-of-excellence, especially in the areas like biotechnology. Further, there was no reason to believe that the academic centers in the UK were any worse. So the question asked was why were some of the trends of industry-academia engagements unfavorable and this was to be addressed.

During that phase, London Business School (LBS) and University College London (UCL) had decided that they would form a joint venture. This was to leverage the skills of LBS and assist the UCL engage with the industry. It was to be partly funded by LBS and partly by UCL. However, the various government offices heard about it and said that this is just the kind of initiative that the third stream funding activity should be aimed at. So under one of the funding initiatives, called the Higher Education Innovation Fund, they offered to support the London Technology Network. And in return LTN had to assist all the colleges and universities in London.

Today LTN has emerged as a vital piece of infrastructure in London, which helps the industry and academia to connect. It covers scientific developments in a range of technology-intensive industries including life sciences, high technology and engineering. Global companies too have espoused interest to access skills and research from London's leading universities. Its services come free too.

"It is my hope that we can engage the Indian companies with London's academia and take some of these technologies into the commercial arena."



- Dr Jolyon White, technology consultant, London Technology Network

In July this year, Dr Jolyon White, technology consultant, London Technology Network, was in India to attend Bangalore Bio. In a freewheeling chat with N Suresh and Ch. Srinivas Rao, Dr White told BioSpectrum how LTN works and invites Indian companies to engage London Technology Network (LTN) to their advantage.

What are the services that you offer?

LTN is about helping any industry anywhere in the world, which has a technology-intensive component engage with the universities and academics in London. You have to tailor the service you offer according to the type of enquiry that the industry asks. The most easily understood type of problem is a company asking for carrying out a specific piece of work for a specific need. This is a relatively straightforward enquiry to handle as the academics are competing directly with CROs (Contract Research Organizations).

The deeper problem though is when companies are interested in learning about things that are outside their areas of expertise. This is an area where the academics can play an important role. It is because they work in this area of core understanding and wholly defined problems. They tend to have the abilities to foresee where the new technologies can go better than somebody who is within the company and who does not have the time to consider these things. When you bring the academic together with the commercial organization, he can see where the technology is going and the commercial threat and opportunity. These are the valuable things that get incorporated into the planned strategy.

Are these enquires handled differently?

These two types of queries are handled differently. They are slightly different in process and very different in terms of documentation. So for the project type of enquiry, which is "I know what I do not know", we handle this effectively as a preliminary project brief. It is made of phases. These are passed to the academic communities and they respond. The expertise enquires are normally not laid out in the same way. They are laid out as a knowledge area that a company wants to know more about.

In terms of process, when you feedback on a project enquiry, you feedback very precisely as to what each academic has said. The feedback on an expertise enquiry produces a technology landscape document. We lay out exactly what each of the groups in doing and it comes to the company as a single document as opposed to multiple responses.

Why is it important to have an organization like LTN?

London has somewhere between 40-60 academic institutions, all carrying out good technical research. They are split between London University (about 30 colleges), another 5-10 other universities and 5-10 other institutes, which are not part of any universities. All of them operate relatively autonomously and tend to have their own commercial offices for out-licensing. So the problem arises, when a company wants to find an academic in London. How does it identify him? It will be difficult even for a company, which is based in the UK, to find its way through that many colleges. For a company, which is overseas in mainland Europe or the US, it is difficult for them to spend the time to hunt around all the colleges. So an organization like LTN becomes very important because we help the companies find their academics of choice.

What is your structure?

We have put in place 110 people. They are called business fellows. Business fellows work for LTN half-a-day a week. The other four-and-half days a week, they do full time research. They are generally in the lecturer grade and above. They are fairly senior people and act as eyes and ears of LTN. They help us understand what is happening in their circles (about colleagues) and collect information about the current, past, and future research.

What is the incentive offered to the business fellows?

We pay them. Besides they are keen to learn about industry. They are not necessarily entrepreneurs, but they have to be in business facing mode and have the desire to work with industry. They are carefully selected on the basis of interviews. We do this with the blessing of the institutions. Universities are both the stakeholders and resource providers.

Why does the industry want to work with London?

The largest chunk of the UK's research funding goes into London. On a global scale, London is probably the largest life science research community outside of the US. So it is a serious global player in life sciences research. I think this could be of great value to Indian companies too. The total funding to manage research is about \$5 billion. In terms of employees, about half of the researchers would be in life sciences. The number of researchers in the top two grades in London alone

Greenwood named next president of BIO

Congressman James C Greenwood was named the next President of the Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO) that represents more than 1,000 small and large companies, as well as academic and research centers. The organization uses biotechnology to develop medical, agricultural, industrial and environmental products. It has members in all 50 US states and 33 other nations.

Greenwood will be taking over from Carl B Feldbaum who headed BIO since its establishment in July 1993. Feldbaum, who announced in February that he would retire this year, said, "Jim Greenwood has the broad social perspective, the passion, ability and experience to lead BIO superbly in the future. I could not be more enthusiastic in passing this baton to our industry's next generation of leadership."

During the tenure of Carl B Feldbaum, BIO has grown from 16 employees and a \$2.1 million budget to almost a 100 member staff with a \$40 million budget. Membership has increased from 350 companies to over 1,000. BIO members are involved in the research and development of health-care, agricultural, industrial and environmental biotechnology products.

BIO Chairman and Alkermes CEO Richard Pops said, "After a comprehensive search from a pool of top-level candidates, Jim Greenwood was the Board of Directors' unanimous choice to lead BIO because of his commitment to improving people's lives through science and technology and his personal leadership skills."

Jim Greenwood has represented the eighth district of Pennsylvania in the US House of Representatives since 1993 and serves on the energy, commerce and education workforce committees. He previously served in the Pennsylvania House and Senate.

Since 2001, Greenwood has served as chairman of the energy and commerce subcommittee on oversight and investigations.

"I passionately believe in the promise of biotechnology to find cures and treatments for the diseases that force parents to watch their children suffer and die, and children to endure their parents' disintegration into the clutches of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases," Greenwood said.

Source: www.bio.org

Maize genome sequence data made public

The National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) announced that the valuable maize (corn) data is now available to research scientists working to sequence the maize genome. Ceres, Inc., Monsanto Company and DuPont subsidiary Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc., have transferred maize sequencing information to a searchable database on the Internet hosted at the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center.

After completing a licensing agreement at NCGA, scientists can access the research at MaizeSeq. "Access to these gene sequences will help public-sector researchers more quickly develop corn plants with improved agronomic performance and profitable quality traits," said Patrick Schnable, professor and director of the Center for Plant Genomics and past chair, Maize Genetics Executive Committee.

In March, NCGA announced the three industry leaders would share their corn genome sequence data, which combined with the corn sequence data already in the public domain will significantly accelerate the identification of genes within the entire corn genome.

This project underscores NCGA's continued commitment to advancements through research. NCGA took a leading role in getting the Plant Genome Initiative signed into law in 1997 and continues to support this important effort. With the availability of sequencing data from Ceres, DuPont and Monsanto, the corn genome could be completely sequenced by 2007, potentially years ahead of when it would have been completed without this initiative.

Source: www.biotech.ca

Why not a Bangalore Technology Network?

Closer home, Bangalore is an important hub of biotech activity in India. There has been a constant effort on the part of the government, industry, academia and entrepreneurs to enthuse and synergize the biotech scenario in the city and the country as well. The Bangalore Bio event, formation of the Karnataka Biotechnology Development Council (KDBC), etc. are some of the efforts in this direction. Can there be a "Bangalore Technology Network" on the lines of the LTN to provide a connect between the fledgling biotech industry and the university research? Does Bangalore require such a network? Who should spearhead this initiative? And what should be its mandate? These were the questions BioSpectrum posed to several eminent biotech personalities in the city.

"If we want biotechnology to flourish in India, a technology network is certainly required. It can be a forum where the practical applications can be developed into viable business models. It can be headed by an academician in Bangalore or for that matter in India. And one name that comes to my mind is Vijay Chandru. He is an academician who ventured into the industry. But I am not sure if he has time. In academia many developments and discoveries keep happening and sometimes their true potential is not realized. The industry can bring in that perspective."

Dr S Anand Kumar, director, AstraZeneca Research Foundation India, and honorary director, ABLE

"Everybody is talking about the industry-academia interaction, but I am not very clear about the role of a separate body for this purpose. Most of the Government bodies like the DST, CSIR and DBT have a cell for the same."

Prof. G Padmanabhan, Honorary Professor and Emeritus Scientist, IISc.

"It is required and that is why we are here. This is exactly what we are doing."

Diwakar Rao, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer, KBDC

"I do not see the requirement of a formal structure or network. Already the government has floated many such schemes. But since the biotech industry is in its infancy, the government could subsidize the technology transfer. Academic institutions, which develop the technologies, expect good revenue from them; and rightly so, as they put in a lot of research efforts into it. To make the technology cost-effective for companies, it should be subsidized. The biotech industry is headed by people who know what they are doing. So they have an exact idea of what they require and how to get it. That is not a problem at all."

Dr P Babu, President, Bangalore Genei

"An organization, very much like the LTN, that can address the following issues will be a good initiative:

- Find out what companies, of all sizes and shapes, need by way of new technology.
- Find out how academia in Bangalore can respond to this need.
- Get the best researchers in Bangalore together with companies worldwide on specific projects.
- Develop regular interest-based groups for in-depth interactions.
- Develop "Adda": a top quality guest- house, meetings center and watering hole where interactions can take place.

The government should support this organization generously-land, money, etc., but not run it. Academia should participate but should not run it. Industry should participate and run it but not act as if it owns it! It should be located

near Yelahanka/Hebbal for it to be effective. It should have started yesterday. Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw should be the Chair and Vijay Chandru should manage it."

K VijayRaghavan, Director, National Centre of Biological Research

Asia

Japanese authorities move towards restricting cultivation of GM crops

There has been a series of moves on the part of local authorities in Japan as the government of Hokkaido is looking at restricting the cultivation of genetically modified crops in open fields. The law concerning the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity through regulations on the use of living modified organisms which was enacted in February 2004, allows the use of genetically modified organisms.

Swayed by the anxiety of consumers and the fear of harmful rumors against producers, these local authorities are implementing restrictions on genetically modified crops, even though they have been approved by the national government as being safe to consume and without harmful effects on the environment. In response to such a movement, academic researchers and those in industry are voicing their opposition to these restrictions.

On March 5, the Hokkaido prefectural government formulated its guidelines on the cultivation of genetically modified crops in Hokkaido. The reasons for setting forth these guidelines are stated as being the fact that "consumers harbor serious doubts with regard to genetically modified foods" and that "there is a risk that this will lead to harmful rumors concerning food produced in Hokkaido and be extremely deleterious to the image of agriculture in the prefecture".

The Japan Biotechnology Association submitted a written opinion, stating that i) restricting the cultivation of crops that had been deemed safe was questionable and that action should be taken with the aim of deepening public understanding, in order to reduce their disquiet; and that ii) there is concern that there may be an adverse impact on the competitiveness of Japan's agriculture and food industry in the future, if the path towards the practical application of genetically modified crops was obstructed.

Source: www.jba.or.jp

Europe

EuropaBio joins forces with The World Life Sciences Forum

EuropaBio, representing the European Biotech Industry and The World Life Sciences Forum, BioVision have joined forces to provide a special industry track at BioVision 2005. The industry track will provide opportunities for Europe's emerging biotechnology companies to meet with leaders from some of the continent's largest pharmaceutical, chemical and food companies, who traditionally come together every two years in what is known as the Davos of Life Sciences. The World Life Sciences Forum BioVision will take place in Lyon, France from April 11-15, 2005 and will bring together leaders of science, society and industry to discuss and debate social, environmental and economic issues impacting the life sciences." We are delighted to have the opportunity to implement an Industry Track in this important event," says Johan Vanhemelrijck, Secretary General of EuropaBio. "It will allow the emerging biotech industry sector to discuss key issues at the very highest levels."

BioVision has established itself as a platform for top-level dialogue between scientists, public authorities and international organizations, pharmaceutical and agri food industry executives, patient and consumer association representatives, and a wide range of representatives from society at large, including most major non-governmental organizations and leading media.

EuropaBio Industry Track will provide a vital bridge between BioVision and the concurrent business-partnering event BioSquare, a unique concept pulling together the biotech industry from North America, Europe and Asia. BioSquare attracts large, medium and small sized companies via an innovative partnering platform. The needs of the 1,500 emerging biotech companies feature prominently in the EuropaBio Track at BioVision; this Track will be open to BioSquare participants.

Source: www.swissbiotechassociation.ch

EuropaBio appoints new board members

The European Biotechnology industry association (EuropaBio) announced that Jack Huttner, Dr Bernward Garthoff, Tom Saylor and Odd Magne RÃ¸dseth have been appointed to the EuropaBio main Board.

Jack Huttner is vice president, corporate communications and public affairs, Genencor International, Inc and Dr Bernward Garthoff is member of the board of management of Bayer CropScience AG. Tom Saylor is chief executive, Arecor and represents the BIA, the UK BioIndustry Association on the EuropaBio board while Odd Magne R  dseth is CEO Aqua Gen AS and chairman of the Norwegian Biotechnology Association.

These appointments bring elected Board members of EuropaBio to a total of twenty-one representing large and small biotech companies based throughout Europe. Speaking on the appointments Feike Sijbesma, chairman, said, "These board members representing the full range of biotech sectors as well as large and small companies alike will strengthen EuropaBio's capacity to contribute to the European policy agenda on biotechnology and life sciences."

EuropaBio, the European Association for Bioindustries, has 35 corporate members operating worldwide and 24 national biotechnology associations representing some 1500 small and medium sized enterprises involved in research and development, testing, manufacturing and distribution of biotechnology products.

Source: www.europabio.org

Irish to increase its R&D spend in next 5 years

Irish business needs to increase its research and development spend from about one billion Euro to 2.5 billion Euro by 2010, if the country is to meet goals set by Government to put Ireland at the centre of a knowledge-based EU economy, a new report said. The claims were made in a new report to the Interdepartmental Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation which outlined a plan to increase the national spend on research and development.

At present the R&D spend is only two-thirds of the EU average, while spending on research and development in the EU lags behind that in both Japan and the US.

The report was prepared by a high-level interdepartmental steering group established by the T    naiste in 2003. The steering group was set up in response to the targets agreed by Heads of State at Barcelona in 2002 to increase expenditure on R&D in the EU from 1.9 percent of GDP currently to 3 percent in 2010. Two-thirds of the increase is to come from the business sector.

Launching the report, Mary Harney, minister for enterprise, said the action plan highlights that despite significant strides in increasing public investment in R&D over the last five years; the performance of R&D in key sectors of the Irish economy is low compared to leading knowledge-based economies.

The plan calls for a major change in the R&D performance, particularly in the enterprise sector and calls for a number of ambitious targets to be met by 2010, including the raising of business investment in R&D from 917 million Euro in 2001 (0.9 percent GNP) to 2.5 billion Euro in 2010 or 1.7 percent GNP.

Source: www.biotechnologyireland.com

