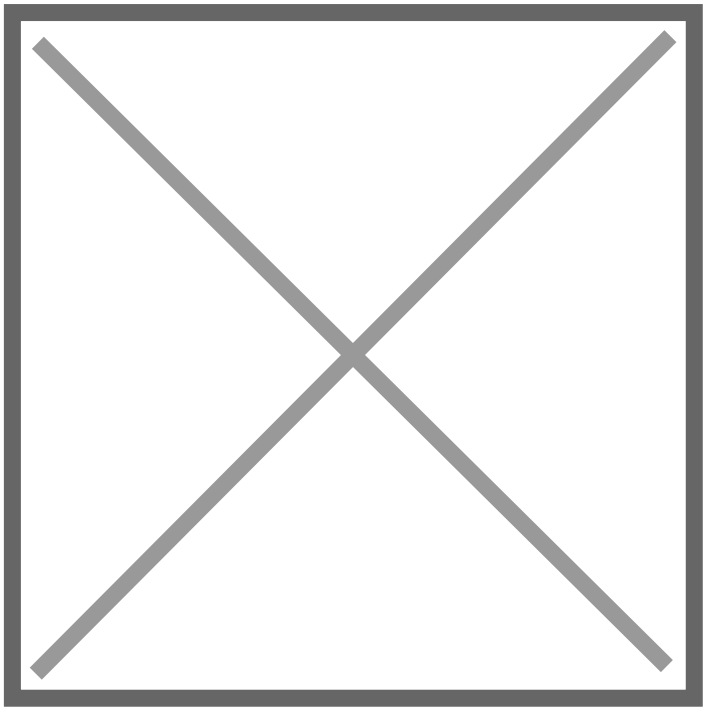
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Biotech Frontier

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North West

England's Northwest region is leading the next wave of successful biotechnology growth in Europe.

The region's biotech activity is thriving as a result of focus vision and the right ingredients of strong academic and clinical base, the commercial skill base in pharma sector, and infrastructure. The two key champions of the regionÃ¢â?¬â?The Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) and the Northwest Science CouncilÃ¢â?¬â?recognizing life sciences as the key to economic growth in the region set up Bionow in 2000. Bionow has encouraged and nurtured this growth by creating an active, progressive community based on the region's academic success and strong presence of international pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies and supporting service companies.

Ã¢â?¬Å?Bionow was the first in England to have a biotech strategy. Bionow cluster development programme focuses on biomedicine and covers pharmaceuticals, biotech, devices, and related health care. The cluster embraces the R&D based core companies, service and supply companies, entrepreneurs and investors, among other things. We have the one Bionow to support and facilitate business process,Ã¢â?¬? informed Dr Linda Magee, head of Bionow, NWDA.

All these efforts have pushed the fortunes of the region. Ã¢â?¬Å?Studies completed last year indicated that 93 percent of the core companies have a single or predominant focus in human health care. About 61 percent of them specialize in therapeutics or diagnostics. We have looked into some of the investment profiles of the companies and found that the average investment per company had risen from Â£0.62 million in 2000 to Â£1.86 million,Ã¢â?¬? said Dr Magee. There are about 175 life sciences companies. The base of the R&D companies in 2002 was about 72.

Bionow is investing over Â£1.5 million to create an innovative training and research facility for Northwest biotechnology companies. The North West Institute for Bio/Health Informatics (NIBHI) will provide training and learning opportunities for Northwest companies to develop their understanding of biological and health informatics. The new facility, the first of its kind in the UK, will be managed by the University of Manchester, with funding and management input from AstraZeneca as well as significant support from the NWDA. The Institute, with a total investment of over Â£2.7 million, will operate out of new facilities in the University of Manchester and the University of Liverpool. Last year, the region had a major success in the form of Â£25 million worth of funding approvals.