

FINALIST IN THE CAREER TRACK KT ACHIEVER OF THE YEAR CATEGORY

Dr John Pearson



University of Birmingham

John joined the University of Birmingham in 2009 from a career in industry.

John initially undertook a full review of the University's IP portfolio by leading an initiative to develop a new IP assessment tool identifying market

attractiveness and appropriate routes to market for the individual opportunities.

He immediately saw the potential of extracting better value from opportunities arising by finding the right commercial partner to move the initial discovery onto a product with a well defined market need. Previous attempts to exploit diagnostics patents had been undertaken by employing various consultants, and whilst this approach was often useful in both advancing the technology and providing a marketing plan the consultant was rarely sufficiently engaged in the project to ensure success.

Knowledge transfer

Alta Innovations Ltd had recently been formed as a subsidiary of the University with the remit of managing and commercialising the University's IP, and the University was looking at options to develop Alta Bioscience (a unit of the University engaged in manufacturing and providing peptide reagents).

John's vision was to bring together these opportunities to create a commercially funded joint venture with an experienced entrepreneur using the facilities, staff and accreditations of Alta Bioscience as a foundation for developing a group of companies. IP would come from the University of Birmingham and the organisation would operate in the area of diagnostics.

John linked with a partner company, Abingdon Health, a diagnostics development and commercialisation business. Dr Chris Hand, CEO of Abingdon Health, has a strong track record in the area. John and Chris shared the ambition of creating a new vehicle for commercialising the University's diagnostics IP and spent over a year in discussions with the University, Abingdon Health, Alta Innovations, inventors, lawyers and accountants to develop the best vehicle with appropriate legal and financial structures.

Personal contribution

Due to John's foresight and drive the University is now joint owner with Abingdon Health of Bioscience Ventures Ltd – the parent company JV set up with one wholly owned subsidiary, Alta Bioscience Ltd. The sale of the assets and goodwill in Alta Bioscience to Bioscience Ventures generated significant capital which is being used as seed investment for two newly founded diagnostics companies in which the University, Abingdon Health and the inventors have shareholdings. One of the two new companies is already on track to make its first product sales within one year and the second has attracted significant commercial interest and grant funding. This innovative initiative is showing every indication of becoming a thriving business which will become a beacon of good practice in technology commercialisation for the University and a sustainable centre of excellence. Current business plans indicate that revenue could reach £20m within five years resulting in significant capital gain. The University and its academics will gain reputational enhancement and most importantly there will be translation of research for patient benefit.

Without John's enterprising outlook and problem solving abilities this shift in technology transfer strategy would not have taken place and the University would not be in a position to deliver the economic and societal impact which is now possible.

Key points

- Enterprising outlook and ability to identify opportunities
- Problem solving capability
- Business plans indicating revenue generation of £20 million within five years