

Careers

How to Attract Money to Fund Biotech Projects**By Andrea Chipman**

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When Graham Blakey was thinking about leaving his research-and-development job at AstraZeneca PLC in early 2007 to set up his own consulting firm for small biotech firms, he wanted to test out his plans and network with others.

He turned to one of a growing number of educational programs focused on biotech entrepreneurs. His choice: a three-day Bio-Entrepreneur School in Nottingham, England, run by a consulting firm with funding from a government economic-development agency. "It was a very concentrated, focused course that takes you through all the steps to setting up a business -- a one-stop shop," he said of the program, now in its third year.

Biotech companies always have faced an especially steep battle for survival: long lead times to develop products and a high failure rate. With capital markets in turmoil around the globe, venture-capital investors have less money and are more risk averse than just a few years ago. Start-ups often find it difficult to translate or explain their projects for a commercial audience.

The one good piece of news is that many big pharmaceutical companies have money to spend on deals. "Because their own discovery pipelines are limited and they can't renew them entirely from internally generated sources, [pharmaceutical giants] will be looking for acquisitions, and they've got the cash to do it, which is a great combination," said Ernie Richardson, managing partner at U.K. technology investment firm MTI, in London.

Many of the new programs are aimed at teaching biotech entrepreneurs and managers how to take advantage of the money out there.

The Bio-Entrepreneur School, two and a half hours north of London, offers 30 spots a year funded by the East Midlands Development Agency, a U.K. government entity that aims to bring a regional focus to economic development. It is run by QED Consulting, a consulting firm with public- and private-sector clients across the U.K. and Europe that has developed a range of entrepreneur schools across the U.K. since 2001. At the biotech one, students are prepared for the commercialization of life-science intellectual property, including training in marketing and an introduction to funding networks.

A number of universities offer joint-degree programs combining science and business studies. In Europe, these include full master's programs in biotechnology and enterprise at the University of Manchester in the U.K., Instituto de Empresa Business School in Madrid and the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. In Asia, Macquarie University and the University of Queensland offer full dual-degree courses. Others offer a range of diplomas in the commercialization of science. Another option is a two-year biotechnology M.B.A. at the University of Pune in India.

School officials say the specialized biotech programs prepare students to deal with challenges including the ability to navigate complex regulatory and licensing processes as well as the special intellectual-property issues that govern the commercialization of discoveries in the life sciences, said Ruben Henriquez, the director of the Master of Biotechnology Management program at IE in Madrid.

Many scientists "don't understand that there is so much more to do before a commercial product can be built," Mr. Henriquez said.

The process of commercialization is a culture shock for many scientists, said MTI's Mr. Richardson. "There's an expectation that you build the better mousetrap and the world will make its way to your door, but unless they know what your mousetrap is like and where your door is, you're going to struggle," he said.

The industry needs more managers capable of accelerating the technology-transfer process and focusing on products that are the most commercially viable, said Carl Sundberg, head of the life-

sciences program and unit for bioentrepreneurship at Stockholm's Karolinska Institute, which started its two-year Master's of Bioentrepreneurship program this past autumn. The Karolinska program focuses on training students to enter existing small and midsize life-science companies, rather than scientists looking to launch their own start-ups, he said.

In both the Stockholm and University of Queensland programs, students spend an extended period of time in a company or research organization working on a project designed to benefit the host organization, in addition to taking business and science courses.

The programs generally attract international student bodies. Most students come from a science background and are looking to add the business specialization, school officials said. The programs also attract lawyers and bankers looking to develop a niche in the area.

For David Ireland, who in 2007 became the first to earn a hybrid doctorate from the University of Queensland program, the course has been crucial preparation for his position as manager for innovation and commercial development for Australian technology-transfer firm UniQuest Pty Ltd. Picking up either a science or a business degree wouldn't have given him a sufficient advantage, Dr. Ireland said.

"The current economic environment is making life in biotech even more difficult than it used to be," he said. "When there is cash aplenty, you don't necessarily need to spend your time making sure that you are running an efficient company. But now, with limited cash and the likelihood of raising more money low, you need to be very careful where you spend your money and time."

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