

Birmingham receives £600,000 through Biomedical Catalyst

Posted on Thursday 2nd August 2012

The University of Birmingham has been awarded £600,000 by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Technology Strategy Board under the joint £180 million Biomedical Catalyst.

The awards were announced today by Minister for Universities and Science David Willetts at the British Business Embassy's life sciences summit at Lancaster House.

These initial awards, which will inject nearly £10 million into 14 universities and 18 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), will support UK academics and businesses on the vital first step in exploring the market potential of their early-stage scientific ideas.

The MRC 'Confidence in Concept' awards, totalling £7.4 million, will give universities grants of between £360,000 and £750,000 to help them to advance more promising research ideas towards clinical testing.

The grants will fund about 150 pilot projects, allowing academic researchers to begin the process of turning a bright idea into a viable proposition. For example, a university research group may use the funds to validate therapeutic targets and undertake the earliest stages of development of new treatments.

Universities receiving an award have control over allocating the funding internally, allowing them to respond rapidly to new opportunities and have the flexibility to pursue the most promising translational research opportunities.

Eighteen SMEs have been awarded funding totalling nearly £2.5 million by the Technology Strategy Board to carry out feasibility studies. These awards will enable the companies to explore and evaluate the commercial potential of an early-stage scientific idea, to validate the scientific concepts, fully test the market opportunity and construct future development plans.

Funding provided to companies and universities via the Confidence in Concept and Feasibility awards will be used to evaluate the commercial and scientific potential of early-stage ideas, accelerating the journey from discovery research into the development of innovative new products and services, which will provide solutions to healthcare challenges.

Professor Adam Tickell, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Knowledge Transfer) at the University of Birmingham, commented: *'We are delighted to receive news of this award which highlights Birmingham's outstanding contribution to world-leading research in biomedicine.'*

Minister for Universities and Science David Willetts said: *"The UK's world-leading life sciences industry is changing fast and we need to stay ahead of the game. The Biomedical Catalyst will help bridge the so-called 'valley of death' that exists between when a bright new idea is developed in the laboratory and the point when a new drug or technology can be invested in by the market. This will support our most innovative life sciences SMEs and academics, drive growth and benefit patients."*

Dr Wendy Ewart, Deputy Chief Executive of the MRC, said: *"The MRC's Confidence in Concept awards will empower leading UK universities to respond quickly to emerging translational opportunities as they arise. They will give academic researchers the opportunity to generate enough evidence to leverage further investment from a variety of sources to progress the best ideas, helping to bridge the gap between discovery and development."*

David Bott, Director of Innovation Programmes at the Technology Strategy Board, said: *"We are delighted to make these first funding awards through the Biomedical Catalyst, which will help bridge the funding gap between the development of a new idea and investment by the market in a new drug or technology, and provide effective support for the best life science opportunities arising in the UK."*

The Biomedical Catalyst, announced by Prime Minister David Cameron in December 2011, is a programme of public funding designed to deliver growth to the UK life sciences sector. Delivered jointly by the MRC and the Technology Strategy Board, the Catalyst is a key feature of the UK Government's Life Sciences Strategy.

The first applications for larger translational projects through the Biomedical Catalyst, including those seeking to demonstrate clinical utility, are currently under consideration. Funding for successful applications will be announced before the end of October this year.

For more information please contact Jenni Ameghino, Press Office, University of Birmingham, 0121 415 8134. 07768 924156.

Notes to editors

For almost 100 years the Medical Research Council has improved the health of people in the UK and around the world by supporting the highest quality science. The MRC invests in world-class scientists. It has produced 29 Nobel Prize winners and sustains a flourishing environment for internationally recognised research. The MRC focuses on making an impact and provides the financial muscle and scientific expertise behind medical breakthroughs, including one of the first antibiotics penicillin, the structure of DNA and the lethal link between smoking and cancer. Today MRC funded scientists tackle research into the major health challenges of the 21st century.

www.mrc.ac.uk

The Technology Strategy Board is the UK's innovation agency. Its goal is to accelerate economic growth by stimulating and supporting business-led innovation. Sponsored by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the Technology Strategy Board brings together business, research and the public sector, supporting and accelerating the development of innovative products and services to meet market needs, tackle major societal challenges and help build the future economy. For more information please visit www.innovateuk.org (<http://www.innovateuk.org>)