

Drug discovery business expands at Norwich's Innovation Centre

Written by editor

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Inspiralis, a drug development business that grew out of research laboratories at Norwich's John Innes Centre, has expanded into new premises at the Innovation Centre at Norwich Research Park. Founded in 2008, the business has become a global force in the battle against infectious diseases and cancer, working at the forefront of drug discovery and antibiotic development and is seen as the number one topoisomerase company in the world.

"A key element of our business is to supply the necessary tools and materials to develop and screen novel anti-infective and anti-cancer compounds," said founder director Dr Nicolas Burton. "The overseas demand for our services from research groups working in the pharmaceutical industry and academia around the world is so great that today 90 per cent of our products are exported."

Dr Sally Ann Forsyth, chief executive officer at Norwich Research Park said: "Norwich Research Park provides a great environment for start-up science based businesses. The flexible accommodation and offer of shared equipment makes it the ideal location for companies, particularly at the early stages of their development when access to affordable scientific facilities and free business support is so important to their growth."

"We provide the necessary tools and materials to develop and screen novel anti-infective and anti-cancer compounds," said Dr Burton. "We supply enzymes such as topoisomerases (that regulate the overwinding or underwinding of DNA) and ligases (that act as catalysts in chemical reactions in which molecules are linked together). Also plasmids (DNAs capable of independent replication) and other DNA- and RNA-modifying proteins. We also provide substrates and kits for analysis, along with the enzymes from a range of organisms and a variety of mutants."

Inspiralis developed from the John Innes Centre laboratory of Professor Tony Maxwell – a world leader in the field of topoisomerase research. It still maintains strong links with Professor Maxwell's lab, including sponsoring a student there. It also sponsors students within the school of biological sciences at the University of East Anglia.

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“We have made good use of the greater space and enhanced office facilities created by the move into our own premises, expanding our supply of high-quality research products and screening services worldwide,” he said.

The founding directors are Tony Maxwell, Nicolas Burton and Alison Howells. They were joined by Tony Blake in 2010. Investors include Icení Seedcorn Fund and Plant Bioscience Ltd represented on the board by Dr Martin Stocks.

Photo (l to r) : Dr Sally Ann Forsyth, Chief Executive Officer Norwich Research Park with Inspiralis directors Alison Howells and Dr Nicolas Burton.