

CASE STUDY

QED BIO-ENTREPRENEUR SCHOOL 2008

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Going one step further

“We can improve on that” was a view taken by Dr Des Powe and his colleagues in the Pathology Department, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham University Hospitals Trust when they spotted the commercial opportunity to develop a test for customising breast cancer treatment. The need to put that idea into commercial practise prompted representatives of the Nottingham Breast Cancer Research team, headed by Prof Ian Ellis, The University of Nottingham, to apply for places on the 2008 Bio-Entrepreneur School at BioCity in Nottingham.

Molecular Biologist Dr Powe attended the School with his University of Nottingham team colleagues Dr Andy Green and Dr Jon Garibaldi knowing that each needed to build a better understanding of business processes if their idea was to develop further and be commercially successful. Research has shown that breast cancer patients can be grouped according to their genetic profile and that not all breast cancers are the same, allowing for the prospect of a more personalised drug delivery process. As part of a multidisciplinary breast research team, also involving Dr Graham Ball of Nottingham Trent University, Dr Powe and the team are developing a decision-making tool to guide clinicians and patients on the probable survival, risk of metastatic spread and potential benefit from targeted drug therapies across all breast cancer patients. It is an improvement on a current testing procedure.

Encouraged by fellow academics and clinicians, the team have decided to take the idea forward by using the services of the University of Nottingham's Technology Transfer Office, and Business Office advisors from the NHS and Trent University, as well as a business mentor. They are already in the final stages of the UK Research Council's Business Plan competition and decided that the Bio-Entrepreneur School would provide an intensive review of both themselves as potential entrepreneurs and the business as a viable proposition.

"The Bio-Entrepreneur School was the perfect opportunity for the three of us to take time away from the lab to focus on our idea," says Des. "It's easy to get carried away with a business idea but until it is tested through rigorous market research and taken through the defined pathway into start-up it may as well remain as just another idea."

Tapping into the expertise on the School, as well as bouncing ideas around the other delegates has given Des and his colleagues a sense that they are on the right track. The School has also confirmed that they are probably more entrepreneurial than they gave themselves credit for. "The fact that we recognised a business opportunity and are excited about its potential gives us confidence. As a result of the School we have made several really valuable contacts and now know where to go for further help. We are likely to progress carefully in a measured way and will try to maintain a good sense of realism."