



Technology transfers on a high

SOME 50 years after its inception, Britain's technology transfer industry is thriving and with pharmaceutical companies under relentless pressure to discover blockbuster drugs, the outlook is bright.

Figures from corporate finance house FirstStage Capital show that more than 310 new businesses have been spun out from 37 UK universities since July 1998. Much of the credit for this success is due to technology transfer agencies, which help scientists to spot and develop the commercial potential of their discoveries. Several have recently embarked on significant expansion plans.

Earlier this summer, Cancer Research Ventures, the technology transfer company established

by the Cancer Research Campaign, appointed a chief executive to strengthen its commercial activities.

Guy Wood-Gush, a former investment banker, describes his task as helping people to think big. "One of my priorities is to bring a level of corporate understanding to the business and model it in a way that is appropriate to a business that is beginning to be quite large," he said.

CRV, and its forerunner, Cancer Research Campaign Technology, have been providing services to cancer researchers in the UK since 1987. The organisation has since been instrumental in establishing a number of successful biotech companies in the UK,

the most high-profile of which is Dundee-based Cyclacel.

According to Wood-Gush, Cancer Research Ventures will generate revenues of about £8m next year. Geographic expansion is also on the cards, with a recent move into Europe and the setting up of an affiliate company, British Research Ventures, in Singapore. Although CRC is its major client, what distinguishes CRV from in-house groups at Imperial College and University College London is its third-party work.

Last week, CRV announced a licensing deal with UK biotech group, Antisoma.

In the UK, the history of technology transfer goes back to 1948 when the government set up the National Research Development

Corporation to commercialise publicly-funded UK research. The NRDC later merged with the National Enterprise Board to form the British Technology Group (BTG) in 1981.

BTG is also expanding, having raised £120m last year in order to fund its drive into the US and set up a separate company dedicated to genomics. Chief executive Ian Harvey says that, contrary to popular myth, the UK has on the whole been very successful at technology transfer.

He points out that Britain starts more companies per pound spent on research and development going into universities than the US.

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