Nexxus Awards 2010

THE LOCAL life science community celebrated another successful year at the Nexxus Life Science Awards this November. In Glasgow, Cran Mor hosted the sixth Nexxus Annual Awards in the West, and in the East, the second Annual Nexxus Awards were held at the University of Edinburgh’s Playfair Library.

Around 400 people attended the awards, celebrating local life science expertise as well as those individuals and organisations contributing to the area's scientific excellence.

At the West Awards, keynote speaker Hamlet Fear, CEO of One Nucleus, the new name for ERBI and LBN, discussed partnerships - both local and international - and their importance in developing successful life science clusters. In the East, attendees heard from Scotland's Chief Scientific Adviser Professor Anne Glover on the subject of collaboration, as she urged life science companies to take risks and to work together for the benefit of Scotland as a whole.

The keynote speeches were followed by presentation of awards for Young Life Scientist, Innovation, Young Company and Lifetime Achievement. In the East, a Collaboration Award, sponsored by Edinburgh Science Triangle, was also given.

**Young Life Scientist**

Dr Fiona Henriques, winner of the Young Life Scientist Award (West), is a Reader at the University of the West of Scotland whose research is in the field of parasitology. Technology she co-developed with Dr Craig Roberts at the University of Strathclyde aims to prevent potential blindness of contact lens wearers by inhibiting essential metabolic pathways of the parasite *Acanthamoeba*. Such is the potential economic value of the technology that OptiCENS was launched earlier this year to commercialise it.

Similarly, Dr Asier Unciti-Broceta, winner of the Award in the East, has developed technology in the laboratory and formed a spin-out company to commercialise this work. Based at the University of Edinburgh in Professor Mark Bradley's laboratory, Asier has developed cell delivery systems for gene therapy applications which have become the basis of spin-out company Deliverics. The company's first product will be SAFECtin™, a kit for researchers that delivers molecules such as DNA into cells in a non-toxic, efficient manner.

**Most Promising Young Life Science Company**

Glasgow-based Sistemic won the Award in the West. The company only started trading in late 2009 but has already established itself as a major player on the global life science stage. Sistemic's business focuses on providing innovative, problem solving services and kit based products to the life sciences research and development markets.

It has already secured its first EU and US customers, filed three patents and launched three products. CEO Chris Hillier leads the company, having formerly been CEO of Biotta. Sistemic has a strong management team and its eight full-time employees will be joined by more as the business from pharmaceutical clients grows.

In the East, Solid Form Solutions (SFS) won the Award. In just over two years, the company has grown quickly, continually building more business and adding more services. SFS specialises in high-tech solid-state screening services important for development of novel pharmaceuticals.

When founders Stephen Watt, Julie Scott and Alan Beattie started out in June 2008, they had just a small office at the Roslin BioCentre, and had set up the company solely with personal funding. The company has now tripled its laboratory space, achieved more than £1M in sales, gained ISO 9001:2008 certification, employs 15 staff, and is looking to hire more. John MacKinnay, QA Manager, collected the award.

**Collaboration**

For the second year running in the East, Edinburgh Science Triangle sponsored an award for Collaboration. This award went to Blackford Analysis Ltd for its collaboration with the Institute for Astronomy at the University of Edinburgh and the SFC Brain Imaging Research Centre. Dr Ben Panter CEO of Blackford Analysis, and Professor Alan Heavens, from the University of Edinburgh’s School of Physics and Astronomy, developed a technology to analyse the starlight of distant galaxies. The collaborative effort to move the star-gazing technology into the medical clinic started when Ben and Alan met with Dr Mark Bastin of the Scottish Funding Council Brain Imaging Research Centre. Funding from Scottish Enterprise enabled them to extend the team with Drs Rob Tweedie and Will Hossack joining from the Institute of Physics. This multi-disciplinary cooperation earned them the award.