

ALMAC CASE STUDY

LIFE & HEALTH SCIENCES HORIZON PANEL



DR. STEPHEN BARR

Managing Director, ALMAC

Q. When was the company established?

A. Almac was established in 2001.

Q. Is it privately owned? If no what is the ownership structure?

A. It is a private company owned by Sir Allen McClay. Almac Group consists of five divisions: Diagnostics, Sciences, Clinical Services, Clinical Technologies and Pharma Services.

Q. What areas of research is your company currently working on?

A. The company provides a wide range of services supporting the discovery, development and manufacture of pharmaceutical (drug) products. We conduct research on behalf of a range of clients globally (600). These customers normally operate within the pharmaceutical or biotech sectors. We also conduct our own R&D programmes and these activities are normally performed within the Almac Sciences and Almac Diagnostics divisions.

Our research areas include:

- Translational genomics with specific focus in cancer research, currently colorectal, breast, ovarian and small cell lung with a view to moving to other disease states;
- Biopharmaceutical products with a specific focus on peptide and protein research aimed at the development of platform synthetic technologies and the development of new peptide and protein therapeutics.

Q. What will these new products/services do?

A. Our general service area is in the development of new or enhanced pharmaceutical products. Our offering allows companies to outsource and expedite significant parts of the drug development process to us which in turn accelerates speed to market and ultimately return on investment.

Our own research within the genomics area is initially aimed at the development of clinical diagnostic tests. As an example the company has registered a test with the FDA for approval for stage II colorectal cancer. In summary, all cancer patients require surgery, however this new test will indicate which patients will require the additional chemotherapy. It is hoped similar tests will be extended into other cancer treatment areas in the not too distant future. The peptide research is focussed on the development of new enhanced methods for the synthesis and modification of peptides and proteins used both within research and as therapeutics. The development of new protein therapeutics as pharmaceuticals is a massive growth area at present globally.

Q. How many people are involved in research?

A. The company employs 2000 staff globally. Approx 1300 are based in Craigavon with another 650 in the US and the rest in other parts of the UK. Approx 100 staff currently would be

involved in our own research areas with this number expected to grow significantly.

Q. How qualified are they?

A. Approx 50% of the total workforce are qualified to at least degree level. Within Sciences and Diagnostics the majority of staff have degrees and many of the scientists (>100) have PhD's. A number of Professors are also employed throughout the company.

Q. Do you export your products and to where?

A. Products and services are exported/used worldwide with the main areas being the major pharmaceutical markets in the US, Europe and Japan.

Q. Do you envisage increasing your investment in research over the next five years? If yes by how much in real percentage terms?

A. Investment in research is continually increasing and since the company's foundation, there has been a year on year increase. We expect this to continue with significant emphasis now being placed on internal R&D.

Q. What would you like to see coming out of the MATRIX panel?

A. Ideally I would like to see the Life and Health Sciences sector being identified as an area of strength and focus within NI. Significant effort and investment should be focussed on the development of this sector with

government led initiatives aimed at supporting education, the academic and industry sectors already existing and seeking to enhance inward investment. The development of a knowledge based economy is key and an area where NI can compete on a global stage.

Q. Do you work collaboratively with other companies in Northern Ireland, Ireland or GB?

A. The company collaborates widely with many companies within NI, Ireland and GB. We have many collaborations with Irish/UK universities (QUB, UU, Cambridge, UCL, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee etc) and globally within Europe and the US.

Q. How long have you been collaborating with other companies?

A. Since the company's formation.

Q. Have you had any spin offs from your own company?

A. There have been no spin-offs as such but Sir Allen McClay has invested significantly in the departments of chemistry and pharmacy within QUB through the McClay trust. Without this investment some of these may not have existed today. The McClay institute was created as part of the School of pharmacy to promote research within NI.