

Campus Incubation Centres

Driving enterprise across Ireland

new business new ideas
new technologies
new jobs

Campus Incubation Centres

*Driving enterprise across Ireland:
A selection of client company case studies*



Foreword

Mary Coughlan T.D.

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment

As we reflect on ten years of Enterprise Ireland's campus incubation programme, it is apt that we take this opportunity to highlight the success of the initiative by looking at the impact it has had on the local and national economy to date.

Right now, there are 240 new companies, employing nearly 1,000 people in 20 incubation centres around Ireland, and the programme is expanding. This is a significant achievement for the 21 third level institutions that have embraced this programme and the companies they have nurtured.

The Campus Incubation programme was established to exploit the full potential of the many innovative business ideas created by the groundbreaking research being undertaken at third level institutions throughout the country. By supporting such centres of research excellence, Enterprise Ireland is fostering innovation by facilitating the development of these potential research ideas into viable commercial entities.

Incubators provide an essential transitional space between the research and business worlds, in which the commercial potential of the scientific research undertaken in our third level institutions can be maximised. Enterprise Ireland plays a fundamental role in bringing knowledge to the marketplace from the third level research centres and other sources of technology that generate ideas and products that have commercial potential. This involves

creating an environment conducive to the free and flexible flow of ideas out of the research system into the business world, where they can be developed into marketable technologies, products and services.

The centres offer benefits to both the host institutions and the companies that they support; tenant companies benefit from the research environment, being able to tap into mentors and the facilities of the host institution; the institutions benefit from having a focal point for entrepreneurial activity on campus and a path to the commercialisation of research performed in their college.

This is a key area where campus incubation centres provide an essential complement to public investment in scientific research and help drive the commercialisation of research into long-term business opportunities. Being based on campus also brings distinct advantages including the opportunity to tap into the rich vein of applied research, learned academics and top-class graduates in engineering, science, computing and business.

These are the benefits and advantages to small, regionally-based companies that the Government had in mind when we published our Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2006-2013. The authors of the Strategy recognised that a dramatic increase in regional innovation was imperative if Ireland's knowledge economy was to become a reality.

€50 million has been invested by Enterprise Ireland in the construction of business incubation centres at the Institutes of Technology and Universities across Ireland under the Regional Innovation Strategies Measure with support from the European Regional Development Fund.

The programme is in expansion mode right now and I hope to see an increase in the number of spin-in companies or offshoots from existing companies starting up on their own. It is critical that supports such as incubation space are available for Irish entrepreneurs, both here and those thinking of returning from abroad.

Experience has shown that incubators in third level institutions have the potential to generate a seedbed of innovative knowledge-intensive enterprises. As the case studies in this publication show, Enterprise Ireland's Campus Incubation Programme is playing a fundamental role in ensuring that the potential from this seedbed is exploited to the full. Furthermore, the geographic spread of the Programme underlines the vital role which these centres play in ensuring balanced regional development, which is a core principle of our industrial development policies. I commend the centre managers on their work and look forward to seeing more success stories like these in the future.

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new jobs
new business

Introduction

“The development of innovative products and services by start-up companies with a high potential to grow, underpinned by the effective and imaginative use of technology, will be the lifeblood of the Irish economy”.

Enterprise Ireland – Transforming Irish Industry 2008-2010

A decade ago, Enterprise Ireland launched an initiative to support the establishment of incubation centres on higher education campuses across the country. Since then, it has invested approximately €50m in the Enterprise Ireland Campus Incubation Programme with the support of the European Regional Development Fund. The funding has been used to support 22 business incubation centres on campus at 16 institutes of technology¹ and at five universities. It has also provided for the establishment of six specialist bio-incubation facilities linked to the universities.

In making this investment, Enterprise Ireland is working to realise three broad strategic objectives:

- 1) To foster entrepreneurship and new company activity on campus
- 2) To commercialise research carried out in third level institutions for the benefit of local enterprise
- 3) To support balanced regional development by creating new companies

¹or equivalent third level college, i.e. the National College of Ireland

What is campus incubation?

Campus incubators offer a modern, safe and dynamic working environment where new companies base themselves as they start out into the commercial world.

Being located on the campus of a third level institution means that fledgling companies can foster critical strategic links with leading academic research and technology partners.

They provide an ideal environment for knowledge-intensive companies with growth and export potential through the provision of access to:

- Mentoring on key aspects of business development
- The research and technological expertise of the host institution
- A prestigious address with high quality office space
- R&D facilities on campus
- A pool of students for placements and possible recruitment

Spending a couple of years in a campus incubation centre can be precisely what an enterprise - at its particular stage of development - needs to become sustainable before it moves out, and on, to even greater success.

The entrepreneurial champions of these companies come from a wide range of sources and sectors including software, medical devices, environmental technologies and design.

Some emerge from Ireland's increasingly active research community. Others have made the choice to utilise valuable experience gained in existing companies and to set up their own business, while more have returned from overseas with the benefit of their international experience.

Celebrating 10 years

The success of the campus incubation programme is manifested in the case studies. These stories demonstrate the ability of entrepreneurs in all parts of Ireland to create innovative highly competitive companies. These people – and their enterprises – have all successfully leveraged the collaborative support of their host institution and Enterprise Ireland to bring their ideas to international markets. Their location in campus incubation centres – and the spectrum of expert support which that brings – has enhanced their potential to grow.

Campus incubators are always keen to hear from potential clients. As well as highlighting the success of the companies profiled here, this publication is designed to act as an invitation to potential entrepreneurs, based in Ireland or abroad to visit one of the centres across Ireland and see first-hand the opportunities that exist.

Impact of the Campus Incubation Programme to date;

- **22 business incubation centres across Ireland supported.**
- **Six specialised bio-incubation facilities, with specialist 'wet labs' linked to universities**
- **240 companies located in the centres, nearly two thirds of which are outside Dublin.**
- **Nearly 1,000 people employed in these companies.**

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Intelligent forms

ATFM makes it possible for SMEs to automatically process forms

ATFM is located in liBC, Galway-Mayo IT's campus incubation centre. In addition to ATFM there are 14 other tenant companies employing a total of 55 people. Tony Fitzmaurice, founder of ATFM tells his company's story...

After some years working for Adobe Systems Inc, Tony Fitzmaurice realised that many of the solutions developed for handling documents in large organisations could also be applied in small and medium sized firms. As he explained, the only thing stopping SMEs from changing over to these automated document processing solutions was a lack of suitable software.

Adobe, he said, has always adopted a partnership approach to business, so in 2006 Tony set up his business, ATFM, at Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology to work on creating an enabling solution based on the well known and widely used Portable Document Format. Everyone is familiar with PDFs, and as Tony explained, they provide a very flexible and powerful platform on which smart interactive forms can be built.

Tony's aim was to come up with a solution that anybody in business could use, and about a year later he was ready to release the first version of ATFM's Dataflow product. "We have a number of clients using it now," he said, and the applications range from handling of planning applications in County Mayo, to conducting a survey among dentists.

The solution
has been tried,
tested, and is a
proven success,
so ATFM is
aiming for the
export market.

To automate processing, intelligent forms are created. These can be emailed or distributed electronically in the same way as any other PDF file. Users can fill in the form on screen, and that information goes back to the server for automatic processing. "It's all very easy and intuitive," said Tony.

The forms are made up in the usual way, saved as PDFs, and configured using the Dataflow software. "Users can make changes in these forms without having to become involved in the technology," said Tony.

Processing is automatic, and as Tony explained, "we can supply it to work in either of two ways, as an on-site installation, or remotely with ATFM providing the host server."

Once the processing software is installed, and the links set up, the relevant information is extracted automatically, and sent on to wherever it is required, such as a stock register or database. The big advantage in all of this, said Tony, is that everything is simple and transparent so there is no need to call in the IT experts.

Electronic forms are quite common and are widely used by large corporations, but one of the major problems with these, explained Tony, is that they are usually purpose built so lack flexibility, and making changes involves bringing in IT specialists. If a large company wanted to gather information under a different brand, said Tony, they would probably have to rebuild the entire system.

Smaller scale solutions do exist, he said, but they share the same bespoke weakness of inflexibility. Once installed, they are difficult to change, and this ability to adapt coupled to ease of use, gives ATFM's Dataflow a big advantage.

Because of the link to Adobe, ATFM is in a position to cover the entire business spectrum, but the company has opened up a big new market for document automation among SMEs and smaller organisations. One of the developments that Tony is looking at now is getting smart forms out into the field. Emailing to mobiles has become a lot easier, and ATFM has been supplying technology to another Galway based company, eFAST, which also makes use of mobile technology to keep track of information.

Tony is pleased with progress and he now wants to move on from word-of-mouth to more formalised marketing. The solution has been tried, tested, and is a proven success, so ATFM is aiming for the export market.

It was helpful to
see how other
companies had
made it through
the start-up
phase

Capturing bio-signals

Non-contact monitoring from BiancaMed is good for healthcare

BiancaMed is located in NovaUCD, the Innovation and Technology Transfer Centre at UCD. There are 23 companies located at NovaUCD, employing 146 people. Conor Hanley, one of the founders of BiancaMed, explains how the company was formed...

If we know how to capture and read the signals, the body can let us know when something is going wrong. As a research student at UCD's School of Electrical, Electronic and Mechanical Engineering, Conor Hanley realised that monitoring body functions has a great future. Conor had been working with Philip de Chazal on biosignalling under Professor Conor Heneghan, and together they had developed effective technology for recording breathing, heart beat, and other body movements.

The idea of applying the results of research had always appealed to Conor and healthcare is a growing market. "I like to work in a commercial environment," he said, and after looking into the business prospects, the three agreed that it would make good sense to go commercial. Each had something different to offer and a team always works best, said Conor, when there is a mix of skills.

In 2003 the three set up BiancaMed as a campus spin-off. Moving from an academic to a commercial environment can be quite a challenge. However Conor already had some business experience, and guidance from NovaUCD – established to foster on-campus enterprise – was readily available. "NovaUCD," he said, "gave us

structure,” and he found it helpful to see how other companies had made it through the critical start-up phase.

Conor had also been quick to tap into support from Enterprise Ireland. “They gave me a lot of useful advice on things like intellectual property,” he said, and it was not long before an investor became interested in becoming involved.

Winning an award for a study of sleep patterns, he recalled, had provided an incentive to concentrate on company development. “We decided to focus our expertise on sleep and breathing.”

There were existing products on the market, said Conor, but they were flawed, inefficient in capturing signals, and too intrusive. The team, convinced that they could come up with something better, used venture capital to fund the development of a more efficient non-contact sensor.

“That gave us a platform,” said Conor, which was easy to use and relatively inexpensive. It also had a strong marketing advantage in being non-intrusive. As Conor observed, people are not keen to be seen wearing visible devices, but with wireless this is not a problem. The cost saving potential of non-contact monitoring is also of increasing importance as pressure mounts to keep the elderly safe at home. Personal non-intrusive monitoring means less reliance on hospitals and other institutional settings.

The company’s first product, LifeScreen Apnea, was licensed out to a large manufacturer. Following this, a baby monitor was launched

and there are now plans to distribute this internationally in association with one of the world’s largest toy companies. Enterprise Ireland, he said, had been very helpful in getting exposure for the company at international conferences and fairs.

The company is moving towards more involvement in manufacturing but this is being outsourced and the focus remains on the high value of the sensor. Getting a popular product, such as the baby monitor, onto the market was an important step, and the company is already working on a number of follow-up devices. “We are looking at monitoring other body functions,” said Conor. “With one of the hospitals we are looking at chronic disease management,” and as he explained, he is keen to see a lot more collaboration with others. As he pointed out, BiancaMed was started from a combination of medicine and engineering. “More interaction between different people,” he added, “would be very helpful for the healthcare industry in Ireland.”

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On location

Retained ownership is giving television production companies a brighter future

Big Mountain Productions is based in the Regional Development Centre, the campus incubation centre in Dundalk IT, which has 12 tenant companies employing 41 people in total. Jane Kelly, co-founder of Big Mountain Productions outlines the benefits of being based there...

When it comes to television, Jane Kelly and Philip McGovern know how to come up with big hits. Philip, explained Jane, produced RTE's Prime Time, he worked on comedy, he won coveted Irish television and film awards, and he created enormously successful documentaries for the BBC. Jane also has an impressive track record, securing programmes for BBC, and as she put it, "doing my share of work for RTE and TG4."

After working for fifteen years or so, Jane and Philip realised that with all this experience, they had an opportunity to set up a production company of their own. "We had a wide range of contacts," said Jane, "and we wanted to be in control of our own destiny."

Taking control also meant being able to choose where to work and live. Jane and Philip moved to the Cooley Peninsula not far from Dundalk, and since 2005 this has been the home for Big Mountain Productions. As Jane explained, being able to operate from the Regional Development Centre at the Dundalk Institute of Technology means that the company is working from the perfect

location. Dundalk, she said, is mid-way between Dublin and Belfast, and within an hours flight to the big UK market.

Although experienced in handling big budget productions, Jane explained that they still had to learn how to run a business. An enterprise development programme run under the Institute's Novation initiative brought the couple up to speed, and Enterprise Ireland stepped in with practical support.

Growth was rapid. "We started the company in January," said Jane, "and we had our first commission in March." One of the reasons the company could develop quickly is that resources in terms of skills and equipment only have to be assembled on location as required. As Jane explained, the business essentially involves creating and marketing ideas. "We are content providers," she said, "we have a core team and we crew up during production."

On return from location, post-production can continue in Dundalk at the Institute's "Bright Room," a state-of-the-art suite of high-definition sound and vision facilities. "We are not big into hardware," said Jane, but having access to facilities like these, she added, makes it possible for the company to operate efficiently from Dundalk.

The company has had 30 per cent growth this year, and Jane is confident that this rise will continue. The environment for independent producers, she explained, has improved enormously. There are two reasons for this. The first is that broadcasters have started to outsource more production. "By 2010 the BBC expects to

be outsourcing 50 per cent of their production to the regions," said Jane. The second, far more significant reason, is that independent producers can now sell a programme while retaining copyright. What this means, explained Jane, is that the producer stands to gain from sales, either from rebroadcasting, or from added value merchandising. "This was one of the reasons we decided to go into business," she said. The merchandising associated with a popular television series can be worth a lot more than the initial broadcast fee.

Big Mountain has already moved in this direction, and with Enterprise Ireland support, Jane and Philip went to Cannes with "JAM" a highly successful 'rock-reality' series. Cannes is not just the high profile market for film-makers, but it is now the place to be for a growing number of independent television producers. "That was our first outing," said Jane, "and we were picked up by a distributor."

Broadcasters have an insatiable appetite for programmes, and as long as people are watching, they need content, said Jane. What pleases her most, is that now that producers are in control, there is more of an incentive to strive for success. "What we want to do are shows that have a life beyond broadcasting."

Celtic Catalysts makes the right turn into a niche market

A global business based on providing the means to produce bio-active molecules with the correct shape

Celtic Catalysts is located in NovaUCD, the Innovation and Technology Transfer Centre at UCD. There are 22 other tenant companies in NovaUCD and between them they employ 146 people. Dr. Brian Kelly explains how he commercialised his research and created Celtic Catalysts...

Molecules exist in three dimensions and their shape often determines how they function. In living systems, biologically active molecules usually work by docking with receptor sites, in much the same way as two pieces of a jigsaw fit together, so having the right kind of shape can be very important.

Three-dimensional molecules often exist in two 'chiral' forms, one twisting to the right, and the other twisting to the left. Chemically both mirror images, known as enantiomers, appear to be exactly the same, but functionally they can be quite different.

With drugs, these chiral differences can make a big difference in how the body reacts. While one form of the drug may be of benefit, the mirror image, if active at all, may actually cause harm. Chemical synthesis often results in an enantiomer mix, and as Dr Brian Kelly from Celtic Catalysts explained, about a third of the drugs we use can actually exist in different chiral forms. In many cases this mix is not a problem, but when separation into enantiomers is required, processes have to be adapted. For instance, this might involve

Realising how important new and more specific catalysts are for the pharmaceutical industry, Brian decided to concentrate on this as a commercially valuable niche area

changing the way in which one of the precursors for an active pharmaceutical ingredient is synthesised.

These processes are often quite elaborate and, about ten years ago, as a PhD student at University College Dublin Brian Kelly became interested in how the choice of catalysts could influence the chiral outcome. Realising how important new and more specific catalysts are for the pharmaceutical industry, Brian decided to concentrate on this as a commercially valuable niche area.

Of particular interest, he explained, were catalysts involving the chirality of phosphorous atoms. "These are extremely difficult to produce," he said, "but we succeeded in making them in a scalable way." This was a breakthrough that led to the creation of other tunable catalysts, and Brian described these developments as a mixture of theory, trial and error, and the experienced gained over a number of years by researchers at UCD.

Apart from ensuring that these developments were protected as intellectual property, Brian went about commercialising the results in a business-like way. "I attended a campus company development programme, I wrote a business plan, and looked for investment," he said. Enterprise Ireland provided support, as did the UCD Business School, and at that stage, venture capital started to come in to get the company off the ground.

Brian was determined to succeed by being the best in this narrow but critical field, so the company embarked on a world wide recruitment drive. "There are now a dozen chemists working for us," he said, "a few from the UK, and others from Sweden, from Poland, from Italy, and Germany."

By their nature, catalysts are only used in small amounts. These are produced in the lab at UCD, with whom Celtic Catalysts has developed a good working relationship during its time at NovaUCD, the university's innovation and technology transfer centre.

Having a strong home market has certainly helped, but as Brian remarked, pharmaceuticals are not the only fine chemicals being produced around the world. Chirality, he said can be just as relevant to fragrances and flavours. Most of the company's customers, he said, now come from outside Ireland.

With some customers, they supply the catalysts, and with others, just the intellectual property and know-how. "Ultimately," said Brian, "most of our revenue is likely to come from licensing."

Tracking assets

Companies can stay in control of multiple assets with eFast's software.

eFast is located in the liBC, Galway-Mayo IT's campus incubation centre. There are 15 companies based in units at the liBC, employing 55 people. John Clancy takes us through how his company, eFast was born...

Every business has assets and these can range from big and obvious machines, to the much less visible ownership of knowledge. John Clancy, Head of Business Development at eFast explained that the definition of an asset varies from company to company, and while we all expect to see fixed assets in the annual accounts, everyday values can be harder to define. Fast moving companies need to know what they have, but keeping track is not always easy.

After working in the area for twenty years, eFast founder, Padraic Burke, decided that he could actually offer clients something much better than a simple end of year inventory. By combining smarter software and radio links, he realised that companies could be kept up to date on an ongoing basis no matter how widely their assets were dispersed.

Following an enterprise development programme at Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology and mentoring from Enterprise Ireland, Padraic turned these ideas into reality by launching eFast. Having a business incubation centre, liBC, on the Institute's campus meant that no time was lost in getting the new company up and running.

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Developing eFast's "a-track" software, explained John Clancy, was the essential step that enabled the company to come up with a solution that combines desk-top management with radio tracking. We have all become familiar with RFID, radio frequency identification, in locking car doors, and as John pointed out, while the technology has been around for quite a while, the combination with asset management is new. "Our solution ties everything back to the financial register," he said. Company personnel can call up a 'dashboard' display and see the current state of relevant assets at a glance. This transparency, said John, makes the eFast solution unique.

What eFast supplies, said John, is a combination of services and software. The set-up process begins with the drawing up of a fixed asset inventory, and following validation, the system goes live. From then on, the status of company assets, including fast moving stock, can be kept under constant review. This initial step of validation, explained John, is critical, and once it is done the company has much more control over its assets. Benefits, he added, can include better compliance with regulations, and cost-saving though greater efficiency in deployment of assets.

From the start, the company adopted a partnership approach. "It is an R&D focused project," said John, and the aim of collaboration is to continue enhancing eFast's RFID enabled software. Because the company operates in the liBC campus environment it can draw on the expertise available at GMIT. The company also has the continuing

support of Enterprise Ireland and it works closely with Hewlett Packard. The partnership approach with HP, said John, "gives us the synergy to provide a complete solution to larger multinational clients."

Clients can come from almost any sector and, in one case, the system is being used to keep track of expensive studio equipment at TG4.

In the short term, said John, the company aims to be the market leader in fixed asset management, but in the long term the ambition is to be a global leader in RFID enabled software. "eFast is already doing business with Nortel in the UK," said John, "and next year we will be rolling out our product offering for an existing Irish client of ours for their plants in Mexico and the USA." Enterprise Ireland, he said had been a great help in providing detailed knowledge of overseas markets.

eFast is also planning to become more involved in providing their specialised software as a service. This approach, often referred to simply as SaaS, means that instead of selling once-off packages, eFast is moving towards a "pay as you use" model. By 2009, explained John, eFast clients will be able to log on and log off as often as they want, and only get billed only for what they use.

At NUI Galway
they were in
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Getting better treatment into circulation

Patients benefit from less elaborate procedure devised by Embricon

Embricon is one of 14 companies, in which there are a total of 52 people employed, located in NUI Galway's Business Innovation Centre. The Embricon story is an excellent example of what can happen when research and scientific experience meets business acumen...

Every year about three million people around the world undergo some form of surgery to clear blocked blood vessels. Constricted flow is a major health problem and one of the common procedures, reaming out a vein, is similar in many respects to clearing out a blocked drain.

As vascular surgeon at University College Hospital Galway, Sherif Sultan realised that while existing procedures work, they are elaborate, and he believed that a better alternative could be developed. There had been advances, such as the introduction of laser burning probes, but this involves the risk of damaging nerves. Sherif was interested in developing an easier to use but effective mid-range solution. The usual procedure was to make two incisions and to push a device down through the vein. His proposal was to make a single incision and draw the blood out by vacuum. He discussed the idea with John Power, manager of the medical device company, Eirogen, and Marto Hoary, who had worked on R&D for different industries. The three concluded that the less elaborate procedure would have considerable commercial potential.

For about 18 months the partners, based at the Business Innovation Centre at NUI Galway worked on the basic prototype. At NUI Galway they were in the right kind of environment with lots of expertise on tap. However, self-funding could only bring them so far and Enterprise Ireland recommended taking on an investor. "That's when I got involved," said John Corcoran. Originally attracted as an investor, John soon found that he had a lot more than cash to contribute. He had run a large company out of Manchester, and that experience turned out to be highly relevant. "I wanted to become involved," he said and is now the company's Chief Executive Officer.

A lot of the development work had been completed by late 2007 but what really counts, said John, is being able to launch a solid commercially viable product onto the market. Embricon could consider other medical products, but Sherif's mid-range solution had significant advantages in that it could be developed reasonably rapidly, it would be relatively inexpensive, and it could be used by general rather than specialised surgeons. For a start-up company, getting something onto the market within a reasonable timeframe helps secure a longer term future. "We wanted to have something that we can get to market quickly so that there would be cash flow to support other projects."

Prototypes are currently being made and Embricon will be ready to launch the finished product in 2009. Because it involves the application of tried and tested technology such as stents, gaining FDA regulatory

approval is not going to be a problem. "We expect to have this in less than a year," said John.

Embricon, he explained, is focussed on innovation. It is not a sales or a manufacturing company. The prototyping has been outsourced to Irish manufacturers and, as John remarked, "we selected these on the basis that they would have the capacity to manufacture European volumes."

Ideally, said John, the product will be marketed by a major medical device company and, because it is ready to go, Embricon is in a strong negotiating position. The product is also going to broaden the market. Up to now, said John, many procedures were not undertaken because the surgery involved was too specialised, but now more patients can be treated and recovery time is shorter. Those cost cutting advantages, said John, will have a big appeal to hospital authorities.

Networking slides

Slidepath's scanning makes it possible to extract and share more data from medical images

Slidepath is located in Invent, DCU's commercialisation gateway, which was funded under Enterprise Ireland's Campus Incubation programme. Invent, currently has 20 companies under its roof, employing 73 people between them. Dr. Donal O'Shea tells us how Slidepath was established...

Medical scientists spend a lot of time looking at cells and tissues under the microscope where diseases often show up as a change in appearance. Making sense of these patterns, while still a highly specialised skill, has become easier and a lot more effective because of advances in information technology. Just like many other types of image, a digitised slide can be stored, analysed and shared among any number of students or experts.

Dr Donal O'Shea became interested in image analysis while working as a post-graduate at UCD, and this led on to him becoming a co-founder of Pixelert, a company providing clients with a document screening service. Through the application of image analysis, sensitive or confidential content could be recognised and blocked to prevent release into an open environment.

Donal had studied biotechnology at Dublin City University, and on returning there to take up an academic position, he gave his attention to the capture and analysis of pathology slide images. Working with one of his post-grads, Seán Costello, Donal made considerable progress in developing suitable software to facilitate

Slidepath works closely with different groups and its partnerships with a number of clinical research consortia helps keep the company ahead in development

the sharing of data and images between researchers. In 2003, the two set up Slidepath as a campus company based at Invent, DCU's commercialisation gateway. "The company's Digital Slidebox," explained Donal, "is now the premier product for medical histology training."

The initial development, he said, had followed the "classic friends and family route" of raising finance. The company founders took the view that every euro they put in to prototype development was a euro less that they would have to raise from investors. Only when things were beginning to take off did the company go out looking for investment finance, and in this, said Donal, Enterprise Ireland had been very supportive.

One of the things that Slidepath needed to invest in was management. "A strong management team is essential for the rapid development of any business," he said. Starting with a few 'all-rounders' the company now employs 25, and as Donal explained, there is now more room in the company for dedicated specialists. With growth, came the need for a mix of technical and marketing skills. It takes an all-rounder entrepreneur to get a business going but vision alone is not enough, said Donal. Entrepreneurs, he said, often do not start out with enough experience. With Slidepath, he explained "we have always had a strong non-executive director on the board who keeps us on our toes."

Slidepath works closely with different groups and its partnerships with a number of clinical research consortia helps keep the company ahead in development.

Growth has been rapid, and Slidepath now has more than 60 clients in over 10 countries. "The company has doubled its revenues each year for the past four years," said Donal, "and has been profitable in the last two."

On marketing, he explained that the company's strategy is to work hard on gaining the attention of potential user groups and when they become clients they, in turn, influence others. "Most of our early success came from overseas," said Donal, who added that the good reputation of Irish technology was something they could trade on.

Slidepath's reputation was built on a niche product but Donal is keen to diversify. "Since 2005 we have launched a new product offering each year," he said, and further growth is expected to come from computer aided clinical diagnosis.

"We are now in the process of raising a large tranche of funding to make our vision a reality," he said. "Funding is the lifeblood of a business, and it really dictates the pace at which you can take your vision to market." Part of that vision includes achieving a €20 million turnover within five years.

The location has
the advantage
of being central
for a nationwide
business and
relevant expertise
is available from
the Institute.

On the move

A mobile solution from WPA Mobile makes it easier to serve the customers

WPA Mobile is a campus company in the Midland Innovation and Research Centre at Athlone Institute of Technology. There are 5 other companies with a total of 35 employees in units in the centre. Oliver Heaney, founder of WPA Mobile Ltd tells his company's story...

When out delivering home heating oil, the last thing the driver wants to do is waste time filling out forms. The same is true for many others involved in sales, said Oliver Heaney, who started his company four years ago to provide these busy people with a 'mobility solution'.

Oliver had been working in the telematics area, and it struck him that the rapid growth in mobile devices represented an opportunity to develop specialised applications. Almost everyone in business carried a mobile, everywhere was covered by the network, yet the number of applications taking advantage of this technology were still limited. Although other hand-held solutions for gathering data had been developed in the late 1990s, they were still operating in effect as closed systems, and none had migrated to the developing mobile market.

Oliver, decided to set up WPA Mobile Ltd to fill that gap, basing the company at the Midlands Innovation and Research Centre at Athlone Institute of Technology. Apart from being at home in Athlone, Oliver said the location has the advantage of being central

to a nationwide business and relevant expertise is available from the Institute.

Oliver was able to source a suitable technology from Denmark on which the company could build their own product. "We localised the software for the Irish and UK market," explained Oliver, "and we tied in with some people at the Institute to develop some of the applications." That help, he said, enabled the company to get up to a higher level of development, and, most important of all, it allowed them to get a working product onto the market quickly. A partnership deal with O2 provided the coverage, and in 2007 the product, Field Force, was launched.

A typical customer, said Oliver, is involved in running a high-volume low-margin business, and on the road they carry a pre-programmed mobile, which provides the link to the back office. Every day, the company uploads customer files onto the WPA server, and whoever is out on the road can pick out what they want from a menu. In the case of an oil delivery, the meter reading goes straight into the records, so as Oliver remarked, there is no need for paper and the customer automatically gets a receipt.

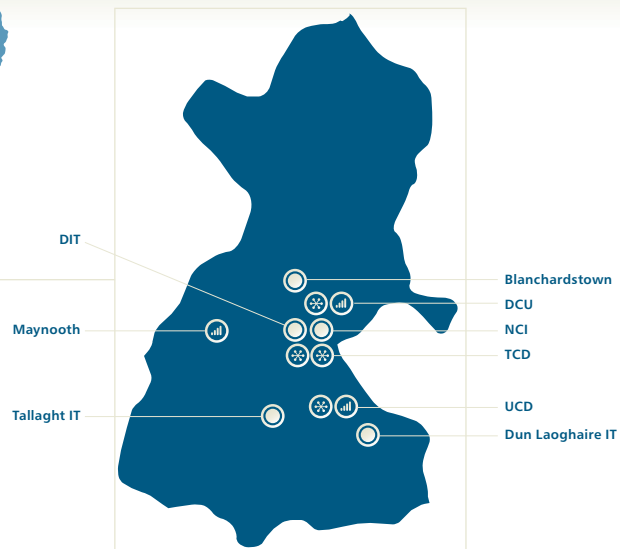
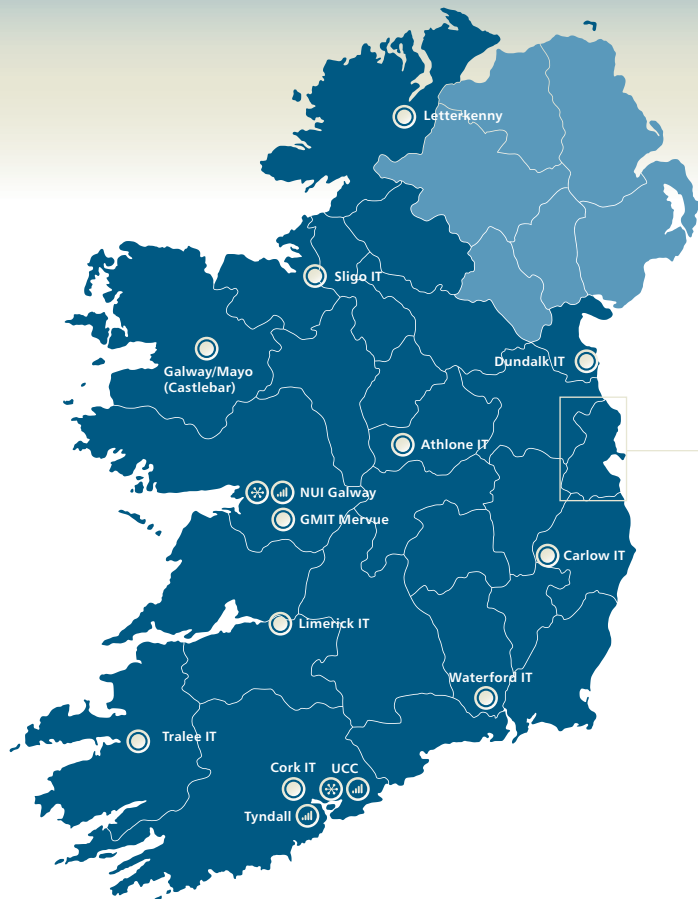
The technology is easy to use and not much training is required. "We could get a fleet of up to ten vehicles up and running within two or three days," said Oliver, and there is no limit to the number of possible applications. For instance, the system is used to track parcels deliveries and the first field trial was with Plant Life in Dublin. According to this

company, which supplies and maintains the greenery in many offices, the mobile solution resulted in an enormous saving in paperwork.

From the start the uptake has been high. The company doubled in growth in year one, and Oliver expects this to continue. "We started with two people," he said, "and now we have twelve employees, the order book is full and we will be hiring 20 more people this year."

The company plans to get into the UK and this move is being backed by Enterprise Ireland. This type of mobile solution, observed Oliver, simply does not exist there, and having proven its value in Ireland, the company expects to do very well in exports. This month a deal involving 74 dealers was signed with a partner in Australia, and the US is another target. "We expect to go from 75 per cent local, to 75 per cent export," said Oliver, who explained that growth is not just going to depend on the success of one product. Getting in ahead of other developers gave the company an advantage, but to stay in the lead means keeping ahead in innovation. Oliver is well aware of this and is already thinking ahead. "We are developing a back-end solution with Microsoft and we are about to launch this product," he said. This will involve selling back office systems over the web. "Hosting the software," said Oliver, "is our next big development."

- Institute of Technology Incubation Centre
- ⦿ University Business Incubation Centre
- ⦿ University Bio Incubation Centre



Campus Incubation Centres

Institutes of Technology¹

Athlone

Midlands Innovation & Research Centre
www.mirc.ie

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The Learning & Innovation Centre
www.itblinc.ie

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Enterprise & Research Incubation Campus
www.eric.ie

Cork

The Rubicon Centre
http://www.cit.ie/index.cfm/action/page/id/197/level/page/pageid/504/Content_Key/901/type/Page/PaGeName/Rubicon_Centre.html

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Dundalk

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Galway-Mayo (Mervue)

Innovation in Business Centre
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Galway-Mayo (Castlebar)

Innovation in Business Centre
www.gmit.ie/iibc

IADT (Dun Laoghaire)

The Media Cube
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Letterkenny

EI-supported facility under construction
Business Development Centre
www.bdc.ie

Limerick

Enterprise Acceleration Centre
<http://www.lit.ie/eac/>

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ICELT
www.ncirl.ie/Research_&_Innovation/Enterprise_and_Incubation Learning Technologies

Sligo

ITSBIC
www.itsbic.ie

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Synergy Centre
www.synergycentre.ie

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Tom Crean Business Centre
www.creancentre.com

Waterford

Arclabs Research & Innovation Centre
www.arclabs.ie

Universities

University College Dublin

NovaUCD
www.novaucd.ie

Dublin City University

Invent-DCU
www.dcu.ie/invent

NUI Galway

Business Innovation Centre
www.nuigalway.ie/tto/centre

NUI Maynooth

Innovation Centre (Centre under construction)
www.commercialisation.nuim.ie

University College Cork

(Business incubation centre under construction)
www.ucc.ie/en/ResearchandIndustry/OfficeoftheVPforResearch/TechnologyTransfer/

Bioincubation centre

<http://biotransfer.ucc.ie/bi>

Tyndall Institute

(Centre under construction)
www.tyndall.ie

Trinity Technology & Enterprise Campus Bioincubation

www.tcd.ie/research_innovation/entrepreneurship/enterprisecentre.php

¹or equivalent third level college, i.e. the National College of Ireland

www.enterprise-ireland.com/campusincubation



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