

Queen's Anniversary Prize for Dundee

The University of Dundee has won a prestigious Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher Education for its work in drug discovery – one of only X awarded in Scotland and Y in the UK.

The announcement was made at St James's Palace last night (17 November) at a ceremony attended by the Principal Sir Alan Langlands, and Professor Sir Philip Cohen and Professor Peter Downes, both of the University's School of Life Sciences.

The award recognises the work of the Division of Signal Transduction Therapy (DSTT) - a unique consortium bringing together the research expertise of 12 research teams, based in the School of Life Sciences and its associated Medical Research Council unit, with six leading rivals from the pharmaceutical industry to drive the development of new drugs combating major diseases including cancer and diabetes.

Sceptics called it a "test tube dream" – the notion of getting six major rivals, all world leading drug companies, to put aside their competitive instincts and share basic research in the quest to develop new drugs. But the University of Dundee's unique concentration of bio-expertise, giving one-stop access to drug targets in almost every major disease has proved a magnetic attraction; and the driving entrepreneurial vision of the two leading scientists, Cohen and Downes, together with the University's technology transfer experts, overcame the contractual complexities to clinch a deal which has accelerated the process of drug discovery and been hailed as a first class example of the knowledge economy in action.

The consortium was recognised by the Department of Trade and Industry last year as a model of best practice in technology transfer and has directly injected well over £23 million directly into the local economy since it began in 1998. Now with a staff of 35 and a further 150 working in associated units, the DSTT is one of the largest research collaborations between the pharmaceutical industry and a UK research institution. Its presence in Dundee has also been instrumental in stimulating biotech start ups and attracting other international companies.

University Principal Sir Alan Langlands: "We are honoured that the work of our life scientists in this important area has been recognised with such a prestigious award. The DSTT is an unique, extraordinary and highly successful operation which is enabling the discovery of new drugs to treat major global diseases. It is a great tribute to the drive and vision of Philip Cohen, Peter Downes and other leading scientists, that the DSTT has gone from strength to strength in spite of the complexities, not only of the science, but of the international business environment in which it operates."

Co-director of the DSTT, Professor Peter Downes said: "Scientists at the DSTT are no strangers to international awards but The Queen's Anniversary Prize is a particular honour and one of which we – and all our partners in the consortium - feel immensely proud. The Division of Signal Transduction Therapy has enhanced drug discovery programmes against diabetes, cancer and inflammatory diseases contributing to the research and development pipelines of several of the world's

largest pharmaceutical companies. It has stimulated biotechnology in the region by training scientists with a knowledge of the needs of the commercial sector. Several of these staff helped to establish Upstate Inc., a company selling specialised reagents to the pharmaceutical industry, which was recently acquired by the Serologicals Corporation for around \$205 million.

“The Queen’s Anniversary Award acknowledges Dundee’s success as a global player in signal transduction research and its innovative approach to knowledge transfer. More than anything it is recognition for the efforts, dedication and commitment of all of the staff of the Division of Signal Transduction Therapy.”

The Queen’s Anniversary Prize is part of the honours system and constitutes the highest honour in UK higher and further education. The award will be presented by The Queen at Buckingham Palace in February 2006.

This is the second time the University of Dundee has won the Queen’s Anniversary Prize. The first was in 1998/99 when the pioneering work of Professor Sir Alfred Cuschieri and his team in the field of keyhole surgery was recognised./ends

Notes for Editors

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