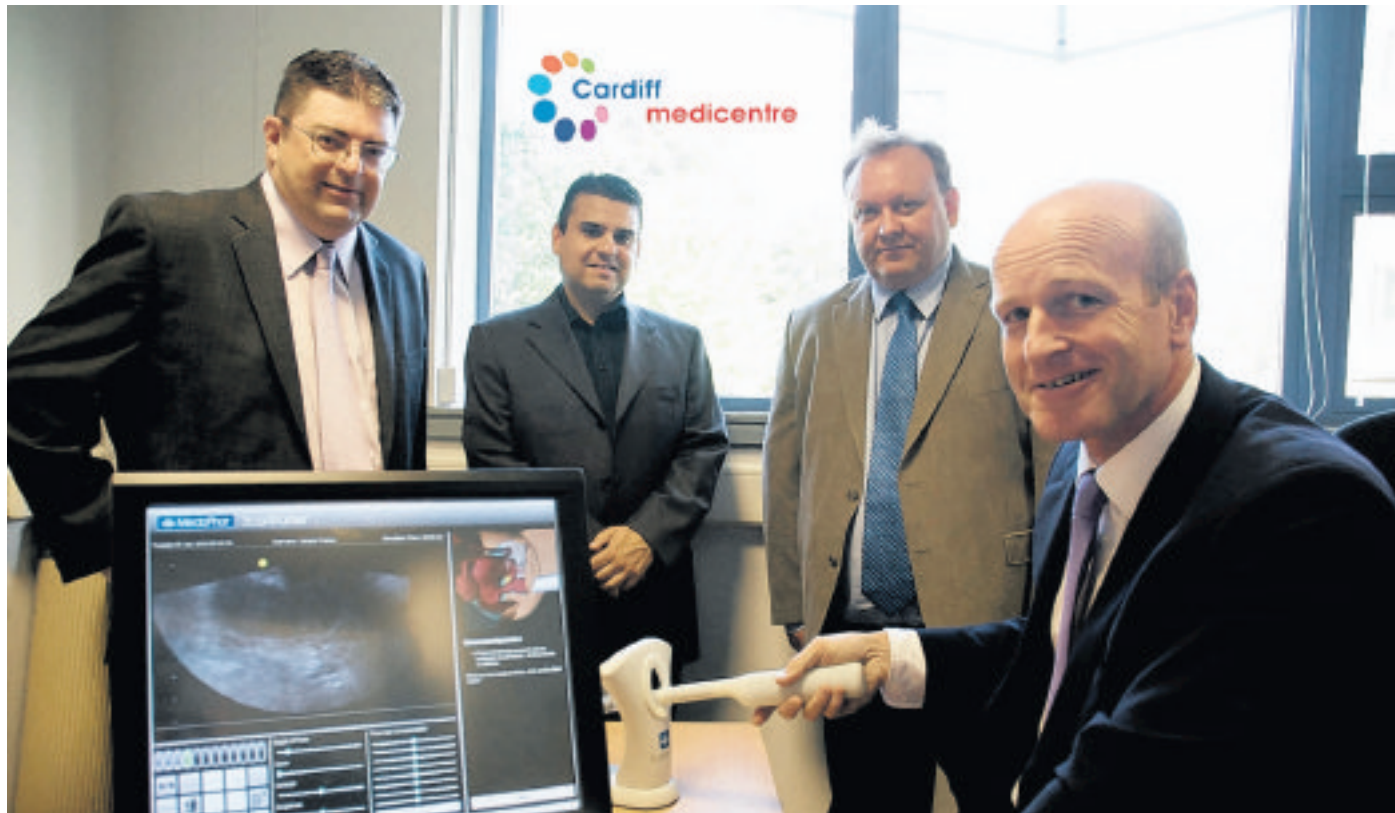


# Centre provides biotech companies with the environment to grow



Dr Mark Bowman, second from right, with, from left, Coun Mark Stephens, chairman of Cardiff Medicentre, Coun Neil McEvoy and Stuart Gall, chief executive of Medaphor

## Cardiff Medicentre has helped launch some well known names in the Welsh life sciences sector

Usually in this feature we look at an individual company that has developed an innovative product or a new way of providing a service. This time we are looking at an organisation that helps get innovative start-ups on the way to success – on the way making a significant contribution to Wales’ important biotechnology and life sciences sector.

Cardiff Medicentre is located on the campus of the University Hospital of Wales (UHW), more familiarly known as the Heath Hospital, Cardiff. Its purpose is to provide specialist incubation facilities and support to start-up companies in the medical, healthcare and life sciences sector, as director of innovation Dr Mark Bowman explained.

“We’re looking to provide a range of incubation support needs,” he said. “Companies that are here are technology based. We have strict selection criteria to make sure we select businesses with high growth aspirations.

“We’ve built a network of professional and business support mechanisms with lawyers, patent attorneys, investors, accountants and so on, to make sure companies have access to all the support start-up companies need.”

Dr Bowman has been at the Medicentre for 18 months, having started there in June 2010. His background is as a venture capitalist specialising in high technology.

He spent the five years before his appointment to Cardiff Medicentre working for “early stage seed funds in London and Birmingham”.

“I have first-hand experience in Oxford, Birmingham, London and have seen the kind of

services available for business start-ups there. I’m trying to establish that level of service in Cardiff,” he said.

“The facility itself required freshening up and a turnaround. I could see opportunities to recreate the special support available in England and assist early stage technical companies and bring [that] home to Cardiff.”

The Medicentre has 19,000 sq ft for letting, split up into 32 units of varying size, including offices and laboratories. It currently has 87% occupancy – a good figure considering the national average occupancy for incubation facilities is 85%.

What’s more, a year ago the facility was only 60% full, so there has been as Dr Bowman describes it “a surge in occupancy” over the past year, despite the economic conditions.

“In the current downturn it’s risky to be doing start-ups,” he said. “We’re very clear about the types of business we allow in. I interview them face to face to discuss the business and its aspirations, to make sure they are appropriate.”

At the moment there are 19 tenants of varying sizes. “We’re not a permanent home for businesses. They can stay for three to six years, then they should be ready to take the business elsewhere,” said Dr Bowman.

While at the Medicentre the companies can often benefit from working with researchers from UHW. Some companies, Dr Bowman says, are spun out from UHW, while he adds he is “trying to make sure the collaboration extends to biosciences department (of Cardiff University) in Park Place.”

Cardiff Medicentre is a joint venture between

Cardiff Council, Cardiff University, Cardiff and Vale Local Health Board and the Welsh Government.

It is a not-for-profit enterprise and uses its “modest surplus” as a reserve. “In the downturn the board has used its reserves to support companies here, so we only recently raised our prices,” said Dr Bowman.

During their tenure at the Medicentre, businesses receive advice in finding venture capital to finance their future growth.

Around a third are currently funded by venture capitalists. Finance Wales and Fusion IP are the main sources of finance, although some companies have business angel funding. Dr Bowman says he is “keen to increase the diversity of funding sources available”.

Since the Medicentre started operating in 1992 it has an impressive record in launching businesses out into the commercial world.

Of its former tenants, 68% have become established, revenue generating companies and graduated into fully commercial follow-on space or their own purpose-built facilities. Twenty six per cent of former tenants have gone on to be acquired as a result of their high profile.

Some former tenants have gone on to become well known names in the Welsh life sciences and biotechnology sector. The bio-pharmaceutical company Q-Chip recently raised £3.6m in funding, while laboratory testing company Tricho-Tech was acquired for £11.25m and the healthcare consultancy business Cardiff Research Consortium was purchased by outsourcing giant Capita Group plc for £11.6m.

**Chris Franks**  
Bilingual champion,  
Cardiff and Vale  
College



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## A business case for bilingualism

WHILE public and third sector bodies may be required to have Welsh language schemes in place, it is crucial that business and industry recognise the competitive edge that investing in Welsh can give.

The Welsh Language Commissioner makes her recommendations in the New Year and it remains to be seen what she will expect the private sector to do about bilingualism. However, the business case is clear – using Welsh in the workplace can only bring benefits.

There are 600,000 Welsh speakers in the country and the number is growing, particularly among young people, with a third being educated through the medium of Welsh.

Promoting your business as bilingual and encouraging Welsh at work can provide a real competitive marketing advantage to attract this burgeoning population of Welsh speakers.

It can attract new customers and create or boost loyalty among existing customers.

It can be seen as a mark of quality, with research demonstrating that while one in five people in Wales speak Welsh, four in five approve of bilingualism.

So even those who do not speak Welsh support a firm that accommodates those that do. In the past year the Institute of Directors in Wales has publicly stated that there is a sound business case for investing in language skills.

The costs however can be minimal. Staff may already speak Welsh but have not mentioned it, and there is plenty of free support available.

At Cardiff and Vale College we are supporting employers to develop this advantage. Students on a range of vocational courses are offered the customer care Yr Iaith Ar Waith, or Language At Work, which helps individuals deal with enquiries from Welsh-speaking customers and members of the public.

An increasing number of vocational courses are also being offered through the medium of Welsh, supporting the need for Welsh speakers in sectors including childcare and health.

The advantage to employers is that not only is Welsh a skill that helps build a flexible workforce, but also the potential competitive advantage it offers your business, and in this market, Mae pob mwmryn yn helpu (every little helps).  
[www.cardiffandvalecollege.ac.uk](http://www.cardiffandvalecollege.ac.uk)

