Filling the European Skills Gap – Preparing the Next Generation of European Bio-Entrepreneurs

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Biotechnology is one of the most innovative industries of the 21st century driving global wealth & wellbeing. It is revolutionising areas as diverse as the prevention of environmental pollution to the diagnosis & treatment of disease. Our biotechnological scientific understanding is expanding at an unprecedented rate & preparing our graduates to embrace this opportunity through a combination of their scientific & entrepreneurial skills will ensure they maximise their employability & that this industry continues to develop & provide solutions to many of our modern-day challenges.

In August 2015 34 PhD & MSc students from across Europe gathered in Aberdeen to take part in a week-long summer school aimed at developing the skills required to make the transition from student to life-science entrepreneur.

Students worked in international teams, each with representatives from Italy, Spain, France, Hungary & the UK.

The intensive event delivered the opportunity to learn directly from individuals who have "been there & done it" &, in many cases, have the commercial scars to prove it. By the end of the week the teams took on Board Level roles in their own "virtual" biotechnology companies & pitched for cash or contracts guided by a panel of industry Dragons.

"The Summer School enriched & expanded my understanding of the intricacies of bio-business & provided an insight into the rewarding career opportunities the sector provides. I thoroughly enjoyed the course & it has been something I've used as motivation while working through my PhD, given me a path to aim for, if you like. "

"Amazing & wonderful experience! If i could do this again, I will do it ! :)"

"I really enjoyed the summer school & felt that it gave me an insight into career options outside of academia that are not otherwise easy to find out about....."

".....The team-based challenge of setting-up a hypothetical start-up company seeking investment allowed the simulation of a real-life work situation - gaining transferable skills & practical experience that can be applied to a potential future career."

This innovative summer school relied on the collaboration of 5 European higher education institutions as well as a number of successful biotechnology companies. It provided students with a knowledge & understanding of how the field of biotechnology in industry is evolving & an opportunity to experience high-level education in specific fields that cannot routinely been taught in the classic school programmes. Students were able to expand their professional networks across Europe & develop multidisciplinary skills which will give them a major advantage in today's highly competitive job market.

Lecturers, mentors & bio-entrepreneurs that delivered the programme were also a broad & international mix. Students were exposed to aspects of the industry from small start-up companies to large, billion-dollar multinationals. They interacted with bio-entrepreneurs running award winning, high-risk, therapeutic companies & corporate giants providing services & research capabilities to the ever-expanding portfolio of companies that sit within the life-sciences umbrella.

Students were encouraged to abandon their academic values for the week & discuss how ideas could be protected by patents before being shared with the wider science community, to facilitate income generation or even new spin-out formation.

In the evenings students were encouraged to work together in their teams & social events were organised to allow them to relax & mingle.

This was the third in a series of such summer schools, with the next one scheduled for 2016 in Bologna.

"This experience was wonderful for me, in professional, cultural, & personal sense. I think that it will be better if the summer school it lasted two week, in this case the student will have a free afternoon to visit the city & to do something else."

This event, which was organised with Erasmus Plus funding, was delivered with support from the Universities of Bologna in Italy, Pau in France, Oviedo in Spain & Pécs in Hungary as part of the Biotech-Ma Project - http://www.biotechmaproject.eu/.