

Unlocking Laboratory Space for
the North East Life Sciences Sector

Case study
QuantuMDx



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To support the continued growth of the health and life sciences sector in the North East of England, and to meet the ongoing demand for more laboratory space in the region, the North East Combined Authority, in partnership with invest Newcastle, is showcasing how existing buildings in the region can be converted and adapted into new commercial laboratory space.

The following case study looks at the growth journey of life sciences company QuantuMDx, which over the past 15 years has developed a number of multiplex PCR solutions for the Point of Care.



Company background

Founded in 2008 by Elaine Warburton OBE and Jonathan O'Halloran, QuantuMDx is a progressive medical technology company that develops diagnostic systems allowing testing to be done at a patient's side. Using PCR, QuantuMDx's technology prevents the need for testing to be done in a laboratory setting.

The company's first office and laboratory space was spread across two sites at the Centre for Life in Newcastle upon Tyne, but as the company grew and there was greater need for an integrated workspace where everyone could be together, QuantuMDx began to explore a new base in the city.

The Challenge

When the company began its search more than eight years ago, the infrastructure around the life sciences sector was very different. Newcastle Helix had not been built, and the concept for The Biosphere had yet to be developed.

Dr Jonathan Peat, Head of Global Business Development at QuantuMDx, said: "As well as using the facilities at Centre for Life, we were also using the chemistry labs at Newcastle University and engineering space across the city. We knew it was time to find a larger site that would support our growth plans.

"At the time, the main site being offered to us was NETPark in County Durham, but we knew that location wasn't right for us. Being in a city centre location provided many benefits, one of the most important being access to skilled and talented graduates from Newcastle and Northumbria Universities.

"Access to finance was also a problem at the time as we didn't fit the very specific criteria. Fortunately, it was a conversation with a colleague at Lugano Property Group that led to an introduction to their company headquarters - 57 Melbourne Street in Newcastle city centre."



The Solution

Formerly the iconic Newcastle music venue, The Riverside, the building on Melbourne Street provided exactly what QuantuMDx was looking for. Lugano Property Group agreed to co-fund the office/lab build, which paved the way for work to begin.

"It's important to remember that the landscape in the city was very different when we moved sites," said Jonathan. "The infrastructure in place now wasn't there, so we had to do things differently. The vast majority of building management companies couldn't see the opportunity in a growing life sciences company, and the caveats around how we could use the spaces on offer was prohibitive. Thankfully Lugano Property Group believed in our vision."

Jonathan believes the life sciences sector and developers could benefit greatly from working together to improve understanding around the needs of each party.

"I don't think there's a play book for creating a laboratory space, and outside of the industry itself there's a widely held perception about what a traditional lab space is. In reality, for 99% of life sciences startups, labs are in fact very simple. I think by bringing people together we could better understand and address some of the areas that prevent the creation of more flexible laboratory and office spaces in the region."

QuantuMDx's current home on Melbourne Street provides the company with bespoke labs that meet the company's specific needs, as well as space to grow the business.

"I think one of the best things we did at the time was bring in a specialist lab fitter and lab designer," said Jonathan. "That allowed us to build the labs to our own specifications.

"My advice to any other life sciences business going through this process is explore all your options. Whilst established sites like The Biosphere and others provide a fantastic range of spaces, they may not be for you. Think differently, and that opens up a world of possibilities."





The Future

Whilst QuantuMDx is looking to further expand its work in China after securing investment in the Far East, the company is still committed to growing its operations in the North East.

Jonathan continued: "Our region has a huge amount to offer life sciences companies. For us, access to a talent pool from the region's world-class universities has been vital. Another benefit is that here in Newcastle you're not a small fish in a big pond - you can really forge your own path.

"As an adopted Geordie, the region is my home and I want success to come here. I think all the ongoing investment and growth in the life sciences sector is creating a vibrancy and energy here.

"I would like to see the region really grasp the opportunity to forge links with emerging markets and interrogate the opportunities for businesses like ours based in the North East.

"It's an interesting time for the region's life sciences sector. We're seeing a lot of spin outs - including from our company - and we must provide the infrastructure that's needed to help these businesses grow and become success stories for the North East."

Key facts

Name of company	QuantuMDx Group Ltd
Number of staff	75
Location	QuantuMDx Group Ltd, Lugano Building, 57 Melbourne St, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 2JQ
Duration of project	XX
Project team (contractors)	XX
Main lesson/challenge	At the time of QuantuMDx's laboratory/office move, there wasn't the existing support/infrastructure around the region's life sciences sector, which made it difficult to access funding and find building owners willing to accommodate a growing medical technology company. There remains a gap in understanding between life sciences businesses and developers.
Main benefit to 'doing it yourself'	Creating bespoke labs that meet the company's specific needs, and securing the space the business needs to grow and thrive.