

Case study Invenirex

Unlocking Laboratory Space for
the North East Life Sciences Sector

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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 start-up Invenirex - a Newcastle-based biotech company that has developed a molecular diagnostics platform designed to accelerate life science research.



Company background

Founded in December 2021 by Dan Todd, Invenirex (which takes its name from the Latin word 'invenire' - meaning to find or discover) has developed a TRL (Technology Readiness Level) six cutting-edge benchtop technology capable of real-time ultra sensitive DNA or RNA detection, down to single molecule levels.

The company's platform enables biotech researchers to carry out live detection of nucleic acids, ribonucleic acid, and proteins through video-feed with single-molecule precision using artificial intelligence.

In 2024, Invenirex secured a £500,000 investment from DSW Ventures and XTX Ventures, and the company also welcomed Alastair Carrington as non-executive chair. The injection of new investment also sparked the search for a new office and laboratory space to support the company's growth.

The Challenge

After quickly outgrowing its first office space in Milburn House - a Grade 2 listed office building in Newcastle City Centre - Invenirex began the search for a larger premises in the city, one that would provide room for the business to grow and the ability to create a BSL-1 lab space.

Having previously struggled to secure office/lab space in established city centre sites like The Biosphere on Newcastle Helix, the company decided to remain in its current location in Milburn House, but upgrade to a larger 330 sq. ft. office in the historic building.

Dan Todd, Founder and CEO of Invenirex, said: "When we first visited the larger office it was being used as a call centre. Conventional wisdom might suggest you can't use it as a lab space, but in reality, it offered everything we needed.

"Quite often a lot of life sciences companies - especially university spinouts - overestimate what they need. This former call centre was the ideal location for us."

Invenirex believes incentivising building owners and contractors to create suitable spaces for growing life sciences companies would deliver benefits for everyone.

Dan continued:

"If we educate people about the work that takes place in the majority of labs, and the relative ease in creating them, we would see more spaces pop up across the city and wider region. Not only would this provide tenants for office blocks, it would also provide much needed space for startups. It needs a maverick approach - the prohibitive costs aren't coming from the labour and materials."





The Solution

With a budget of around £1,000, Invenirex was able to fully fit out its new BSL-1 lab and office space. The company achieved this by purchasing old lab equipment being sold for parts on eBay and repairing / refurbishing items to their requirements. This included a spectrophotometer, incubator, centrifuge, gel-tank, two PCR machines, and a fluorescence microscope setup. Invenirex was also able to 3D print many of the parts it needed rather than buying them.

Waste collections through phs were straightforward to establish as Milburn House is not in a residential area, and despite the buildings listed status, there were few limitations on what the company could do in reconfiguring/using the space.

Josie Todd, COO of Invenirex, said: "Since moving into our new office and lab space we've recruited new members of staff, and we also secured a pilot project with QuantuMDx. Being in the heart of the city centre brings so many advantages, it really feels like we're part of a cluster here. Having a network of life sciences businesses around us has created a valuable knowledge and sharing resource.

"Also, from a practical point of view, being in the city centre means we can walk to places more easily and attend workshops and events. If we were further out of the city - on a business park for example - we wouldn't have that flexibility."

Whilst the company believes negative perceptions around the North still exist, Dan and Josie agree a show and tell approach would encourage more investors to be active in the region.

Josie continued: "If we bring people to the region they'll see for themselves what a thriving sector we have here. They'll also see we have the infrastructure to service clients all around the world. Our region is incredibly capital efficient, and that's a real selling point to investors - the North East pound goes further."

For Invenirex, one of the most positive things to come from the experience of searching for and moving to a new office and lab space has been the experimental approach the company has taken. Dan said: "By clarifying what it was we actually needed, we were able to create our lab on a very small budget."



The Future

Invenirex plans on being a global company, not just a local company, and it also wants to build on its commitment to excellence in people by improving skills development across the sector and sparking people's interest in life sciences.

Dan said: "Just because something's difficult, that doesn't mean you can't do it. I'm a firm believer that those situations breed innovation. As a region I think we're open to change and exploring new ways of working, and in the life sciences sector we need to adopt that creative mindset if we want to grow businesses beyond the incubation phase.

"My advice to anyone seeking a new office/lab space is do it yourself - give it a go. There's a lot less regulation in R&D and experimental biotech. And as long as it's not going to bankrupt you as a business, see what you can achieve on your own. If it works, you've done something incredible."

Key facts

Name of company	Invenirex
Number of staff	10
Location	D1 Milburn House, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 1LF
Duration of project	Two weeks
Project team (contractors)	Dan Todd (Founder and CEO) and Josie Todd (COO)
Main lesson/challenge	Startups can often be priced out of established or purpose-built lab facilities, and a lack of understanding of the requirements of life sciences businesses means building owners and contractors are less likely to create spaces for them. Invenirex believes incentivising building owners and contractors to create suitable spaces for growing life sciences companies would provide tenants for office blocks and much needed space for startups.
Main benefit to 'doing it yourself'	Adopting an experimental and DIY approach delivered a cost effective lab space that met the company's needs, and the regulatory requirements of the industry.