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Life sciences

SPECIAL EDITION

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LIFE SCIENCES WEEK

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By HENRY CARPENTER
Editor

Birmingham Business

Welcome

Did you know that an early-stage company in Brindleyplace is behind pioneering and potentially life-saving tech to give real-time assistance to people suffering significant injuries?

Since its launch in 2018 Black Space Technology's telehealth and telemedicine equipment has caught the eye of various military and civilian organisations, and can boast several armies and the United Nations as clients.

Just the other side of the city centre Salts Healthcare is at the opposite end of the time scale. Founded more than 300 years ago, this venerable institution – and one of the oldest-family owned firms in the region – has adapted its products to societal demands over the centuries, and is currently a market leader for the manufacture and supply of stoma bags, which are so important for those suffering from bowel illnesses.

These are just two vastly differing businesses which contribute to the region's status as a hotbed for the life and health sciences, and we have profiled both firms in depth in this special edition of Birmingham Business which is coinciding with the inaugural West Midlands Life Sciences Week.

How apt that Birmingham and the wider West Midlands is playing host to this celebration. With its long-established academic institutions lying cheek by jowl with one of the largest hospitals in the UK, any number of highly respected medical institutions and a commercially astute business community, this is a region with all the attributes needed to become a powerhouse of international standing for the life sciences.

As well as the aforementioned profiles, we also interview some of the individuals who do so much to make this sector tick in the region. David Kidney is a case in point. This former MP is the chief executive of the West Midlands Health Technologies Cluster, and heads the advisory board of Life Sciences Week – a wise appointment, you would think.

Some of the region's most respected thought leaders have contributed their insight to this edition, including globally renowned blood cancers expert Professor Charlie Craddock, and his business partner and co-founder of Cure Leukaemia, Graham Silk, a formidable presence in commercial spheres.

The charity sector too is represented through a cracking interview our writer Jon Griffin had with Mike Hammond, CEO of University Hospitals Birmingham Charity, which oversees Fisher House, a home from home for injured military personnel and their families.

We hope you enjoy this edition . . . and Life Sciences Week itself.

All pages with tabs not in 'Birmingham Business blue' indicate commercially backed content

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HOSPITALITY

CREATE UNFORGETTABLE MEMORIES WITH ASTON VILLA FOOTBALL CLUB'S PREMIUM HOSPITALITY

Investing in Aston Villa's hospitality is an investment in your business. From the very first game of the season to the final cup clash, each fixture offers a unique opportunity to strengthen your most important relationships:

VIP CLIENTS

Impress your top clients during high-profile games, such as those against our Premier League and European rivals, providing the perfect setting to cement vital business relationships.

NEW PROSPECTS

Start your relationship on a high note by inviting potential clients to a match, where the excitement of a home game can set the tone for a fruitful partnership.

STAFF ENGAGEMENT

Reward your team or welcome new members by introducing them to the vibrant atmosphere at Villa Park during key fixtures.

FAMILY & FRIENDS

It's not all business—share the experience with those closest to you, creating memories that last a lifetime.

FORGE CONNECTIONS THAT LAST A LIFETIME

Aston Villa's premium hospitality is designed to do more than entertain—it's about creating stories that your clients and guests will remember and cherish. From the buzz of a Midlands derby to the prestige of a European football night under the lights, these are the experiences that will keep your business at the forefront of your clients' minds.

Join us at Villa Park, where business meets pleasure in the most unforgettable way. Make your next move with Aston Villa, and let's create moments that will be remembered, relationships that will endure, and business that will thrive.

SCAN HERE TO FIND OUT MORE

SCAN HERE

Where style meets substance

Inside Aston Villa's elevated hospitality experience

Football today is more than just what happens on the pitch. As the game has evolved into a platform for building relationships, marking milestones, and connecting communities, Aston Villa's premium hospitality offerings have stepped into the spotlight. These experiences go beyond a seat at the match, offering exclusive access to Villa Park and an elevated way to enjoy football that reflects the passion, loyalty and pride of our supporters. From chef-curated dining experiences to lively pub-style atmospheres and private suites, every space is thoughtfully designed to create unforgettable moments.

More than just a venue, Villa Park becomes a home away from home, a place where memories are made, milestones are celebrated, and guests feel part of something truly special. Whether entertaining clients, sharing a day with family or connecting with fellow supporters, our hospitality offering is an invitation to experience Aston Villa in signature style.

Chef Brad Carter at 150 Club

Hospitality at Villa Park is elevated through collaborations with leading culinary talent. Michelin-starred chef Brad Carter brings his creativity to the 150 Club, serving a two-course informal dining menu tailored to the kick-off time.

Guests can enjoy welcome drinks, inclusive premium wines, beers and soft drinks, plus live entertainment at selected home games and halfway line padded seating within the Doug Ellis Stand. It's a unique blend of Michelin influence and Villa passion that defines the future of matchday hospitality.

The 150 Club: a vibrant matchday experience

The 150 Club offers an exciting matchday experience built around exceptional food, dynamic energy and a genuine connection to the game. With a lively members' club atmosphere and a relaxed, social setting, it is the perfect space to bring together friends, family or clients in an environment that feels both exclusive and welcoming. Designed for those who value great food and great company, it offers an inviting place to relax, socialise and enjoy the match in style.

The open-plan layout encourages conversation and connection, making it ideal for entertaining or celebrating special occasions. An elevated matchday menu adds to the experience, turning every fixture into a memorable culinary occasion.

A smart investment in business hospitality

Beyond individual experiences, Aston Villa's hospitality offering is increasingly seen as a smart, effective tool for businesses across the Midlands and beyond. From nurturing key client relationships to rewarding top-performing teams, matchday at Villa Park provides an unforgettable setting for genuine engagement.

It's also a reflection of how football hospitality is evolving and moving away from overly corporate experiences toward something more personal, more vibrant, and more memorable.

For many local and regional businesses, a hospitality package at Villa Park isn't just about the 90 minutes on the pitch. It's about what happens before and after: the conversations, the shared excitement, and the kind of experience that deepens connections and opens doors.

Make your matchday unforgettable with flexible options

The Aston, the 150 Club and the Chef Brad Carter Experience offer the flexibility to fit a variety of needs. Seasonal memberships provide a consistent home for fans and businesses looking to make Villa Park a regular destination. Meanwhile, match by match options give guests the freedom to personally select their fixtures, ideal for special occasions or targeted client hosting throughout the season.

Whether you're looking for a premium upgrade to your matchday experience or a sophisticated setting to entertain and impress, Villa Park's hospitality offering delivers. It's a celebration of football, food, and connection all in a setting that reflects the ambition of one of the Premier League's most storied clubs.

Unlocking our health future

By Professor PAUL CADMAN, CEO of One Thousand Trades Group

The West Midlands is no stranger to reinvention.

From the steam engine to silicon chips, we've always been a region that builds the future - often before the rest of the world knows it needs building. And now, as the UK sharpens its focus on innovation-led growth, we find ourselves at the cusp of a new era: one where life sciences could define our economic future as powerfully as manufacturing once did.

This special edition of Birmingham Business Magazine, timed to coincide with the inaugural WM Life Sciences Week, captures that turning point. It's a showcase of world-leading capability, entrepreneurial grit, and the collaborative ambition driving a £5 billion life sciences sector that's not just thriving here, but starting to lead.

Why life sciences, and why now?

There's no denying the numbers: life sciences contributed over £94 billion to the UK economy, with the West Midlands dominating more than any region outside the South East. But this is more than economics.

It's about how we live longer, healthier lives. How we create skilled jobs that anchor talent here. How we make this region a testbed for digital health, biotech and precision medicine - not in theory, but in practice.

And it's about collaboration. The true heartbeat of this week, and of this magazine, is partnership. Between NHS Trusts and medtech startups. Between universities and venture capital. Between policy-makers and practitioners. WM Life Sciences Week gives a platform to all of them - and shows how, together, we're greater than the sum of our parts.

From the lab to the boardroom

Historically, one of the challenges in UK life sciences has been the gap between research excellence and commercial success. We've produced the ideas - but not always the global companies. That's changing, fast.

Right here in Birmingham, we're seeing investment flow into health innovation campuses, clinical trials networks, and world-class facilities like the Precision Health Technologies Accelerator. We're seeing entrepreneurs with both scientific brilliance and commercial firepower. And we're seeing our universities build research pipelines with business impact built in.

There's confidence here now. A sense that we're not just trying to catch up with London, Oxford, or Cambridge - but defining a fourth engine of UK life sciences growth, on our own terms.

From inequality to impact

What makes the West Midlands life sciences story different is our population.

We're one of the youngest, most diverse regions in Europe. We live with some of the deepest health inequalities in the country. For researchers and clinicians, that means we have the chance to test solutions that matter - not in sterile environments, but in the real world. Whether it's tackling diabetes, mental health, heart disease or healthy ageing, what works here can work anywhere.

At One Thousand Trades Group, we believe in business that solves real problems. That's why we've invested in med-tech, health education and diagnostics businesses rooted in community need. It's not charity – it's a commercial edge. Because the companies that change lives here are the ones that scale globally.

A call to action

But we're not finished yet. This magazine celebrates success – but it also lays down a challenge.

We need more investment – private and public. We need joined-up thinking between health, industry and skills. We need to shout louder about what we do best. And we need to make the West Midlands irresistible to the next generation of life sciences pioneers.

That means creating an ecosystem that doesn't just support talent, but keeps it. That means levelling up funding and regulatory support. And it means seeing the West Midlands not as an 'alternative' to London, but as a global life sciences region in its own right.

The week ahead

This special edition is full of stories that prove it can be done. You'll read about fast-growing businesses, pioneering researchers, investor confidence, and world-class infrastructure. You'll hear from people who are making the future of healthcare happen – right here, right now.

WM Life Sciences Week brings all of this together. Events, tours, conversations and connections across Birmingham, Solihull, Coventry and the Black Country. It's a rallying point for the sector - and a platform for what comes next.

So whether you're an investor, policymaker, entrepreneur or student – get involved. Because this isn't just about science. It's about building a healthier, wealthier West Midlands.

And that's something we can all believe in.

Message from Westminster

By ALISTAIR CARNS, MP for Birmingham Selly Oak and Minister for Veterans and People

Firstly, I would like to thank the team behind West Midlands Life Sciences Week for curating such a diverse and engaging schedule of events.

This week promises to highlight the very best of the West Midlands' life sciences ecosystem, from showcasing ongoing work and new innovations to fostering discussions on how we can realise the region's remarkable potential. I am excited to participate in these activities.

The West Midlands boasts one of the UK's most significant and dynamic clusters of life sciences, contributing £10.3 billion to the region's economy and employing around 17,000 healthcare professionals, 9,600 med-tech specialists, 4,000 bio-pharma workers, and 3,000 medical device experts. This impressive workforce supports a unique combination of world-class NHS hospitals, cutting-edge university research, and a vibrant community of innovative life science enterprises.

The region's nine universities are pivotal in driving the life sciences sector. They not only excel in research but also play a crucial role in equipping the region with the necessary skills to deliver high-quality healthcare and foster innovation. These institutions produce 11,000 medical graduates annually across four medical schools. The West Midlands HealthTech Innovation Accelerator exemplifies how our universities promote collaboration.

These academic hubs are complemented by world-class NHS hospitals and infrastructure. The region is home to Europe's largest ITU, the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine, and the UK's largest genomics facility, making it a centre for clinical and scientific excellence.

Collaboration between universities, public sector organisations, and the private sector is thriving in the West Midlands. Developments such as the Birmingham Innovation Quarter, Arden Cross, and the Birmingham Health Innovation Campus (BHIC) are products of these strategic partnerships.

These sites will create high-skilled jobs, attract inward investment, and strengthen the commercial pathways that translate discovery science into real-world patient benefits.

Moreover, the West Midlands is at the forefront of reducing health inequalities both in the UK and globally. Its diverse and stable population makes it an ideal location for conducting representative clinical trials with broad relevance and applicability.

This demographic advantage is further supported by the UK's largest clinical trials environment, including the NIHR/ Wellcome Trust Birmingham Clinical Research Facility and one of seven Cancer Research UK Trial Units. With our Labour Government's commitment to expanding clinical research capacity and the policy direction of the O'Shaughnessy Review, the West Midlands is well-positioned as a premier national hub for commercial clinical trials.

Given the significance of the life sciences sector to our national health and security, I strongly support our Government's ambition to position the UK as the leading life sciences economy in Europe by 2030 and third globally by 2035, as outlined in the Life Sciences Sector Plan.

I am pleased to see a focus on unlocking the potential of the UK's city regions, with the West Midlands Life Sciences cluster being well recognised.

But for now, I hope you enjoy everything this week has to offer. Immerse yourself in the forefront of the life sciences sector right here in the West Midlands.

I very much look forward to seeing you there.

outlook

Stronger together delivering a bold vision

How the West Midlands is leading the future of health innovation

By TIM JONES, chief officer of Health Innovation West Midlands

An enduring feature of the West Midlands has been the ability to adapt to meet new demands.

As we enter a new period of change, the ability to be agile and open to collaboration will be pivotal in the success of the West Midlands in growing its reputation as one of the key life science eco-systems.

The convergence of national and regional strategies such as Fit for the Future: The 10 Year Health Plan for England, the Life Sciences Sector Plan, the West Midlands Growth Plan, English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill and the evolving Industrial Strategy all point to a future where innovation, inclusivity, and regional strength are key drivers of transformation.

This transformation is underpinned by the region's extraordinary diversity, seen through three powerful dimensions.

The first is industry. The West Midlands is home to leading clusters in automotive, aerospace, life sciences, creative industries, and green technologies, as highlighted in the Growth Plan.

Then there is its demography – a rich tapestry of communities and cultures which brings unique perspectives and needs to health innovation.

Finally we point to its culture and heritage. From the pioneering spirit of the Lunar Society to the entrepreneurial legacy of a 'city of a thousand trades', the region has long been able to catalyse ideas and deliver across boundaries.

As we mark Life Sciences Week, it is a time not only to celebrate achievements but also to reflect, plan, and co-ordinate our efforts with the opportunities ahead. It is a chance to align our regional strengths with national ambitions, to build partnerships that deliver real impact, and to ensure that innovation reaches every corner of our communities.

Strategic alignment

The Life Sciences Sector Plan (LSSP) is bold in its ambition. Its goal is to make the UK the most attractive destination in the world for developing and deploying new treatments.

By 2030, it aims to position the UK among the top three fastest-growing countries in Europe for patient access to medicines and med-tech. The LSSP is one of eight plans published as part of the government's Modern Industrial Strategy. Developed with the 10 Year Plan, the LSSP sets out how the life sciences sector can repair and transform the nation's economy and health, and play an enabling role in its shifts for the NHS, by accelerating the adoption of innovation in the NHS.

The high-value strategic partnerships section of the plan focuses on delivering the government's vision and includes a pledge to support the health innovation networks to scale to accelerate innovation and investment across the health sector.

The life sciences sector and health innovation are viewed by the government as not only a route to economic growth, but a way of supporting its three shifts in health outlined in the 10 Year Plan.

The size of the prize is quite obvious when £246 billion is potentially what innovation in healthcare could provide back to the NHS and the country – referring to a recent report, Defining the Size of the Health Innovation Prize by Frontier Economics.

This ambition is reflected in our work, which is not just local, but regional and national in scope.

We are focused on how we play our part in supporting the potential around that £246 billion.

This is not theoretical. Digital innovation, Phio Access and Engage, has already demonstrated a direct impact on workforce, freeing up 1,470 hours for face-to-face MSK triage and treatment in two trusts over 12 months in the Black Country. If scaled regionally, the benefits could be transformative. Our role is to discover, develop, and deploy innovations that deliver measurable value like this.

Health innovation networks: catalysts for regional growth

The West Midlands Growth Plan positions health innovation networks (HINs) as pivotal connectors in the region's health and life sciences ecosystem. By linking NHS organisations, academia, and industry, we can accelerate the adoption of innovation, particularly in diagnostics, medical devices, and digital health.

As part of the region's ambition to scale its health-tech cluster, HINs are driving collaboration with integrated care boards (ICBs) and local authorities, aligning health improvement with economic productivity. Their role extends into national programmes such as the National Neighbourhood Health Programme and innovation accelerators, where they act as delivery partners translating policy into practice.

To realise this vision, strategic partnerships are essential. HINs are enabling access to NHS data, supporting clinical trials, and streamlining regulatory pathways, creating fertile ground for innovation and investment. The plan highlights the importance of scaling proven innovations, with HINs nationally playing a key role in attracting funding and supporting growth.

Health Innovation West Midlands (HIWM) is recognised as a core asset in this ecosystem. Alongside organisations like West Midlands Health Tech Innovation Accelerator (WMHTIA) and Medilink

Midlands, HIWM ensures the region is well-positioned to support the national life sciences strategy. The West Midlands now boasts the UK's largest medical devices cluster, with more than 700 firms, 14,000 employees, and a £6 billion turnover underscoring its strength as a launchpad for life sciences and med-tech businesses.

Working closely with MPs and policymakers enables us to deliver local change faster and more widespread, ensuring all patients benefit from innovation. By doing this we can support a thriving life sciences sector across the region with a growing economy.

From fragmentation to integration

Innovation will not create the kind of impact it needs to unless we start thinking end-to-end. A standalone innovation will not make real change, unless it fits into the broader pathway.

Innovation in healthcare is not lacking in enthusiasm. Every corner of the sector is eager to evolve. Yet, fragmentation persists. Innovators, providers, and regulators all view progress through their own prism. Our challenge is to bring these perspectives together, to project a 360-degree view and foster end-to-end thinking where standalone solutions give way to integrated pathways.

We need to get innovators to understand what providers are looking for. But we also need providers to understand the pressures that innovators are under. It's about building relationships that work.

This is not just a technical challenge; it's a cultural one. Healthcare is careful and considered. Innovation, by contrast, thrives on speed and breakthroughs. Bridging these worlds requires a shared language, mutual understanding, and a commitment to co-design.

West Midlands – the benefits

We've got every skill you would want in the West Midlands.

Acting as conveners is where we add the most value and where our efforts are best placed, and this convening power is amplified by the region's rare combination of assets: a dense population, a compact geography, and a rich ecosystem of talent, infrastructure, and ambition. We have world-class universities and a vibrant academic sector.

Innovation assets like the Birmingham Health Innovation Campus, Birmingham Biomedical Research Centre, Keele University Science Park, the West Midlands Secure Data Environment, the Peter Rigby Digital Futures Institute, and the Warwick Life Sciences Park are matched by industrial strength in advanced manufacturing, digital technologies, and precision medicine. The region is home to incubators, accelerators, and evaluation centres that support every stage of the innovation journey.

The West Midlands has also been ranked as one of the top two regions in Europe in the 'Strong Innovators' category of the European Commission Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2025.

"Healthcare is careful and considered. Innovation, by contrast, thrives on speed and breakthroughs. Bridging these worlds requires a shared language, mutual understanding, and a commitment to co-design."

The power of partnerships

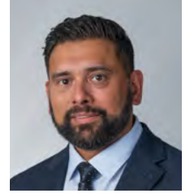
In a changing world, we at HIWM rely on good relationships. We are building trusted relationships with industry, academia, regulators and the combined authority.

We work in partnership with West Midlands organisations such as Birmingham City University, Central England Health Partnership, Birmingham Health Partners, WMHTIA, Central and North West Midlands Commercial Research Delivery Centre, West Midlands Cancer Alliance, West Midlands Secure Data Environment, Manufacturing Technology Centre and Association of British HealthTech Industries.

Our function is discover, develop and deploy. We magnify ways to accelerate and scale what we can do in the West Midlands.

The region has everything it needs. Now is the time to bring it together.

*Tim Jones became the acting chief officer for Health Innovation West Midlands in 2023. He is also the acting chair of the Central & South Genomics Service Alliance, a member of Birmingham Health Partners' executive steering group and a member of the West Midlands Health Technology Innovation Accelerator's executive board. He is an honorary professor at the University Of Warwick Medical School and a senior research fellow at the University of Birmingham.



Adapting the Midlands life sciences sector to global shifts

By RAMESH JASSAL, Heligan Group

The Midlands life sciences sector stands at a pivotal juncture as global health policy undergoes significant transformation. Recent developments in the United States, particularly under the proposed leadership of Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., suggest sweeping changes to key health agencies such as the FDA, HHS, CDC, and NIH.

These include large-scale layoffs, restructuring, and a shift in regulatory priorities, including a potential new mandate for placebo-controlled trials for all new vaccines. Ongoing discussions around removing or weakening vaccine liability protections for pharmaceutical companies signal a paradigm shift that could reshape global investment and innovation strategies. Given that the US accounts for approximately 40–50% of global pharmaceutical consumption, its influence on the world stage cannot be ignored.

To remain competitive and attractive to investors, the Midlands must proactively align with these geopolitical shifts. The region's life sciences ecosystem, anchored by academic excellence, clinical trial capabilities, and a growing innovation infrastructure, must double down on its strengths while adapting to new global standards.

First, innovation must be at the heart of the Midlands' strategy. With the FDA emphasising rigorous placebo testing and safety validation, Midlands-based companies should prioritise generating robust clinical evidence and ensuring transparency throughout their R&D processes. This will not only align with emerging US standards but also build trust with global stakeholders.

Second, artificial intelligence (AI) offers a transformative opportunity. AI can accelerate drug discovery, optimise clinical trial design, and enhance regulatory compliance. The UK government's £100 million AI Life Sciences Accelerator Mission aims to leverage AI to develop therapies for previously incurable diseases.

Midlands firms should capitalise on this initiative to stay ahead of the curve. Recent US investments underscore this trend: Eli Lilly partnered with BigHat Biosciences to use AI for antibody development, while DeepMind's AlphaFold has revolutionised protein structure prediction. Waters Corporation's $17.5 billion merger with BD Biosciences and Lantheus Holdings' $750 million acquisition of Life Molecular Imaging further highlight the strategic value of AI in life sciences.

In addition, artificial intelligence is revolutionising patient recruitment in clinical trials. AI technologies can now identify ideal clinical trial candidates with remarkable accuracy by analysing electronic health records, medical histories, and demographic data. This precision not only improves enrolment rates but also significantly reduces per-patient costs. According to a study published in Nature Digital Medicine, AI-powered recruitment can cut clinical trial costs by up to 70% and shorten timelines by as much as 40%. This efficiency enables Site Management Organisations (SMOs) to operate with leaner staffing models while maintaining high performance. A notable example is Carta Healthcare's acquisition of Realyze Intelligence, an oncology-focused AI firm that matches patients to clinical trials using clinician-trained algorithms. Realyze's technology enabled UPMC Hillman Cancer Center to match seven times more patients and double enrolment rates. Such advancements underscore the strategic value of AI in streamlining clinical operations and enhancing trial outcomes.

Third, university training and skills development are critical. The Midlands' universities must align their curricula with the evolving needs of the life sciences sector, emphasising interdisciplinary training in AI, biotech, regulatory science, and health economics. The ABPI's Life Sciences 2035 report projects a need for 70,000 additional jobs by 2035 and highlights the importance of vocational and practical training. Many universities are not yet equipped for the rapid advancements in AI, and students risk pursuing degrees that may become obsolete. A shift towards apprenticeships and industry-led training programmes is essential to ensure a workforce ready for the future.

Fourth, policy and regulatory agility will be essential. The UK's Life Sciences Sector Plan and Industrial Strategy outline measures to streamline clinical trials, enhance regulatory responsiveness, and attract investment. The Midlands must actively implement these policies at the regional level, creating a low-friction environment for startups, scale-ups, and global investors. This includes fully leveraging the region's integrated 'bench to bedside' ecosystem and promoting assets such as the Edgbaston Medical Quarter and the new Health and Innovation Campus at Battery Park.

Finally, the Midlands must position itself as a proactive partner in the global life sciences arena. As the US redefines its health priorities and investment criteria, regions that demonstrate readiness, resilience, and regulatory alignment will attract more funding and partnerships. With the UK benefiting from favourable tariffs of 10% from the US, we should continue to see strong appetite from US buyers interested in UK healthcare assets. Added to this, a weak pound versus the dollar is likely to increase overseas interest from the US, particularly from investors seeking strategic footholds in Europe, including those aligned with more protectionist or domestic investment agendas. By embracing this new paradigm, innovation must demonstrate clear material benefit over placebo, and safety and accountability remain paramount.

The region is already making strides. The West Midlands Health Tech Innovation Accelerator (WMHTIA), part of the £100 million Innovation Accelerator programme, has supported over 100 health tech companies, created or safeguarded 110 jobs, and secured £28.4 million in co-investment. With a £10 million funding boost, WMHTIA is set to further support innovative businesses, researchers, and entrepreneurs.

In conclusion, the Midlands has the foundation to thrive amid global change. By integrating innovation, AI, education, and policy reform, it can not only adapt to the evolving US influence but also lead in shaping the future of life sciences in the UK and beyond.

*Ramesh Jassal is a partner at Heligan Group, with over 15 years of mid-market M&A advisory and 20-plus years of healthcare industry experience. He is recognised as a leading UK healthcare M&A advisor, specialising in health and social care, medical equipment, devices, and pharma/life sciences.

Remote control

Black Space Technology is one of the many cutting-edge early-stage businesses in the West Midlands which are causing ripples in the wider life sciences sphere. HENRY CARPENTER catches up with the bosses of the Brindleyplace-based firm whose vision is to help those suffering in some of the world's least accessible environments.

Imagine being a medic on a battlefield in a far-flung land, and being able to give effective and potentially life-saving treatment to a wounded soldier thanks to a small, pioneering piece of technology.

Both you and the soldier would give it eternal thanks.

The 'it' in this instance is equipment designed and issued by Black Space Technology, an early-stage telemedicine firm which, although based in Brindleyplace, is being used across the globe by different nations' armies and peacekeeping forces.

At its most basic, we are talking about the ability to access live video conferencing on a system which has the patient's medical records already stored.

And it's not just appropriate in military zones either. The tech could equally be used by a rescue team on the slopes of a mountain as part of a failed climbing ascent or, closer to home, an air ambulance doctor treating a car crash victim in a remote part of the UK.

This is explained by Black Space's founder and CEO, David Morgan, and colleague and finance director Davinder Sidhu.

As Morgan says, the focus is being able to deliver first-class healthcare into any remote environment.

"Everyone has a right to top-level healthcare wherever they are," he says.

To understand where Black Space breaks the mould of conceptually similar equipment, it's right there in its name.

"We called it Black Space because of something called black space innovation," he explains.

"This reflects how a small, agile company can compete with much larger players through innovation. Our solutions are smaller, lighter and faster than traditional systems, and that combination is the real black space innovation as it allows us to close the care gap at the point-of-injury and save lives."

On-the-ground technology wasn't new, but it existed in much clunkier, heavier monitoring systems, when with Black Space nothing larger than a mobile phone is needed.

So how exactly does it work?

"You need android phone, on which is a configurable application which consists of an electronic patient record, a vital sign monitoring screen that takes the data from third-party monitoring devices and displays it on the device, and the ability to open up a low-bandwidth, high-definition video conferencing link to the next echelon of care.

"So if I'm a combat medic in somewhere like Ukraine, someone gets shot and they've got a chest wound, and I'm not too sure how to operate, I can then link back to my next echelon of care, perhaps a medic in theatre, and they could give me advice on how to treat them.

"We talk about closing the care gap, which means reducing the time to a minimum from the point of injury or illness to when you receive definitive medical care.

David Morgan, founder and CEO

"Now, that might be using the technology by the combat medic – or paramedic, if it's a civilian case such as the Everest expedition we recently supported – and linking into the next echelon of care where an expert can leverage advice.

"If they wanted advice, they could actually have a live video conference back to the UK to get further back-up advice if necessary."

It sounds like a must-have for any military organisation but breaking into established markets is no easy feat. Despite that, Black Space has been seeing steady increase in turnover since it started to gain commercial traction.

"Initially our focus was R&D intensive, and that process lasted for three years," says Sidhu.

"Since we commercialised in about 2021, we've seen approximately 50% year-on-year increase in turnover, with collaborations with the UK's MoD, Canadian Armed Forces, and the United Nations who are scaling up their peacekeeping missions.

"The three main missions at the moment are in South Sudan, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the plan with the UN is to mainstream telemedicine across all the organisation's global peacekeeping projects.

"There are three more missions which we will be involved with this autumn."

So Black Space has come a long way in a relatively short time, especially considering the Covid pandemic put a kybosh on almost all free-flowing commercial activity.

But although the company launched in 2018, its roots as a concept can be traced back several years beforehand when Morgan was working as a consultant at Heartlands Hospital in inner-city Birmingham.

"It all really started when a guy walked into my clinic for a routine appointment complaining that had been waiting for a long time, he had lost his day's wages because he was self-employed, and it had cost him a tenner in parking charges.

"He said he was fed up and asked if there was a better way I could look after his wound, and wondered if you could just send in a photo every week.

"I thought well there must be a good use for mobile phones so I set up a company which sought to look after patients at home – so called telehealth."

It had a good start, with the firm ultimately monitoring over 10,000 patients at home for the NHS. A consultant at Heartlands, who happened to be the lead medic for Northamptonshire Air Ambulance, asked if the system could be replicated for the charity. In corporate terms, the firm was providing British Telecom with its telehealth so it was seeing successful results across a number of disciplines.

Unfortunately though, the NHS's adoption of digitalisation wasn't quick enough or

David Morgan with the Air Ambulance Service

interview

“We’ve developed a system that will bring order to chaos because very few emergency services can cope with large numbers of casualties. What we’re bringing is a paradigm shift by enabling emergency responders, be they police, ambulance or fire services, to know exactly what’s going on and where it’s going.”



Combining smart eye cameras with telemedicine to transform healthcare in remote environments

effective enough, in Morgan’s view, and this led to the firm “running out of runway”.

It folded – just as Morgan had started doing some work with the military who had seen the equipment he had been supplying to the air ambulance.

They liked what they saw – apart from the size which they said was too large and heavy . . . and that led to the quick formation of Black Space Technology.

An early client was the British Army, particularly units which dealt with anti-terrorist actions, and then another contract was issued from the Spanish Air Force for using Black Space’s system for evacuating patients from extreme areas by helicopter.

“That’s when the company first took off,” says Morgan. “But things really started to change in 2021 when we were tipped off by the UK embassy in New York that the UN was looking for a telemedicine system.

“We put in a bid but the UN abandoned the tender and just dealt directly with us. The collaboration was formalised on Christmas Day in 2023. It’s gone from strength to strength and we look after the peacekeepers and anyone that’s injured on the battlefield.”

I’m interested to hear why Morgan and Sidhu seem to prefer working with the military or peacekeeping sources rather than, say, partnering with the NHS and ‘civvy street’ in general?

“The military, as you would expect, are decisive, focused, they know exactly what they want, they know exactly when they want it and they know exactly what to do with it when they have it,” says Morgan.

“Likewise the UN are very focused on what they need to do. They are very passionate and great to work with. In short, they are great partners and that’s why we focus on the military and NGO space.”

David Morgan and Davinder Sidhu at the WMHTIA International Assembly, held at the NEC

That’s not to say Black Space would discount operating more in the civilian space.

“We hope to launch a product which deals with civil contingency,” says Morgan. “With the instability around the world, there’s a very high risk that there are going to be increased terrorist attacks or indeed straightforward military attacks on urban conurbations which will lead to hundreds, if not thousands of injuries.

“We’ve developed a system that will bring order to chaos because very few emergency services can cope with large numbers of casualties. What we’re bringing is a paradigm shift by enabling emergency responders, be they police, ambulance or fire services, to know exactly what’s going on and where it’s going.

“The other part is, if you’ve got large numbers of casualties, you want to triage them and assess the severity really quickly. We have something called the ten-second triage tool which is an automated system that the NHS uses so you not only triage large numbers of casualties, but more importantly match the casualties to the right hospitals.

“It mitigates against the problem of the local hospital surge when everyone ends up in the closest hospital. Our system matches the patient to the definitive care they patient need so you actually spread the patients out to the appropriate hospitals to avoid surge and inappropriate transfers. That’s where we think our civilian play will be.”

In a way though, it doesn’t really matter whether the focus is national or international for Black Space. It can turn on a sixpence because the beauty of the system is that its ‘skills’ are transferable.

As well as the rapid electronic patient record (EPR) system with its inbuilt telemedicine capabilities, the firm also has various side projects on the go. One example is a product for the MoD where they had a challenge of wanting to use heavy-lift UAVs – huge drones capable of lifting 300 kg, not only for supply but also for casualty evacuation, or ‘casevac’ as it’s known.

Casualty pod enabling clinical monitoring during autonomous UAV evacuation

Collaboration launch with Birmingham City University and OUI Inc (Japan) at 10X Brindleyplace

Working with UNMISS in South Sudan to support peacekeeping operations

“If you’ve got an unattended casualty you really want to know what’s going on mid-flight,” says Morgan. “So we developed a slightly different technology for automated casualty monitoring during flight which means that when the casualty is on board, they can be seen and the vital signs can be monitored in real time, just in case anything serious happens.”

The company’s focus might well be a global one, but both Morgan and Sidhu are proud of the firm’s Birmingham roots and acknowledge the collaborations with any number of West Midlands institutions, not least Birmingham City University and also Business Growth West Midlands, the small business support arm of West Midlands Combined Authority.

“BGWM supported us with a grant that allowed us to visit AidEx Geneva, which is a huge humanitarian expo,” says Sidhu.

“That’s where we met a Japanese SME business which operates a smart eye camera which detects eye diseases, cataracts and so forth.

“We also involved Birmingham City University and entered an international submission, which was successful with Eureka Network and funded by Innovate UK, and we look forward to collaborating with them going forwards.”

Morgan takes over. “Visual loss around the world is a huge problem especially in places like Africa. And a lot of it is preventative, and a lot of it can be cured by early diagnosis. But obviously in Africa, you’re challenged by the fact that there aren’t enough doctors and the distances to travel between villages is huge.

“What we’re developing is a device that can attach to an android phone that you can use to take a picture of anterior and posterior eye disease chambers, and then use AI to make a diagnosis which integrates with our telemedicine solution.

“And on that basis, the ones that desperately need help can be triaged in a much faster way than exists at the moment.”

Black Space’s potential seems limitless, given that it can be used in almost any environment, from jungle to battlefield to the sides of the world’s tallest mountains.

Right now it feels it is poised to scale a series of new heights.

Birmingham BioCity set to impact global life sciences sector

Birmingham is expected to further impact on the global life sciences sector with the launch of Birmingham BioCity – a 130,000 sq ft hub at the heart of the £4 billion Birmingham Knowledge Quarter.

Due for completion in 2027, Birmingham BioCity has been designed as critical infrastructure for the UK's fastest-growing life sciences cluster, supporting thousands of new jobs and attracting world-class investment into the Midlands.

Granted UK Investment Zone status, Birmingham BioCity secures one of the most competitive operating environments in the country. Tenants and investors are set to benefit from reduced tax liabilities, stamp duty savings, 0% business rates, and direct government backing.

The facility will provide Containment Level 2 laboratories, hybrid lab-office floors, and high-spec collaboration spaces engineered to the needs of research-intensive SMEs, corporates, universities, NHS trusts, and global institutes.

Birmingham BioCity is purpose-built to accelerate research, clinical translation, and commercialisation at scale. Engineered by Cundall, it is targeting BREEAM 'Outstanding', EPC 'A', WiredScore Platinum, and SmartScore Platinum – combining environmental performance with best-in-class digital infrastructure.

Laboratories will feature vibration-resilient floors, six air changes per hour, 1.5 MVA building power, and a 500 kW back-up generator.

The scheme is anchored by partnerships with the University of Birmingham, Aston University and Birmingham City

University and supported by the city's diverse STEM talent pool. It will offer immediate access to clinical trial networks, translational research, and commercial partnerships.

Tani Dulay, chief executive of Woodbourne Group, said: "Birmingham BioCity is purpose-built as critical infrastructure for the life sciences sector – combining state-of-the-art CL2 labs, sector-leading sustainability standards, and the advantages of UK Investment Zone status.

"With HS2 connectivity, global talent pipelines, and cost competitiveness beyond Oxford, Cambridge and London, it will anchor Birmingham as a genuine centre of excellence and a driver of long-term economic growth."

Tani Dulay

Health-tech campus at Arden Cross

Plans to deliver a world-class health-tech campus at Arden Cross are forging ahead with heads of terms for the vision now agreed.

The University of Warwick has completed early-stage outlines for the first three buildings on site – a health-tech hub, an education and skills hub, and a clinical hub.

These have been developed in partnership with Muse, the site developer, Arden Cross Limited and Arcadis, utilising feedback from a range of stakeholders from the NHS, industry and other organisations.

Jane Coleman, who is leading project management for the campus for the University of Warwick, said: "It is difficult to overstate the huge potential presented by Arden Cross, both as a site and as a catalyst for innovation opportunities in the health and med-tech sector.

"We are looking forward to seeing this site realised as part of Warwick's commitment to play a leadership role in the economic and social growth of our region, making it a better place for those who live and work here."

The campus is one of the key developments sitting at the heart of the Arden Cross site.

Its vision is to accelerate innovation in health-tech, transform healthcare services and improve patient outcomes locally, nationally and internationally.

Peter, left, and Robert Salt

Standing the test of time

Salts Healthcare is a Birmingham institution, not just in medical spheres but as a paragon of innovation in any industrial sector. JON GRIFFIN interviews the brothers currently leading one of the region's great family-owned firms.

Edward Salt, Peter and Robert's father who became an expert in stoma care. Salts is believed to be the first company in the UK to have made stoma bags

Robert Salt leans back in his chair in the historic surroundings of the family company boardroom and offers a fascinating insight into nearly 325 years of industrial tradition and innovation.

"Profit is important but what we do is more important," he says. "We could have made a lot more money but we chose to go down particular routes because it was the right thing to do.

"We could have manufactured abroad, we could have used cheaper materials."

As elder brother and co-owner Peter Salt goes on to relate: "We had a competitor here the other day and I told them we were ostomy royalty – which we are – and he loved that."

Ostomy, with its various bowel-related connections, and the concept of royalty status are not necessarily natural bedfellows in the course of any conversation – until you get to meet the Salt brothers.

Peter and Robert stand at the helm of a manufacturing success story which has grown from humble beginnings at the time of the Napoleonic Wars into a pioneering medical concern making and distributing stoma care products and transforming the lives of countless patients stricken by the grim realities – and still to this day often enduring the stigma – of various bowel and bladder conditions, including IBD and cancer.

The brothers currently heading one of Birmingham's most enduring and influential manufacturing enterprises – which has developed over more than three centuries into a £150 million turnover medical hothouse employing more than 700 people – are a complete contrast in styles, both in conversation and personality.

Whilst Robert is garrulous to a fault and apt to explode into slightly unnerving booming laughter at any second, his elder brother Peter is considered and understated, but with a twinkle in the eye. It makes for a fascinating boardroom combination.

As Robert explains: "Humour is not just a really important part, it is an essential part of being able to run a company. Our father Edward had a good sense of humour but was quiet. My mother, who is still around at 97, has always been slightly wicked and funny.

"There are a lot of stories we can't tell you. They are unbelievably funny involving customers and suppliers, particularly Americans who were trying to be slightly sycophantic."

Salts' full board. Ian Taylor, finance director, is centre

And whilst many of the Salt brothers' rich fund of anecdotes must unfortunately remain out of the public arena for business reasons, the story of the life and times of the Midlands manufacturer which launched in Wolverhampton in the reign of William of Orange, will always be worth retelling.

Robert lets his brother recall the early history. "Peter knows the history because he is closer to it," he says, before exploding into gales of laughter.

Cue Peter. "It was started in 1701 by John and William Salt, father and son. They were instrument makers and cutlers. Our side of the family went into surgical amputation knives, splinting and devices for removing teeth."

As the 18th century unfolded with the onset of the Napoleonic Wars, the fledgling company's reputation grew.

Robert interjects: "We were by royal appointment to the UK, and also some of the royal houses around Europe – and also Napoleon."

There's even a long-standing, if slightly hazy, link between the most famous French emperor of them all and the Salt family.

Peter explains: "This chap, Thomas Partridge Salt, was on the island of Elba during his exile. His job was to look after Napoleon who had a bad tooth, so he extracted it."

Robert adds: "We used to supply Napoleon. We had one of his teeth. That was not necessarily related to the business but it was related to the family."

Whatever the facts surrounding Napoleon and his dental difficulties during exile, Thomas Partridge Salt proved an early exemplar of the family's undoubted talent for innovation and ingenuity.

Peter says: "Each generation brings something to the business. Thomas Partridge Salt invented a spring-loaded truss which was patented throughout the world in the 1800s. In fact, we have discovered a book, which is still in print, that he wrote about the treatment of hernias and trusses.

"The company evolved from cutlery into surgical instruments and then we got into trusses and splinting. Then the First World War came along and we set up special clinics for limb-fitting. There was one in London, Manchester and Birmingham."

The turning point for Salts – which would ultimately prove to be the turning point in the lives of tens of thousands of bowel illness sufferers – was the company's work after the Second World War with Professor Bryan Brooke. Brooke was a British surgeon then working at Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital who was a leading light in developing the inverted stoma technique but didn't have a collection device – hence he contacted Peter and Robert's father, Edward.

"They used to sell bandage rounds with absorbent pads, it was horrendous," says Peter. "They didn't have stomas. The old man worked with Professor Brooke on a bag which would collect the human waste. It was the first one in the UK."

Edward Salt's work with Professor Brooke would in due course change the history of bowel illness treatment – and the lives of countless patients – immeasurably for the better, a significant milestone for both the Midlands manufacturer and the wider arena of medical research.

Robert continues: "The old man managed to find some bag products that were being made in the States but they wouldn't allow us to make it on their behalf. Our father had to come up with his own design, and that was really the turning point for the company.

"He was speaking to our mum and she said 'well, if he does nothing more, he has to help these people'."

Mrs Julia Salt's support for her husband's medical innovations back in the late 40s ensured the Salt medical bandwagon was moving in the right direction.

"We were probably the first company in Europe to manufacture colostomy bags," says Robert. "Professor Brooke has been commended enormously for what he had done – he really changed the lives of patients by having a fairly simple operation.

"Equally, what our father did – and he was never truly recognised which is a shame – actually changed these people's lives by trying to give them back some normality. It was a turning point for the company but not financially. That came later.

"A lot of the effort and energy went into ostomy, which was not that financially viable. It was just the passion that he had for helping these people."

The work – and altruistic nature – of Edward Salt and the early colostomy bag inventions is today reflected in the emergence of a small post-war enterprise employing a few dozen specialist workers into today's £150 million turnover medical powerhouse, a familiar sight to thousands of motorists who brave the Aston Expressway daily.

"One of the loveliest things was that the marketeers were trying to come up with a company strapline, and they came up with something that has become a bit of a mantra in our company, and that is 'caring, listening and innovating to improve lives'."

Operating from headquarters just off Dartmouth Circus on the Expressway, Salts is split into two divisions, Salts Stoma Care, which designs and manufactures stoma care devices and additional products, and Medilink, a national network of dispensing care centres which supplies and dispenses stoma care and continence products by all manufacturers.

The 21st-century version of one of the UK's oldest family-owned manufacturing concerns provides a range of user-friendly stoma bags and other stoma products offering improved quality of life for those living with a stoma. Edward Salt's mantra has been replicated by his sons Peter and Robert, along with their staff, many of them long serving.

Robert says: "One of the loveliest things was that the marketeers were trying to come up with a company strapline, and they came up with something that has become a bit of a mantra in our company, and that is 'caring, listening and innovating to improve lives'.

"Genuinely that is what we believe in, and that has never gone away."

That innovation to change lives remains at the heart of the Salts' business model, a creed which continually faces competition from larger multi-million-pound rivals such as ConvaTec, Coloplast and Hollister.

"We are a pretty big company but not compared to some of our competitors," says Robert. "But we have changed the

Robert and Peter with some of the company's very old products, including surgeons' instruments

face of products which are offered in the market. We also offer the most premium products."

That attention to aesthetic detail for products offering comfort to bowel and bladder disease patients is again part of the Salts approach to sensitive medical areas.

"What we are trying to do is change it from being medical-looking to make it more like an everyday item, not exactly a fashion item, but we have changed the market."

As Peter proudly proclaims: "We have taken big business from them [competitors]."

But, as with any family-owned company which has been around for more than 300 years, there have been peaks and troughs, most recently with Covid, and more personally closer to home, with the sad loss of brother and chief executive Philip to an aggressive form of cancer at the age of 68.

Philip had joined the family business in 1971, starting on the factory floor whilst learning the ropes from father Edward, part of the tenth-generation of the Salt family to work at the company.

A force of nature who was passionate about research and improving the wellbeing of patients, he was a national figure in his industry, becoming chairman of the British Healthcare Trade Association, trustee of the Bowel Disease Research Foundation and was awarded an honorary doctorate from Staffordshire University.

Understandably, Robert's natural good humour goes into temporary retreat as he recalls his elder brother. "He was a larger than life character, really good at getting in front of associations."

Poignantly, Peter adds: "I think the key to it all is the fact that the three of us got on so well." Says Robert: "We all share a sense of humour, and that's how we get through difficulties."

The Covid pandemic presented Salts with a raft of unforeseen difficulties, but the brothers and their staff fought back to help safeguard the future of the firm.

"Covid was difficult but the only good thing was that we were able to come to the office, because we made necessary products," says Peter.

Robert recalls: "The bad thing that happened within the industry was that they stopped operations. Some areas of excellence would do it and we employ around 30 nurses that go out into the community and into hospitals.

"Some of those continued to do that. They had to go through quite a lot of

Very early stoma collection devices

Salt & Son handmade surgeon's chest

Products from Salts's flagship range, Confidence BE

emotional support which we were having to provide. There was interaction with patients and that is when we utilised the technology of Zoom or Teams. It actually became quite a success story, enabling people to speak in a place where they felt completely comfortable – in their home – at a time that was more convenient to them."

If Covid proved a tough – but ultimately beatable – opponent, the present Labour government has also been a thorn in the side to this most durable of manufacturing companies.

"The annoying thing for us is that we produce and manufacture our own products, and we just get hit all the time with National Insurance going up," explains Peter. "You do not expect to have it too easy but they are certainly not giving manufacturing much encouragement."

Meanwhile, Robert warns: "We manufacture everything in the UK but we are actively looking at the possibilities of manufacturing abroad. We are not saying that we will, but that we have to consider these options. The increase to National Insurance was at a time when the NHS is looking to bring costs down and suppliers are increasing their prices, so there is this squeeze. A lot of people I know are in a similar situation and are having to change their working practices."

Faced with pressures on the home front Salts have increasingly flown their distinguished flag on the international front, establishing export markets from Europe to Australasia.

Robert says: "It is now probably 60-40 in favour of the UK. Not all that long ago it was dramatically different. The majority is still UK, but we are actively looking abroad."

Peter adds: "You need other markets and we have set up companies in Scandinavia."

With modern state-of-the-art developments at the company's headquarters in Richard Street in the shape of an academy – which provides university-accredited courses and training facilities – and the Central Skin Sciences Institute, the company continues to innovate and remain at the cutting edge of its sector.

Says Robert: "We have continued to stick to our principles and invested heavily in research and development by trying to understand what the patient wants."

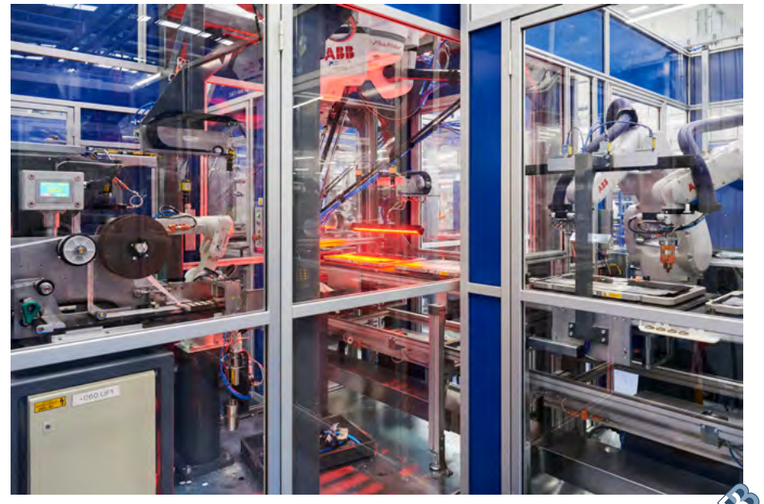
So what does the future hold for a family company which has survived for over 300 years, spanning several wars to today's hi-tech internet age, where technological development in the shape of AI will once again change the face of the workplace?

"I think we have got a rosy future," says Peter. "We have got good products and good ideas. And it is still very much family. People who work for us like us because we are family. My PA has been my PA for 42 years."

Robert adds: "We are diversifying into other areas. It is more about prevention than looking after. We are involved in other technologies to make sure that we have got a future."

Peter concludes: "I think that we will be handing over some good developments to the next generation. In the end we can't guarantee anything. It is up to them because like anything it is good to have some new blood and new ideas."

Peter may be slightly wrong in his assessment. If you can guarantee anything about the Salts, it's surely the case that the celebrated family sense of humour will continue to survive.



Salts' Apollo production site

A fact of LIFE SCIENCE

Three key recruitment challenges in this sector and how to overcome them

By TANIA PARMAR, employee benefits client director and JON SLEIGHTHOLME, director of talent acquisition solutions of NFP

At NFP, we are privileged to have numerous clients that operate in the life sciences sector. These business are at the helm of innovation, development and discovery across a diverse range of vital areas, including pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, medical devices and research labs. This specialist line of work makes them exciting business to work with and work for, but can also cause niche challenges, especially when it comes to the attraction and retention of great people.

Having worked closely with these organisations, many of whom we support with specialist human capital solutions (relating to employee benefits consultancy and brokerage, as well as HR, people and talent), we know firsthand the recruitment challenges that businesses in this sector can face, and importantly, how they can look to solve them.

1. In-demand talent demand richer employee benefits

With a limited pool of highly skilled individuals, and demand rising across the sector, many life sciences employers are finding that attractive salaries alone are no longer enough. To stand out, you must now rethink the breadth and depth of your employee benefits strategy.

Key pockets of life sciences talent tend to be more tech-savvy and socially conscious individuals. These people are not only highly skilled, but they're also highly aware of their worth and tend to appreciate employers with a commitment to beliefs and values that match their own. That's why our benchmarking reports are showing us a broader trend towards life sciences employers making benefits more tailored to individual circumstances.

"How can I cost-effectively deliver impactful benefits that help attract and retain top talent?"

In our experience, when employers hear 'more generous' benefits, they often take that to mean 'more expensive to offer' benefits, but that isn't necessarily the case. As well as mental health support, enhanced parental leave, and sustainability initiatives, we urge our life sciences clients to consider benefits that align with the lifestyle preferences of the people they're looking to attract and retain.

Rather than blindly investing in best-in-class benefits, targeting your benefits strategy to your peoples' needs and challenges will be a more impactful, potentially more cost-effective way of standing out to top talent. Benefits such as cycle-to-work schemes, climate-conscious pension funds, volunteer days, or subsidised wellness memberships can all help you signal your commitment to key values and build employee loyalty.

"How can I ensure my benefits are understood and valued by my people?"

What really matters isn't just the benefits on offer, but how they're explained to both potential and existing employees. Even the most impressive employee benefits packages may be ineffective if people don't fully understand what the benefits are, when they might need them most and how they can utilise them to support their key challenges and needs.

By offering benefits that have real meaning and communicating a message that shows the company values innovation, wellbeing, and sustainability, life sciences employers can create an employee benefits package that not only attracts talent but keeps people committed for the long term.

2. New legislation creates barrier to European talent

The competition for specialist talent doesn't stop at national borders. For many UK life sciences employers, recruiting from Europe is not just a strategic choice—it's a necessity. Mainland Europe continues to be a critical source of talent for more specialist, niche roles, but with this heightened opportunity comes increasing complexity.

While the directive is not yet in force EU-wide, several European countries have already begun aligning with the EU Pay Transparency Directive, which mandates clear salary disclosures in job advertisements, among other requirements.

Although these rules do not currently apply to UK-based employees, we expect the UK may move toward similar expectations in the near future, particularly for employers competing in international talent markets.

"How will EU Pay Transparency Laws affect UK employers hiring talent from Europe?"

For UK employers hiring in the EU, this legislation is increasingly relevant. In countries where local laws already reflect EU Pay Transparency standards, job listings targeting EU applicants must include salary ranges and justification for pay structures. Employers may also need to prepare for:

- Pay audits
- Employee requests for comparative pay data
- Public reporting obligations (in some cases)

The implications go beyond recruitment—they impact employer branding, internal pay equity, and overall HR compliance.

If your business is actively hiring from mainland Europe, it's important to stay ahead of these developments. Failure to comply with local transparency requirements could result in legal risks, reputational harm, or even candidate withdrawal, especially as salary openness becomes a standard expectation among jobseekers.

"How can my business look to prepare for the impact of this legislation?"

Life sciences businesses should start by auditing their pay structures for equity and consistency, ensuring all job roles have clearly defined salary bands. Hiring managers must be trained in communicating these ranges confidently, while job ads should be reviewed for compliance. Beyond legal compliance, pay transparency can send a strong message of fairness and inclusivity - values that can resonate strongly with the life sciences workforce.

At NFP, we support life sciences employers of all sizes to prepare for the changing landscape of pay transparency legislation and the wider implications for their business and workforce. Navigating new and evolving legislation – especially across multiple jurisdictions – can be complex. That's why many organisations turn to experienced partners to ensure they are compliant, competitive, and ready for what's ahead.

3. Lack of flexibility impacts recruitment for core services roles

While the headline recruitment challenge in life sciences is often attracting world-class scientists or R&D leaders, a growing number of employers are now struggling to fill more generalist, core services roles. One key reason? The lab-based nature of many specialist roles in the life sciences sector. This has naturally shaped a workplace culture in which being on-site is the norm, but in today's world where flexibility is a must-have for many people, this is starting to create some recruitment challenges.

Many generalist candidates, who could easily find remote or hybrid roles in other industries, are hesitant to apply for life sciences companies that appear to enforce office-based working. As a result, businesses are losing out on experienced talent for important roles that don't actually require on-site presence.

"What can we do to increase engagement with our job advertisements?"

If they have decided a full return to work is appropriate for them, life sciences employers should actively champion flexibility where it's genuinely possible and rethink how they communicate this to potential new hires. Highlighting hybrid options, core hours, results-focused working, or even fully remote possibilities for appropriate roles can dramatically expand the pool of interested applicants.

"How can my organisation still look to engage my people even with a full-time office culture?"

To revisit one of our earlier points, flexibility needs to be backed up with 'above and beyond' benefits that show you understand and value the broader needs of your people. Perhaps consider benefits that enable people to come into the workplace more willingly or freely, such as commuter subsidies, caregiver support, or learning and development stipends that signal real long-term investment.

Think other sectors don't have to take note? Think again

While this article has framed these as challenges that primarily life sciences employers need to consider, there's lessons here that employers across all sectors could do with paying attention to:

Competing for talent: Around one in two UK jobseekers now cite a strong benefits offering as the most important factor when considering a new role*. The need for tailored employee benefits packages that go above and beyond the bare minimum is therefore clear across the board.

EU Pay Transparency Laws: as we mentioned, we believe it's only a matter of time before pay transparency laws apply to all UK businesses. It's never too late to start getting prepared, and the earlier you do so the more of an advantage you could have over your competition.

Navigating return to office backlash: more and more businesses have either implemented or are considering implementing a full return to the office for their people, in a bid to increase collaboration, creativity and innovation. If your organisation were to follow suit, knowing how to navigate this change with confidence may be key to maintaining business as usual.

Zest Benefits | Report 2024: The growing importance of employee benefits

recruitment

Navigating emerging IP challenges in the life sciences sector:

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY IN THE AGE OF AI

The life sciences sector is undergoing a wave of transformation, driven by the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) across areas such as drug discovery, personalised therapies and medtech. As these systems become more sophisticated and are embedded into biomedical innovation, they bring with them a host of intellectual property (IP) challenges that innovators and users must address. Inevitably, the adoption of quantum technologies by the sector will raise similar issues.

AI in life sciences: a new frontier

AI is revolutionising how life science companies approach research and development. From accelerating compound screening and protein folding to identifying biomarkers and predicting patient responses, AI tools are reshaping the drug discovery pipeline. An early example was the identification of halicin in 2020, repurposing a potential diabetes treatment towards addressing drug-resistant bacteria. Google DeepMind's AlphaFold system offers accurate prediction of 3D structure from a protein's amino acid sequence. AI-driven drug discovery is becoming embedded into the innovation process, with companies like Roche Group's Genentech collaborating with NVIDIA to amplify their "lab in a loop" framework. Personalised medicine is also set to benefit from AI's ability to analyse vast datasets, enabling tailored treatment plans based on individual genetic profiles and clinical histories.

AI technology is likewise being deployed to support patient care in the medtech field. Tools that enable the accurate assessment of wounds to improve engagement with patients to help them attend hospital appointments are making healthcare more effective and efficient. In diagnostics, AI algorithms are advancing the accuracy and speed of disease detection, such as cardiovascular disease, often outperforming traditional methods. AI-enabled health and well-being technology, such as femtech app Flo, can help individuals to understand and manage their own health.

By JAMES FRY, partner & head of life sciences, and ISABEL TEARE, senior legal advisor, at Mills & Reeve

AI and the IP mix

Traditionally life sciences innovation has relied heavily on patent protection to offer recognised and valuable cover for their innovations. Patents remain a high priority, with the numbers of patent applications and grants for AI-based innovations increasing. However, the ability of the patent system to adapt to these technologies remains unclear.

A pressing challenge is determining the inventorship of AI-generated developments. Traditional patent frameworks are built around human inventorship, but AI systems could autonomously generate novel compounds, or treatment algorithms. This raises the question: who is the inventor—the human developer, the AI system, or the deploying organisation? In addition, national laws and intellectual property offices take different positions on patentability, with exclusions for mathematical methods or algorithms meaning that additional technical benefit must be demonstrated. Sufficiency of disclosure is also a concern, with a balance to be struck between providing enough detail to support patentability, while recognising that information in a patent application will eventually be published.

The integration of AI into life sciences technologies leads to a different mix of intellectual property, with more emphasis on so-called "soft IP", such as copyright and trade secrets. These forms of protection offer flexibility but come with their own risks, particularly in collaborative environments where data sharing is essential. It can be challenging to distinguish contributions to new arising IP, especially that generated in collaborative projects.

These considerations drive a different approach to protection of the results of research.

Who controls the data?

The development, testing, and validation of AI models rely on access to large datasets. This may involve "data scraping", the automated extraction of information from websites and databases, leading to potential conflict with the originators of the material. Alternatively, training data may derive from closed databases, whether commercially developed or built from public sector health information. Access to these resources will involve specific arrangements, normally a contractual licence controlling how the data may be accessed and used.

Use of health-related data also brings with it ethical and compliance issues, including compliance with data privacy laws and addressing public concern around the use of health data arising from publicly funded care.

Complex ownership and cross-licensing

These issues mean that AI-driven innovation often results in complex ownership and cross-licensing arrangements, given the dynamic nature of IP generation. Collaborations need tailoring from the outset to avoid pitfalls and maximise benefit for each participant, and to align with IP strategy. Careful agreement drafting to address access, ownership of results and responsibility for ethical considerations and data use is essential to head off disputes and liability arising from this complex, but powerful, technology.

Birmingham is set to become the UK's life sciences epicentre this September with the staging of an inaugural programme celebrating so much of what the industry has to offer.

Life Sciences Week, which is taking place September 15-19, has attracted some of the sphere's biggest and most authoritative names for a packed schedule covering an enormous range of sector-related topics.

The schedule, as well as further news and insight relating to the event, follows.

Top man for the job

David Kidney is one of the most respected figures in the region's life and health sciences industry, so the organisers of Life Sciences Week didn't have to look far when identifying their preferred chair of its advisory committee. HENRY CARPENTER meets this former MP and current CEO of the West Midlands Health Technologies Cluster.

interview

For someone who has been flirting with retirement for several years, David Kidney has been unusually busy of late.

At least part of the reason is that this former lawyer and MP has been chairing the advisory committee of Life Sciences Week, but then again the suspicion is that he just enjoys working and is not quite ready to settle into the quiet life.

He points over to the church in the middle of St Paul's Square in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter and mentions that he's on the committee to raise funds for the new roof. He's also chair of the heritage organisation, the Chamberlain Highbury Trust. He's in what he calls his 'hinterland', a term MPs use to describe that period between full-time work and the retirement days of gardening and golf.

He is not quite there yet. Over these last few months the focus has been on his 'day job' as executive chair of the West Midlands Health Technologies Cluster – and of course leading the LSW advisory board.

We'll come to the credentials that make him such hot property in the life sciences sphere in due course, but first it's instructive to hear why he was happy to take on the role for LSW.

"Paul Cadman, who I knew already, asked what I thought about a life sciences week, and I thought it was a cracking good idea for the region," he says.

"It would really raise our profile and show that there's confidence that we're growing as a sector. The first thing I agreed to do was for HTC to be a partner organisation and we are doing a couple of events during the week along with partners to support it.

"And then Paul asked me about chairing the advisory group. Having been so enthusiastic and supporting it to the hilt, there was no other answer than yes. I've been very pleased to do it."

Ask Kidney why he's so upbeat about the life and health sciences in the West Midlands and he barely pauses for breath.

"I'm always pleased to tell the story about Thermo Fisher Scientific taking over the Binding site. I mean, what a success story of the last 20 years – a University of Birmingham spin-out, growth under the management buying it out, then sold to an American global company for over two billion dollars.

"I believe that the first thing they did was review Birmingham as a location for their business. They compared it to other sites in the UK, as well as locations in the US and Scandinavia, to decide whether

Stafford MP David Kidney visits Bill Madders' Coppenhall Farm in 2007

Birmingham was the right place for the company to grow.

"They decided it was and they've grown the workforce from 500 to 800 and taken on extra premises in Edgbaston in order to give them enough space for their growth. In my book that's a really good story and a great endorsement for the city.

"At the other end of the time scale you've got Salts who have been going for 300-plus years – a family company using local talent drawn from local universities. Peter Salt always speaks very highly of the intake of graduates from universities, so that's another heartwarming story about continuity and success.

"And then we have this really thriving and bubbling innovation environment, which is wider than health-tech, but nevertheless health-tech's in it. The Innovation Accelerator has helped over 200 companies, spent over £14 million of funds and leveraged nearly £50 million of private investment. Long may that innovation support continue."

Support is a theme which runs through Kidney's career, no doubt stemming from his childhood and upbringing.

Born in Stoke-on-Trent 70 years ago, he remains the proudest of Potters ("when out dining, I still turn over the plates to see if they were made in Stoke"). He was one of four brothers whose parents had to work hard to make ends meet, his father as part of English Electric, and his mother a skilled but poorly paid clay flower maker.

Living in Stoke's less salubrious margins where deprivation and crime were commonplace, he sensed the reality of not feeling particularly secure in life.

Still, he was academically gifted and enjoyed the teamwork which sports such as football and rugby offered. As he says: "When I think of youngsters who have become disengaged or mentally ill nowadays, I always consider that I was really lucky to have these teammates about me, who looked out for each other and went out together socially."

From a relatively early age then, the die was cast – the young David Kidney wanted to make a difference to other people's lives. So at the age of 16 he marched into a meeting of the local Labour Party, and signed up there and then.

Before he became a career politician though, he was the first member of his family to go to university when he studied law at Bristol.

"That was on the advice of my big

“I was surprised by how fast we became influential as an organisation, with people turning to us for our views.”

brother John, who was an insurance investigator and he said there was money in law,” says Kidney.

“But I had three lovely years at Bristol. It was my first time away from home and I really enjoyed the independence, managing my own budget, cooking for myself and basically growing up.”

He left with his degree and an offer of a training place, and went back up to Stoke to work with a law firm, first as a trainee, then an employed solicitor and finally as a partner. Family law was Kidney’s field, and he became something of a specialist in representing children in care proceedings, an expertise he was able to bring to Parliament a few years down the line.

Kidney’s political career started off on a parish council in rural Staffordshire before, in 1987, being elected as a borough councillor in Stafford. By now married with two children, this was a role he occupied for a decade.

“Labour won control of the borough council and I became the chair of the housing committee,” he says.

“I enjoyed that work very much and I particularly liked being the ward representative.

“I held advice surgeries every single week on Thursday evenings and heard the issues people were having. I enjoyed fighting for them and knowing where to go for the solutions, so I was quite well trained for national politics.”

His first attempt to enter parliament was when he was the Labour candidate in 1992 which was unsuccessful due to it being an ultra-safe Conservative seat.

“But then there were big boundary changes and I became a little bit more hopeful. I was re-selected to fight in ’97 where my Conservative opponent was a little-known politician named David Cameron. I defeated him by 4,000 votes – hah!

“It was good times. I was put on the Treasury Select Committee and went to America to meet Alan Greenspan the head of the Federal Reserve, as well as Frankfurt where I met the boss of the European Central Bank.”

The next 12 years were to provide Kidney with a great deal of hard work – both in the constituency and in Parliament itself – but also experiences and connections which will continue to linger long in the memory.

The suspicion is that – like most politicians – he would have liked to have been made a minister in his first parliament, but his stance against Tony Blair’s Iraq War policy saw to that. However, he was made environment minister David Miliband’s personal private secretary at the time of the Climate Change Act (“a brilliant piece of legislation”, according to Kidney) and then he was PPS to Michael Meacher when he pushed through the so-called ‘right to roam’ laws.

Kidney was eventually appointed a minister in the energy and climate change department under David’s brother Ed, which pleased him.

“If I do say so myself I was a good minister,” he says now. “I read the papers, I answered properly to the civil servants, I walked the floor of the department twice a day, took part in two civil contingencies exercises, spoke at major events and was active in debates in the House of Commons.

“But by 2010 the tide was going out on Labour, Stafford was never a very secure seat for the party, there was a scandal at Stafford Hospital in the run-up to the election and out I went.”

When assessing his impact closer to home in his constituency, he counts one of his most meaningful contributions managing to persuade the army to move into the RAF base after the air force had relocated to RAF Wittering, thereby saving the site in Stafford.

He was also instrumental in lobbying the business secretary Stephen Byers into granting Stafford £5 million from the Single Regeneration Budget, used to create the next generation of jobs to replace the ones lost in heavy industry.

“The result was a whole business estate called Beaconside in Stafford,” says Kidney. “It had the fastest broadband at the time of being built and is today a really thriving business park.”

The thought of pausing didn’t occur to Kidney, and his immediate career post politics really sowed the seeds for where his finds himself now – in the realms of public health.

Without going into too much detail, he became head of policy at the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, and that brought him into contact with the Public Health Register, a self-explanatory organisation which covers the whole spectrum for public health specialists and practitioners.

Having been headhunted to become its CEO, Kidney brought the register to Birmingham where it was massively expanded and operated in a much more professional way than when he first worked on it.

Silkmore Primary School in Stafford celebrates its Investors in People Award 2002

Defence minister John Spellar MP visits RAF Stafford welcomed by station commander Grp Capt P. Whalley and Kidney when he was MP for Stafford

As he says: “It is widely seen as the regulator and watchdog for public health practice in the UK.”

With the arrival of Covid, suddenly public health was catapulted to the forefront of the nation’s mind, and it also led to Kidney delaying his retirement so he could ensure he left the register on an even keel when he did come to step away. However, while he was casting around for what to do in retirement, he heard that the LEP was looking for someone to do a study for them about how to support the sector of health technologies in the West Midlands – and shortly afterwards he launched the West Midlands Health Technologies Cluster.

“I set up the cluster in May 2021 with the express purpose of supporting growth in health technologies in the West Midlands,” he explains.

“I was surprised by how fast we became influential as an organisation, with people turning to us for our views.

“They could see the benefit of someone who pushed for the right policies to support the sector and helped with identifying what funds were available in grants or investments.”

Kidney is a modest man. He has worked tirelessly, often as a one-man PR machine for the health-tech sector in the region, and has encouraged a hitherto lacking spirit of collaboration between various businesses and supporting organisations. His monthly newsletter is hugely popular and he is the go-to figure for information about say, funding and networking opportunities.

Amongst institutions such as the universities, the agencies, Business Growth West Midlands, Midlands Growth Company, the Combined Authority, he is a hugely respected figure.

“We are a membership organisation and people often aren’t the best at paying,” he says. “However, when they are in trouble, they still want my help.

“Whether they’ve paid or not, I still give it gladly because we are a team and we need the sector to be successful.”

So when Paul Cadman invited Kidney to take on such an important role for Life Sciences Week, it was a shrewd move – he was appointing an effective and unassuming operator whose selfless principles were forged first on the streets of Stoke and then through the realms of politics and public health.

Schedule of events

For the latest updated schedule please scan the QR code

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LIFE SCIENCES WEEK

September 15-19, 2025

Monday September 15th

11am-4pm: Conference launch event
Millennium Point, Curzon Street, Birmingham B4 7AP
We're excited to kick off Life Sciences Week with a dynamic launch event bringing together industry leaders, innovators, and key stakeholders.

The event will feature insightful keynote speeches from top experts, engaging panel discussions on the latest trends and challenges, and valuable networking opportunities to connect with peers and potential collaborators. Whether you're a researcher, entrepreneur, investor, or policymaker, this is your chance to be part of the conversation shaping the future of life sciences.

The full line-up to be announced, but includes: Professor Gino Martini, CEO of PHTA, John McGrath, a surgeon in Bristol and an NHS England adviser on robotic surgery, Victoria Gosling, chair of Invictus Games, Colonel Victoria Moorhouse KHP, the commanding officer of the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine based with University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Trust and the head of Army Allied Health Professionals and Technical Trades, David McIntosh, founder and chair of United Plasma Action, Professor Neil Hanley, pro-vice-chancellor and head of the College of Medicine & Health at the University of Birmingham and executive director of Birmingham Health Partners, and Dace Dimza-Jones, national life sciences specialist within the UK Government's Global Entrepreneur Programme.

5.30pm-8pm: WMHTIA and life sciences social
Hotel du Vin, 25 Church Street, Birmingham B3 2NR
Join us for an exclusive evening with the Technology Supply Chain celebrating innovation within the sector as part of Life Sciences Week. This engaging innovation social is your opportunity to mix with key players, disruptors, and forward-thinking professionals driving innovation across life sciences.

Tuesday September 16th

7.30am-10am: Innovation, funding and opportunities in the life sciences – roundtable hosted by the Technology Supply Chain.
Hotel du Vin, 25 Church Street, Birmingham B3 2NR
Speakers: Prof Gino Martini from PHTA, Judith Stewart from Health Innovation West Midlands, Ewa Truchanowicz from Bidshaper, and Esther Lawrence from TBAT Innovation.

Join us to gain valuable insights into innovation in the life sciences from new lab facilities to AI, and hear about the amazing programmes available to support innovation in this vital sector.

9am-11.35am: Protecting innovation: patents and trials in life sciences – hosted by WTW
The Colmore Building 20 Colmore Circus, Birmingham B4 6AT
In life sciences, innovation drives progress – but without protection, valuable discoveries risk being lost or misused.

Hosted by WTW, this seminar explores how companies can safeguard their breakthroughs through two critical avenues: patent protection and clinical trial integrity.

9.30am-12.30pm: Navigating development pathways of medical devices and technologies Medical Devices Testing and Evaluation Centre (MD-Tec), Mindelsohn Way, Birmingham B15 2TH
After arrival, coffee and welcome from clinical director of HRC-DDR & MD-TEC, University Hospitals Birmingham NHSFT Professor Tom Clutton-Brock, Dr Jonathan Gregory, digital theme lead for HRC-DDR, will examine digital technology and the essential role of patient and public involvement and engagement. Tours of MD-TEC will follow.

9.40am-2.30pm: Unlocking innovation: life sciences research in the NHS
PHTA, Birmingham Health Innovation Campus, Aston Webb Boulevard, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6SQ
Join Health Innovation West Midlands for a dynamic roundtable symposium exploring how the NHS is advancing life sciences research across the West Midlands – with a spotlight on real-world examples from Staffordshire & Shropshire, Coventry & Warwickshire, and Birmingham. Bringing together leaders from industry, academia, and the NHS, this event will showcase how applied research is driving innovation and improving outcomes across the region.

Colonel Victoria Moorhouse

Dace Dimza-Jones

David McIntosh

10am-12pm: Roundtable – leveraging Arden Cross to maximise economic growth
Rolls Royce Control Systems, 5000 Solihull Parkway, Birmingham Business Park, Birmingham B37 7YH
UK Central (Solihull Council) event. Invitation only, places are limited, with expressions of interest to be sent to business@solihull.gov.uk

10.30am-11.30am: From hype to health – investing in technologies that actually scale
Alpha Works Boardroom, Floor 22, Alpha Tower, Suffolk Street Queensway, Birmingham B1 1TT
The focus will be on how to distinguish scalable health tech from short-term trends, with a mix of investors and founders sharing what commercial and clinical success really looks like.

2pm-4pm: Innovating health-tech: A roleplay journey through design, regulation and deployment
The Old School Building, School Street, Wolston, Coventry CV8 3HF
Join us for a fast-paced, collaborative roleplay workshop where we bring to life a fictional wearable med-tech innovation.

Co-led by experts in hardware design, regulatory strategy, and digital health development, this session will simulate what it really takes to turn an innovative idea into a regulated, usable medical product.

3pm-6pm: SPARK monthly cohort meeting
John Cadbury House, Corporation Street, Birmingham B4 6QD
Join the monthly SPARK Community Meeting — an open and engaging forum where SPARK project teams share updates, discuss challenges, and connect with the SPARK management team. This event is ideal for academics, healthcare professionals, entrepreneurs working in translational research, and those developing therapeutics, medical devices, or diagnostics.

4pm: Official launch of Birmingham Health Innovation Campus (Invitation only)
Birmingham Health Innovation Campus (BHIC), Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6SQ

4pm-6pm: Investor ready: scaling with capital – attracting equity investment.
Crowe, One Colmore Row, Birmingham B3 2BJ
This roundtable, hosted by Crowe, has the following investor speakers: Aaron Baker of BGF, Chris Wardle of Hypha, and James Bakewell of Agathos.

Ideal attendees: established/growing businesses looking for or interested in securing private equity funding. Networking drinks will follow the one-hour round table.

Wednesday September 17th

9.30am-5pm: Innovation Day in partnership with Medilink Midlands
Aston Villa FC, Villa Park, Birmingham B6 6HE
Join event partner, Medilink Midlands for Innovation Day, in collaboration with Life Sciences Week, for a spotlight on groundbreaking advancements in life sciences.

This event will showcase cutting-edge innovations, feature expert-led discussions, and provide opportunities to connect with industry pioneers driving the future of healthcare and biotechnology.

11.30am-2.20pm: Risk, resilience & revolution: life sciences in a changing world – hosted by WTW
The Colmore Building 20 Colmore Circus, Birmingham B4 6AT
This seminar brings together industry experts to explore the evolving risk landscape in life sciences. Attendees will gain insights into emerging claims trends, legal challenges, and cyber liability risks.

The event is designed to help organisations strengthen their risk management strategies and build resilience in an increasingly digital and regulated environment.

12.30pm-1.15pm: Addressing health inequalities through life sciences innovation
Birmingham City Football Club, St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park, Cattell Rd, Birmingham B9 4RL
As part of the afternoon of sessions on Influencing Life Sciences at Birmingham City Football Club, this specific session will involve a panel of experts exploring how innovation in life sciences can play a pivotal role in tackling health inequalities — from improving access to care, to developing technologies that meet the needs of underserved communities.

The speakers include Jeremy Dale, CEO, Birmingham City Football Club, and Sharon Thompson, deputy mayor at West Midlands Combined Authority, and deputy leader and cabinet member for economy & skills at Birmingham City Council.

1pm-2pm: Lunch and learn session at Dains Accountants
Dains Accountants, 2 Chamberlain Square, Birmingham B3 3AX
Open to all Life Sciences Week attendees, this will explore how to maximise the benefits of R&D tax relief and the patent box regime within the life sciences industry.

1.15pm-2pm: Sustainable practices and ecosystem building in regional life sciences
Birmingham City Football Club, St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park, Cattell Rd, Birmingham B9 4RL
This session will involve a panel of experts exploring how sustainable practices and collaborative ecosystem building can drive innovation and growth in regional life sciences.

Hear from leading voices in the sector as they share practical insights, strategic approaches, and future-focused ideas for creating thriving, sustainable life sciences communities:

Speakers include Martin Sandhu, managing director of nuom; Judith Stewart, economic, commercial and business development director of Health Innovation West Midlands; Alex Toft, founder and CEO of Toft Ventures; and Adam McGuinness, programme manager at Plug and Play.

2pm-2.45pm: Life sciences networking lunch – hosted by Al Carns MP
Birmingham City Football Club, St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park, Cattell Rd, Birmingham B9 4RL
This informal session is the perfect opportunity to continue conversations sparked during the morning and early afternoon, meet new collaborators, and exchange ideas with industry peers.

Lunch will be available on a first-come, first-served basis, so arrive promptly to make the most of the networking – and the refreshments.

2.45pm-3.30pm: Advancing med-tech, diagnostics and advanced therapies
Birmingham City Football Club, St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park, Cattell Rd, Birmingham B9 4RL
A panel of experts will be exploring some of the latest innovations and future directions in med-tech, diagnostics, and advanced therapies – and the opportunities they present for the life sciences sector.

3.30pm-4.15pm: AI and digital innovation driving life sciences leadership
Birmingham City Football Club, St. Andrew's @ Knighthead Park, Cattell Rd, Birmingham B9 4RL
A panel of experts exploring how AI and digital transformation are reshaping leadership, operations, and competitiveness within the life sciences sector.

Our panel of industry leaders will share insights on how emerging technologies are unlocking new opportunities in

Ben Howlett

research, improving decision-making, and enabling more agile, patient-focused strategies. Expect candid discussion on practical applications, regulatory considerations, and the future skillsets leaders will need to thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape.

Speakers to include Charlie Blakemore, CEO of Intercity, Ben Howlett, co-founder of UKAI, and Patrick McCallum, senior associate at VWV.

Thursday September 18th

8am-10am: Invention to realisation: turning breakthrough ideas into commercial success
Gateley Birmingham, One Eleven, Edmund St, Birmingham B3 2HJ
Panel discussion with industry experts exploring the journey from concept through commercial impact to value realisation.

The content will be relevant for all stages of business from early-stage innovator to scaling, high-growth businesses and will offer practical insights on areas such as protecting, valuing and commercialising IP, capital raising, licensing technology or other IP assets, building and growing the right team and navigating international markets.

8.45am-9.30am: Power of partnerships in the life sciences sector
Orelle, 103 Colmore Row, Birmingham B3 3AG
Join us for this exciting session, in partnership with the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, featuring a discussion with Professor Gino Martini, CEO of the Precision Health Technologies Accelerator.

In this exclusive morning session, Professor Martini will share insights drawn from a distinguished career spanning academia, industry, and science policy. This talk will explore how partnerships fuel innovation, accelerate market access, and build resilience across industries, with a particular lens on the health and life sciences sector.

Following the session, the Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce invites you to join their Global Brunch at 9.30am-11.30am, which Professor Martini will feature as a panellist.

9am-4.30pm: Smart buildings & sustainabilit leaders forum
The Vox Conference Centre, Resorts World, Pendigo Way, Birmingham B40 1PU
This is a dynamic conference and networking event designed to drive innovation, collaboration and accelerate the rate of adoption of digital solutions across the built environment.

Its unique format blends four parallel conferences, keynote presentations, expert panel discussions, and curated networking sessions alongside a showcase of the very latest

Councillor Sharon Thompson

For the latest updated schedule please scan the QR code

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smart technologies, creating an immersive experience for senior professionals leading the charge in sustainability and digitalisation.

9am-12.30pm: WMHTIA: Impact, insights & the future of health-tech in the West Midlands
Baskerville House, Centenary Square, Birmingham B1 2ND
An exclusive event for stakeholders, partners and decision-makers to experience the transformative impact of the West Midlands Health Tech Innovation Accelerator and discover opportunities for its next phase of growth.

Over the past two years, the West Midlands Health Tech Innovation Accelerator has delivered exceptional results, catalysing investment, strengthening collaborations and cementing the West Midlands as a leading hub for health and med tech innovation.

The agenda will focus on highlighting the impacts and insights from the WMHTIA programme to support the case for reinvestment.

11.30am-2.35pm: Strategic foundations for life sciences growth
The Colmore Building 20 Colmore Circus, Birmingham B4 6AT
This seminar offers practical insights for life sciences companies on structuring their business and guidance on how to build a strong foundation for growth in the life sciences industry and manage essential insurance risks.

Open to startups and scale-ups across med tech and biotech, the event also provides valuable networking opportunities.

Key speakers include Phil Pugh, partner at Browne Jacobson, Vicki Leslie & John Darling, WTW, and Victoria Targett, WTW.

1pm-3.30pm: Unlocking Global Growth DBT Offices, 23 Stephenson Street, Birmingham, B2 4BJ
The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) is pleased to invite you to our Unlocking Global Growth roundtable session, hosted at the HMG Offices in Central Birmingham.

This session is specifically designed to equip you with the insights, strategies, and resources needed to accelerate your international growth journey.

We will highlight the comprehensive government support available such as the Business Academy, which provides expert support for your business, including training aimed at developing skills for reaching new customers internationally. In addition, UK Export Finance provides resources to facilitate sales abroad, such as export insurance and guarantees to lenders.

Not only will we showcase a range of exciting live global opportunities currently open to UK life sciences businesses, but you can also discover how to access and search export sales leads across the sector so you can pitch your company to overseas buyers who are looking for products and services like yours.

Importantly you can hear from successful global businesses about how they leverage international markets, benefit from a global client base, and strengthen their growth and resilience.

Join us to connect with experts, peers and likeminded businesses, and take the next step towards expanding your global footprint.

6.30pm-11.30pm: Gala dinner & awards
Hyatt Regency, 2 Bridge Street, Birmingham B1 2JZ
Celebrate excellence and innovation in the life sciences industry at the Life Sciences Gala Dinner & Awards. This prestigious evening will bring together industry leaders, researchers, and pioneers for a night of recognition, networking, and celebration.

Friday September 19th

9am-12pm: WMHTIA and life sciences innovation support
Warwick Manufacturing Group, WMG International Manufacturing Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL
Discover the innovation, support and funding available to life sciences companies. Hear from participants involved in the massively successful West Midlands Health Tech Innovation Accelerator. Find out how you can connect with the regional innovation ecosystem, which provides grants, funded programmes and events.

9am-11.30am: How to use IP to reduce your tax liability
PHTA, Birmingham Health Innovation Campus, Aston Webb Boulevard, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6SQ
If you have IP, are thinking of IP now or in the future, this session must not be missed. This ABGI-UK event is designed to show life science companies how: To create a tax asset using IP; to protect your IP; to be introduced to narrow scope patents and the benefits thereof.

Keynote speaker: Philip Cupitt, patent attorney at Marks and Clerk, Birmingham.

12pm-3pm: Improving health and wellbeing using safe, secure, regulated and ethical AI
Design Factory, 2nd Floor, North Wing, Aston University B4 7ET
West Midlands Health Technologies Cluster and Aston University are hosting a panel discussion to focus on how AI can be used appropriately to improve our health and wellbeing. With a wide range of experts on the panel, we look forward to a robust and informative discussion.

- Nibbles and networking from 12pm-1pm
- Panel session from 1pm-3pm

2pm-3.30pm: Life with nature
Meeting at Harborne Lane Nursing Home, 247 Harborne Lane, Birmingham B29 6TG.
Walking workshop with Chris Millward, co-founder of Team4Nature and the Brum Biosphere and conservation manager at Bibbey's Wild Farms.

This walking workshop looks at our relationship with the natural world and how our happiness, health and wellbeing can be enhanced by connecting to it. We will also explore how life sciences, manufacturing and technology can come together to help our region and its people thrive in the wake of Birmingham being recently crowned as the UK's first nature city.

Voting open for awards presentation

The finalists of the five awards being presented at the Life Sciences Week Gala Dinner & Awards have been announced.
Voting is open until 5pm on Monday 15th September. Please scan the QR code to take you through to the page for voting.

Breakthrough Innovation in Life Sciences – Recognising pioneering research, technology, or therapies that are transforming healthcare and biotechnology.
Aston Vision Sciences; Black Space Technology; and Alex Richter

Rising Star in Life Sciences – Celebrating an emerging leader making significant contributions to the field through research, innovation or leadership.
Shashank Chaganty, Vichag; Leah Vanono, The Social Architex; and Kloe Avon, KZ Organics

Excellence in Collaboration & Partnerships – Honouring successful cross-sector partnerships driving advancements in life sciences, from academia to industry.
Liam Grover, WMHTIA; Judith Stewart, Health Innovation West Midlands; and Adam McGuinness, Plug and Play

Outstanding Contribution to Life Sciences – Awarding an individual or organisation for exceptional long-term impact on the industry.
David Kidney; Medilink Midlands; and University of Birmingham

Advancement in Patient Care & Health Outcomes – Highlighting innovations in treatments, diagnostics or healthcare delivery that have significantly improved patient outcomes.
Sian Dunning, Medical Devices Testing and Evaluation Centre (MD-Tec); Jean-Louis Duprey, ExGen Dx; and Karim Vissangy, HoloMedix.AI

Investment breakfast

Wealth manager RBC Brewin Dolphin is holding an investment breakfast at their office in Colmore Row on Tuesday September 16, 8.30am-10am.
Investment Specialist Director from Baillie Gifford
Ben James, an investment specialist for Ballie Gifford's US Equity Growth Strategy, will be the speaker. He also chairs the US Equity Growth Product Group and has been a member of the team since 2016. He joined Baillie Gifford in 2015.

Shout about your business

It's competition time on the first morning of Life Sciences Week as businesses are invited to shout about themselves at the selection day pitch for the second cohort of the University of Birmingham's HealthTech AI Hub.
The HealthTech AI Hub is a co-development ecosystem based within the College of Medicine and Health at the University of Birmingham.
Funded by the West Midlands HealthTech Innovation Accelerator, it aims to support the creation of responsible, scalable AI and digital health solutions through industry-academia collaboration.
Cohort 2 highlights include tailored support for AI product development from leading academic experts, accelerated development of digital health MVPs, regulatory guidance for software/AI as a medical device, talent-matching and internship opportunities for students, industry project collaborations, investor pitch sessions for academic spinouts, and the opportunity to prototype solutions during the Spring 2026 Hackathon.
The online pitch takes place at 11am-2pm on Monday September 15.

Podcast series launches for Life Sciences Week

The University of Wolverhampton is running a series of podcasts for Life Sciences Week.
Dr Martin Khechara from the STEM Response Team at University of Wolverhampton has been talking with with Life Sciences Week advisory board members David Kidney, Adam McGuinness, Plug and Play, Lynn Yap, consultant, and Ellen Daniels, CEO of British Compressed Gasses Association.
Each podcast is approximately 20 minutes long.
Please scan the QR code to be taken to the podcasts.

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SMEs invited to access support offered by Birmingham Chambers of Commerce

Life sciences SMEs are among the businesses invited to access a Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce resource designed to provide the knowledge, tools and support firms need to thrive in today's competitive landscape.
The Business Growth Studio is a new initiative launched by GBCC – combining previous campaigns of Growth Through People and Sustainable Business Series into a hub of expert insights, practical workshops, and peer-led support.
It is based on the core themes of growth foundations, growth through people, sustainable growth, innovation for growth, tech for growth, and global growth.
The GBCC has worked closely with life sciences SMEs to find solutions to the pressing challenges businesses have faced including international trade and innovation.

David Woakes

Meanwhile, as part of GBCC's collaboration with Life Sciences Week, a special session has been launched on the power of partnerships in the life sciences sector.
It will take place at the Orelle restaurant on September 18 from 08.45 to 9.30 am with Professor Gino Martini, CEO of GBCC partner, Precision Health Technologies Accelerator.
This talk will explore how partnerships fuel innovation, accelerate market access, and build resilience across industries, with a particular lens on the health and life sciences sector in the region.
David Woakes, head of commercial development at Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, said: "The life sciences sector is one of the region's greatest strengths, and we're committed to helping SMEs within it unlock their full potential.
"Through the Business Growth Studio, we're bringing together expert insights, peer support, and practical tools that directly respond to the challenges businesses face – from international trade to driving innovation.
"Our collaboration with Life Sciences Week and partners like PHTA is a prime example of how we can create the connections and opportunities that help firms grow and thrive."

LIFE SCIENCES WEEK 2025
ADVISORY BOARD

David Kidney (chair)
As executive chair of the West Midlands Health Technologies Cluster, David is responsible for its operation as a membership organisation for health technologies businesses in the region. He steers the cluster as a co-operator, an advocate and a promoter of economic and jobs growth in the sector.

Previously, David was for seven years the chief executive of the UK's Public Health Register, regulating public health professionals. David has also had careers in law and politics. See pp28-31 for in-depth interview.

Adam McGuinness
Adam is a health technology specialist and UK health program manager at Plug and Play, a global innovation platform and venture capital firm. He works closely with startups, universities, investors, and corporates to accelerate the development and adoption of transformative health solutions.

Actively embedded in the West Midlands health tech ecosystem, Adam plays a pivotal role in connecting the region to Plug and Play's international network of investors, industry leaders, and subject matter experts.

Nicholas Hitchins
Nicholas is currently is engineering director for an innovative point-of-care diagnostic company working on rapid diagnostic testing equipment for STI diagnosis.

He has detailed knowledge of the medical device development pathway, medical device risk management, verification, and transfer to manufacture.

He has led on both internal and external development programmes, with expertise in managing internal engineers and driving company strategy including driving multiple devices forward through development and into manufacture.

Ellen Daniels
Ellen is an award-winning CEO and public affairs leader, recognised for her influential lobbying work during Brexit and her modernisation of the British Compressed Gases Association, where she has served as chief executive since 2020.

Under her leadership, BCGA has won multiple Trade Association Forum Awards and significantly raised its profile with government and industry alike, contributing to national policy decisions including securing essential industry status during the Covid pandemic.

She also launched an award-winning public health campaign on nitrous oxide that helped trigger a national policy review and established the BCGA's largest committee to date, focused on cultivating future industry leaders.

Ken Wood
Ken is a highly experienced recruitment consultant, public sector advocate, and former Lord Mayor of Birmingham, with a career spanning over four decades. A fellow of the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, Ken has developed a reputation within public sector recruitment, specialising in local government, housing, and not-for-profit sectors.

Since 2015, Ken has led Network Public Sector Ltd spearheading its mission to provide dedicated recruitment services tailored to the needs of public and third-sector clients. Previously, Ken served as Managing Director of Network Recruitment Partnership, over a period that saw the company experience significant growth.

Lynn Yap
Lynn is a strategist, board advisor and former corporate executive who helps businesses scale through innovation, digital transformation, and responsible AI integration.

She held senior leadership roles at Estée Lauder, Adidas, and AVON, where she led global omnichannel strategies, digital pivots, and innovation partnerships across markets. Her work combined customer insight with operational execution, delivering sustainable growth and measurable ROI.

As managing director of The Altruistic Capitalist, Lynn advises founders and leadership teams on embedding AI and emerging technologies into core business strategy.

With grateful thanks from the organisers of Life Sciences Week to:

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By LYNN YAP, board advisor for Life Sciences Week

Listening at the edges

Why inclusive innovation must start in Birmingham

Picture a community health centre in Birmingham. In the waiting area, a young mother scrolls through her phone, trying to navigate an NHS app that isn't available in her first language. Two seats away, an older gentleman leans on his walking stick, joking with the receptionist about how many passwords he's forgotten this week.

Neither of them is a 'typical' user – and that's exactly the point.

When we talk about innovation in health, it's tempting to focus on the shiny parts – the AI algorithms, wearable sensors, and precision diagnostics. But the truth is, innovation isn't just about the tools we build. It's about who we build them for, how we build them, and whether they work in the messy, unpredictable complexity of real life.

Birmingham is uniquely positioned to lead in this space. As one of the UK's most ethnically diverse and demographically stable cities, it offers something many innovation hubs can't: a living blueprint for designing products and clinical pathways that work for everyone — not just the median patient or the most digitally connected.

Why diversity is an innovation superpower

In consumer industries, this has been understood for decades. Sneaker brands found that designing for athletes at the extremes — the sprinter with an unusual stride, the trail runner tackling unpredictable terrain — led to shoes that performed better for everyone. Tech platforms discovered that optimising for slow internet speeds made their apps more reliable for all users.

Health innovation works the same way. When companies co-design with diverse communities, they create solutions that are:

- **More robust** — tested in varied contexts and under real-world pressure.
- **More trusted** — shaped by lived experience, not assumptions.
- **More scalable** — built to handle complexity from the start, making them easier to adapt across geographies and systems.

Consider the difference between a diabetes app designed solely around the average user versus one that accounts for cultural dietary patterns, language differences, and varying levels of digital literacy. The first may work well in a controlled trial, but the second is far more likely to succeed in the unpredictable reality of everyday life.

And yet, too many health innovations are created in environments that don't reflect the people they aim to serve.

Birmingham's blueprint for inclusive innovation

The West Midlands is home to over 1,200 life sciences and health tech organisations, employing more than 23,000 people, with 10,000 more roles projected by 2030. But Birmingham's real competitive advantage isn't just economic – it's human.

More than 40% of residents identify as from ethnic minority backgrounds. Over 150 languages are spoken. The city's population is both demographically young and generationally stable – a rare combination that's ideal for long-term research and real-world product testing.

There are already examples of this in action.

University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust has introduced community-led recruitment models that improve participation from underrepresented groups in clinical trials. The Birmingham Health Innovation Campus is supporting start-ups and scale-ups to embed inclusivity from their earliest prototypes.

Another example is the way local universities collaborate with grassroots organisations to bridge research and lived experience. By engaging faith-based groups, youth clubs, and women's networks, they ensure that health pilots don't just recruit participants but genuinely resonate with them. This bottom-up model means insights flow in both directions: communities shape the science, and science adapts to communities.

These are more than local success stories – they are competitive strategies. If a product can thrive in Birmingham's complexity, it's more likely to thrive anywhere.

What health can learn from consumer design

From my own work with global consumer brands and digital platforms, three lessons stand out:

1. Design with, not for – Move from consultation to true co-creation. Bring communities into the process from the moment the problem is defined.

2. Prototype in the extremes – If it works for the most complex or hard-to-reach user, it's more likely to work for everyone.

3. Build feedback loops – Treat launch as the start of a new listening phase, not the end of the design process.

This isn't just theory. Look at how ride-sharing platforms scaled. They didn't only design for major urban centres with strong infrastructure — they tested their services in suburbs and secondary cities. By stress-testing in less predictable environments, the platforms became more adaptable, scalable, and ultimately investable. Health tech can take the same approach: test in Birmingham's complexity before rolling out nationwide.

These principles are as relevant in health as they are in retail or tech — and they make solutions more resilient, trusted, and adoptable.

Making equity the default

If Birmingham is going to lead in inclusive innovation, it will take coordinated effort:

- Community advisory boards connected to every major health innovation project.
- Incentives for diverse trial recruitment built into funding criteria.
- Partnerships with grassroots organisations to bridge trust gaps and widen participation.
- Training for innovators so that cultural competence and inclusivity are embedded in both product and business decisions.

We also need investors who are willing to back companies that prioritise equity from day one. Too often, "inclusive design" is treated as a box to tick after commercial traction is proven. But what if inclusivity itself became the marker of investability? After all, a product that only works for a narrow population may never scale successfully, no matter how sophisticated its technology.

This isn't about slowing down innovation. It's about making sure what we build works in the places and for the people who need it most.

Why now?

Life Sciences Week this September will bring together leaders from industry, academia, and the NHS to explore how applied research can move faster into practice. It's a chance to elevate inclusive innovation as not just an ethical priority but a competitive advantage.

Imagine if every health tech product piloted in Birmingham had been tested across the city's full spectrum of languages, cultural backgrounds, and health needs. Imagine if every AI model was trained on datasets reflecting the reality of all patient populations, not just the easiest to access That's not a distant aspiration. It's achievable – if inclusion is embedded from the start.

The timing matters, too. With the NHS under pressure, the demand for innovations that work first time – without endless adjustments or retrofitting – has never been higher. Birmingham can demonstrate that designing inclusively isn't slower or costlier, but a faster route to scalable adoption.

The competitive advantage of listening at the edges

Inclusive innovation isn't just the right thing to do – it's smart business. Products built for a wide range of needs perform better across markets. Solutions tested in diverse contexts are more resilient when entering new geographies.

For investors, this means reduced risk. For health systems, it means higher adoption rates. And for innovators, it means knowing their solution can survive in complexity, not just in ideal conditions.

The edges are where the friction points — and the breakthrough opportunities — live. Birmingham, with its diversity, stability, and collaborative spirit, is exactly the place to listen.

Because if we can get it right here, we can get it right anywhere.

**Lynn Yap is a board advisor to Life Sciences Week 2025 and the author of The Altruistic Capitalist. She advises startups, corporates, and founders on commercial strategy, ethical innovation, and long-term value creation.*

PHTA gets lift-off

It was one of the most keenly anticipated openings of any facility in the West Midlands for years, but the fact that the Precision Health Technologies Accelerator is now open for business provides a massive boost to both the region's life sciences sector and its economy in general. HENRY CARPENTER reports.

It has not been without its setbacks, but the PHTA is now not just completed but it is officially up and running.

This is big news for the region. It's also a blessed relief for Professor Gino Martini who has been forced to draw on reserves of patience he probably didn't realise he possessed. It's fair to say that he's now in the most chipper of moods.

This facility is quite something. After a personal tour given by Martini in which we visit pretty much every nook and corner, three immediate conclusions arise.

The first is that it is massive. The view from the outside is somehow deceptive. It is a network of dry and wet laboratories, a Makerspace, communal areas, breakout spaces, storage rooms . . . you name it, it's there, and at scale. Then there is the cohesion of the whole facility – everything is where it is for a very good reason.

Then there is the spec. 'State of the art' doesn't cover it. It just has the feel of a space which will stand the test of time for years, decades even.

Finally there is a sense of place. The views from the PHTA remind you where you are – right in the middle of the region's life sciences heartlands.

Given that the PHTA – a subsidiary of the University of Birmingham - occupies the top three floors of the first-phase building at Birmingham Health Innovation Campus,the university must be every bit as pleased as Martini and his team that it is now open for business.

Completion on the PHTA took place in the summer, and soon afterwards its doors were formally opened to tenants.

"If I could summarise how I feel right now," says Martini, "and combine it with my current focus, the six words I would choose are: excitement, excitement, excitement, delivery, delivery, delivery."

It has been a long haul for Martini since he was taken on by UoB to steer the project.

There were – almost inevitably in this day and age – setbacks (a global pandemic and its aftermath don't help), but what we now have is the largest, most significant accelerator in the UK for the life sciences industry, a 70,000 sq ft facility which is the anchor tenant of No. 1 BHIC.

"A bit like a toddler finding its feet, so is the PHTA," says Martini. "And it will emerge as the region's solution to scaling up large life science and healthcare SMEs which are of vital importance to the UK economy."

The views – with the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and 'Old Joe', rising above the University of Birmingham's main campus, both within a few hundred yards – leave no doubt that this is a facility located firmly in the city's medical and academic heartlands. This is important.

Step inside, and there is a thriving network of cutting-edge spaces to meet the needs of organisations and their practitioners, from branches of international corporations to small start-ups.

The Makerspace provides the opportunity for ideas to be tested and refined before going into production, with small-batch manufacturing and prototyping capabilities, and technology including 3D printing, laser cutting and in-silico design .

Category 2 wet and dry laboratories have been designed by scientists for scientists and provide ample room for growing companies and spin-outs. All lab modules are within 40 metres of key shared amenities.

Then there are business incubation and flexible workspaces. The former provides access to specialist support, knowledge and facilities to allow business to scale up, including intellectual property protection.

The workspaces vary from virtual tenancy to hot desks and office space, with access to all BHIC amenities.

But this is before the human involvement – the clinical expertise, the talent pool, the commercial experience – which when combined with the environment is expected to create a world-class ecosystem.

One of Martini's key lieutenants is Louise Stanley, the team's comms manager who has been involved in the project from the start.

She makes the point that while the physical environment, and its positioning within the city, is one huge draw for current and prospective tenants, the importance of access to human resources is similarly appealing.

"Tenants aren't just renting space," she says. "At PHTA they are able to tap

Members of the PHTA team outisde BHIC

Rhys Coldrick, Makerspace technical advisor

Design, prototyping and iteration are key stages in the development of any product. However, these stages are also some of the hardest and most costly for small and medium sized companies.

Basic prototyping equipment is expensive and the experience and expertise to run this equipment can be even more expensive and take a long time to gain. This all means that often these stages are what halts, and in some cases ends, the product development lifecycle.

The PHTA Makerspace aims to solve this problem providing not only access to a wide range of basic and advanced machines but also access to experienced operators to guide users through training and use of the machines.

Available equipment includes FDM 3D Printers, an SLA 3D printer, a laser cutter, hand tools, power tools, a small lathe and mill station, soldering stations, electrical testing stations, a digital microscope, a 3D scanner, a micro printer and most excitingly a digital anatomy printer.

From this equipment you can make anything from simple PLA, TPU or PETG 3D parts on the FDM printer to high accuracy rigid, flexible or biocompatible 3D parts on the SLA printer.

The laser cutter allows for 2D profile cutting and engraving of perspex, plywood, rubber, fabrics and card and the rage of hand tools aid with the assembly of manufactured parts into final prototypes.

Basic machining capabilities using the small lathe and mill unlock the potential for some metal work to be completed allowing some components to be pushed past the initial prototype stage, using material that are more representative of the final material.

For some systems electrical components are essential for the operation of the device. To aid in the development of these systems the space features soldering stations including soldering, desoldering and hot air reflow equipment and electrical test stations including power supplies, oscilloscopes and function generators.

In some cases part inspection or even reverse engineering may be required which can be achieved with the use of the digital microscope or even the 3D scanner. This enhances the ability to ensure parts produced are to the required standard but also allows for the integration of new parts into older or existing systems.

Micro parts, including micro channels for microfluids, are made possible with the inclusion of a micro printer.

Finally, the addition of the digital anatomy printer to the Makerspace will allow for printing of models in near anatomically accurate materials, making it possible to print models for surgical skills training or surgical development.

into the expertise of a thriving cluster of health excellence, infrastructure, clinical leadership and entrepreneurial skills.

“Gino often says he isn’t a landlord to our resident businesses, but a concierge – helping them to harness the power of existing partnerships between the NHS, academia, citizens and industry to deliver innovation in therapies, diagnostics and devices at pace and scale.

“What we’re trying to do is create a national and international resource where people come and work together.

“It’s about collaboration, with businesses of all sizes from the worlds of biopharma and med-tech partnering with PHTA’s clinical-academic teams to integrate, analyse and interpret data sets and basic science.

“PHTA will allow our industry partners to rapidly develop, test and validate new products and services.”

Tenancy contracts were steadily increasing prior to opening, but its anchor tenant is emblematic of how an organisation can benefit from making this flagship research facility its home.

The university’s Clinical Immunology Services has signed up to occupy approximately 10,000 sq ft of the research facility.

The CIS receives more than 100,000 blood, marrow, urine and other samples per year and, according to Stanley, it provides a comprehensive range of lab services to diagnose autoimmune and neuro-immunological conditions.

She adds: “The CIS is the only service of its kind to be embedded within an academic environment, creating a unique bridge between translational and clinical research groups, the NHS, and the pharmaceutical and bio-diagnostic industries.”

The PHTA became something of a labour of love for Martini, but his faith in what it could bring to the city and the wider economy was unshakeable.

A champion of the SMEs, and what they bring to wider economy, he says that they account for nearly two-thirds of total employment and around half of turnover in the UK private sector.

However, he believes that what is stagnating the growth of healthcare companies in the UK and particularly in West Midlands is access to high quality, category 2 laboratory and office scale-up space.

This former chief scientist of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, experienced academic and industrial pharmacist who held senior positions at Scherer Drug Delivery Systems and SmithKline Beecham, has a better understanding than most on what is needed to turbocharge the industry.

“Without scale-up space, SMEs cannot grow, meaning that innovative companies

Sharjeel Kayani, laboratory specialist

The launch of the PHTA Makerspace marks a bold and much-needed step toward transforming how medtech and healthtech innovation take root in the West Midlands.

Purpose-built to bridge the critical gap between breakthrough ideas and real-world impact, the Makerspace offers early-stage companies, researchers, and clinicians the tools, space, and support to develop, test, and iterate medical technologies in a regulated environment.

Unlike conventional labs or co-working spaces, the Makerspace is engineered for momentum. It brings together state-of-the-art equipment, embedded technical expertise, and regulatory know-how under one roof – creating a launchpad where proof-of-concept doesn’t get stuck, but accelerates. This is a space designed for the often-overlooked innovators in the health ecosystem: startups with deep tech, clinicians with practical insights, and academics with game-changing ideas ready for application.

The West Midlands is rich in talent and ambition, but access to suitable facilities has long been a bottleneck. The Makerspace is our answer.

It’s where making, scaling, and commercialising healthcare innovation can finally happen in the same postcode. For the West Midlands, the economic upside is obvious: a magnet for high-value jobs, investment and IP that might otherwise migrate south or overseas.

For the UK’s life sciences sector, it’s a scalable blueprint for levelling-up innovation nationwide. And for patients, it means faster access to smarter, safer, more personalised care. We’re proud of what this will mean for regional growth, UK life sciences, and most importantly, patients.

At the heart of the new PHTA-BHIC ecosystem, the 13,000 sq ft Makerspace is a proving ground where bright ideas stop being PowerPoints and start becoming prototypes. That ‘bench-to-bedside without the baggage’ approach is what sets us apart. In short, you can design, print, test and iterate all in one place.

Why does that matter? Because the real limit on med-tech innovation isn’t imagination – it’s infrastructure. Every day a startup spends bouncing between subcontractors is a day a patient waits for progress. By collapsing that development cycle into a single, open-access hub, we expect to cut timelines, offering game-changing support for SMEs navigating their first critical milestones.

But machinery alone doesn’t make a movement. The Makerspace is deliberately porous to the region’s talent pipeline, wiring in graduate placements, research fellowships and CPD sprints so that a robotics PhD can trade ideas with a surgical registrar and a product-design student – before lunch. Those collisions are where the next generation of inclusive, human-centred medtech will emerge.

Personally, I’m feeling six very loud words right now: think, create, collaborate, iterate, manufacture and impact. That’s the journey the Makerspace makes possible – and I can’t wait to see the first breakthrough roll off the printer.

Massive credit to the PHTA team for making sure we launch with everything certified, calibrated, and coffee fuelled.

PHTA

leave the UK," he says. "What happens is that patients suffer because they cannot access innovative treatments and both the UK and West Midlands economy also suffers.

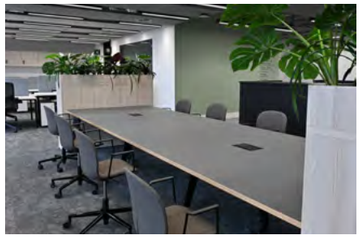
"So we must hail this fantastic development. It has been an investment in excess of £60 million, and has been specifically designed to stop the leakage of innovative companies and highly skilled jobs overseas. Once fully developed, BHIC is estimated to generate £400 million GVA and 10,000 jobs to the local economy.

"But this development did not happen by itself. Many people have been involved from the beginning, such Louise who is the longest serving member of the team.

"I would also like to acknowledge the rest of my team, some of whom are seconded in supporting this important endeavour – Natasha, Mark, Becky, Andrew, Shar, Rhys, Kay, Magda, Sallyann, Gianmarco, Richard and Dan."

It's little wonder there's a buzz about the team.

As Martini says though, now it's about delivery.



Managing the risks of rapid change

IN THE LIFE SCIENCES SECTOR

By NEIL EMERSON of global risk firm WTW

The life sciences industry is evolving at pace. New technologies, therapies and scientific processes are bringing huge opportunities to the sector but also added risks and challenges.

With rapid innovation comes new concerns about the safety of novel products, increasingly complex supply chains and cyber security. Firms also face challenges adapting to new kinds of clinical trials and complying with diverging regulatory frameworks in different countries.

Willis is ideally placed to help you navigate these challenges successfully.

Global reach

Our global life science practice of more than 200 colleagues in 120 countries worldwide includes broking, underwriting, scientific, legal and risk engineering specialists. This means we can anticipate trends and regulations and support you to mitigate and transfer your risks in any location in which you do business.

Local expertise

At our GB life sciences hub in Birmingham, we have a dedicated team of brokers, claims experts and account handlers, with deep knowledge of the industry and decades of experience serving businesses from health tech and medical devices to pharmaceuticals and biopharma.

Our expertise is global, and we share it with you

200+
life science practitioners in more than 120 countries

700+
clients ranging from large multinationals to early-stage startups

1,000+
clinical trials placed global

Supporting your business through the life cycle of growth

The path from the lab bench to commercialisation and on to growth and expansion can be long and complex, especially for new and emerging life science businesses.

Early challenges may include working with contract manufacturing organisations (CMOs) to get products made and navigating the complex clinical trial and regulatory approval pathways. As they grow, companies can face further hurdles expanding into new markets, complying with different sets of medical regulations, and protecting the intellectual property of the products they've developed.

The Willis life sciences team have helped many businesses to make this journey successfully. With a range of professional backgrounds, from broking to legal and scientific specialists, we have the broad expertise and experience to advise and guide you through regulatory and developmental challenges. Our deep understanding of the changes impacting the life science industry can help you stay ahead of emerging risks and avoid common pitfalls.

Looking ahead: Birmingham Life Sciences Week

WTW's Birmingham office will be a proud participant in the upcoming West Midlands Life Sciences Week. As founding supporters, the team will host both breakfast and lunch lectures, offering insights into risk management, regulatory trends, and insurance innovation. These sessions promise to be engaging, informative, and a great opportunity to connect with industry peers. Join us for our three events designed especially for life sciences companies (Lab to market, med tech and beyond). All welcome.

TUESDAY
16th September
8.45am – 11.30am

- **Patent Protection**
- **Clinical Trials**

Hosted by WTW in conjunction with Marks & Clerk and Chubb Insurance

WEDNESDAY
17th September
12.00 – 2.30pm

- **The Evolving Landscape of Life Sciences: Insurance Claims**
- **Navigating Cyber Liability in the Life Sciences Sector**

Hosted by WTW in conjunction with Clyde & Co

THURSDAY
18th September
12.00 – 2.30pm

- **From Vision to Venture: Mastering Company Setup and Director Responsibilities**
- **Crafting Balanced Benefit Programmes to Attract and Retain Talent**
- **Insurance Basics for Life Sciences Beginners**

Hosted by WTW in conjunction with Browne Jacobson

All events take place at WTW, 20 Colmore Circus, Birmingham B4 6AT. All events offer breakfast or lunch, tea, coffee, networking

To register for these and any other events during Life Sciences Week visit www.wmlifesciencesweek.co.uk/events

WTW is a risk, insurance and HR management firm with over 700 life sciences clients. Our specialists have a deep understanding of the risks impacting the life sciences industry and how your business can be protected.

For more information, contact Neil Emerson at neil.emerson@wtwco.com

wtw

Meet the life sciences team . . .

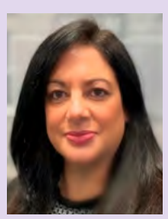
Our Birmingham team is devoted to serving the unique needs of GB life science businesses. We'll make sure you have the support you need locally while providing seamless access to the global Willis network.

WTW Birmingham,
The Colmore Building,
20 Colmore Circus,
Queensway,
Birmingham B4 6AT

NEIL EMERSON
Life sciences practice group leader
Neil has decades of experience in insurance broking, risk strategy and business leadership. He specializes in helping businesses in areas such as med-tech, biotech, pharma and consumer healthcare, to manage complex, interconnected, multi-national risks. Neil holds an MBA from Aston University.

CARRON HIGGINS
Insurance placement specialist
Carron has worked in broking and risk management for public and private sector clients in the life science industry and hi-tech engineering for more than 35 years, she has a detailed knowledge of policy wordings and business interruption exposures and is expert at tailoring insurance cover.

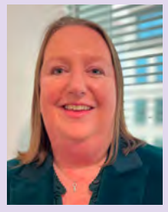
KIRAN RYATT
Risk partner and defence solicitor
Over more than 20 years as a defence solicitor, Kiran has helped many businesses in life sciences and manufacturing to defend personal injury claims and reduce their exposures. Karin also supports clients with accident reporting, investigations and completing claims-related documents.



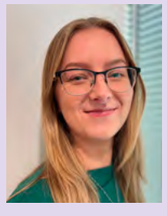
CLAIR MILES
Loss management leader
Clair is a leading expert in managing pharmaceutical claims, including technical and high value complex claims. She is also expert in insurance claim litigation, insurance program review and planning, data analytics and trend analysis.

BARBARA DAINTY
Account executive
Barbara has worked in corporate insurance for almost 40 years, specialising in the life science and tech industries and global risks. She joined the Willis life science team in 2024, working on complex and global insurance.

VICTORIA TARGETT
Account director
Victoria has spent more than 20 years in Birmingham, supporting businesses in life sciences and manufacturing. She works with clients to develop a deep understanding of their risks and make sure they get the best representation in the insurance market.

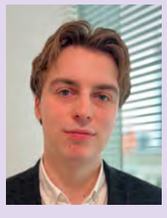


JODIE SMITH
Client service executive
Jodie has worked with several life science companies and spent time on secondment at a large multinational client, which helped deepen her understanding servicing global accounts. She supports clients with day-to-day account management, the renewals process and large projects.

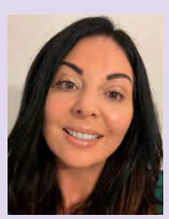


CHRISTINE LEE
Account executive
Christine has been working in corporate insurance for over 40 years. She has specialised in supporting life sciences clients for 20 years. She works to ensure she understands how clients operate to ensure their insurance covers meet their needs.

JONATHAN BRIDGE
New client engagement
Jonathan has worked in commercial insurance since 2019, supporting broking and client service teams. He joined the Willis Birmingham team in 2023 and focuses on developing relationships with new life science clients.



DEE MORAN
Client service executive
Dee has over 20 years' experience in insurance, including small independent brokers and large multinational firms. She has worked in SME commercial insurance and compliance, as well as corporate insurance, helping clients manage global risk exposures and within this has specialized in life sciences insurance. She supports clients daily with queries, and leads day to day support on each account.



HANNAH WILLIAMS
Account executive
Hannah qualified as a barrister at law, which sharpened her skills in reviewing contracts and being able to navigate complex subjects. She has worked as a product recall broker for Willis in London, specializing in the pharmaceutical and medical devices industries. As part of our Birmingham life science team she advises clients about product recall insurance in the sector within her role as an account executive.

TICH MUROMO
Client relationship director
Tich is a senior member of the Risk & Broking Team. He supports and works with teams and experts across various specialties of WTW's global business including life sciences. He provides strategic support to client stakeholders in businesses across a variety of Industry sectors, helping them in managing their strategic and operational risk exposures.

PLASMA DONORS NEEDED

The demand for life-saving plasma medicines has never been greater, and now, thanks to significant advances in NHS Blood and Transplant's plasma for medicines programme, Birmingham is at the heart of a critical mission to improve self-sufficiency in plasma collection and life-saving medicines.

For the first time in more than 25 years, NHS patients across the UK are receiving vital plasma medicines made from UK donors' blood, in the form of immunoglobulin and albumin.

These precious medicines can only be produced from human plasma, which is often referred to as 'liquid gold'. They are used to treat over 50 conditions, including immune deficiencies, blood disorders, neurological conditions, and can be used in trauma care, some cancer treatments and in childbirth.

Plasma can be donated directly in specialist centres but is also collected in smaller amounts from all blood donations given across the country.

The Birmingham Plasma Donor Centre, one of only three dedicated plasma donor centres in England, plays a pivotal role in this mission. With an increasing number of patients relying on these treatments each year, there is need for more people to become blood and plasma donors.

Huge strides have been made since the ban on UK plasma use was lifted in 2021. By the end of 2025, NHSBT aims to meet 25% of the UK's demand for immunoglobulin and 80% of albumin needs with domestic plasma donations.

This effort reduces the reliance on more expensive imports and strengthens the resilience of the NHS supply chain. Many plasma donations are needed to help save

or improve just one life. To continue to meet growing demand, more than 1,000 extra plasma donors in the West Midlands are needed.

Local businesses and organisations in and around Birmingham are urged to support this cause. By supporting and enabling employees to donate during work hours, companies can play a vital role in boosting precious stocks of life-saving blood and plasma as well as giving all those involved a sense of personal satisfaction and fostering a culture of giving back to the community.

A donor survey carried out by NHSBT in 2024 shows that 43% of existing donors would be more likely to donate if their employer allowed them time off – this number rises significantly to 65% for younger donors.

Gerry Gogarty, director of blood supply, said: "More than 17,000 patients currently rely on plasma medicines across the UK. With more plasma donations needed every day, consider becoming a blood or plasma donor and encourage others to donate.

"Every donation brings us closer to meeting the demands of UK patients and ensuring that these vital medicines are always available when they are required."

The blood and plasma donor centres in Birmingham are located on New Street in Birmingham B2 4DU.

To learn more about how you can help or book a donation, please visit www.blood.co.uk.


Dr Richard Fallon

A powerhouse of possibility

Life sciences pioneers are among those invited to attend a "powerhouse of possibility" at Millennium Point on October 10.

Organised by the Technology Supply Chain, the West Midlands Innovation & Growth Conference has been touted as the region's premier gathering for manufacturing, technology, health and life sciences companies, and the businesses, universities and organisations that support them.

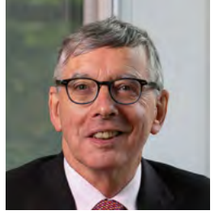
Dr Richard Fallon, CEO of the TSC, said: "This is more than just a conference. It's a powerhouse of possibility – a place where industry meets academia, where cutting-edge tech meets world-class manufacturing, and where innovative ideas turn into real-world impact.

"Attendees can expect keynotes from leading minds in industry and innovation, an exhibitor zone showcasing groundbreaking products and services, and dedicated networking spaces to meet future collaborators, clients and partners."

Dr Fallon is also the co-founder of the Innovation Awards, which this year are taking place at the Eastside Rooms on November 21, and a formidable presence of pioneers in the health and life sciences is guaranteed.

The awards, organised by One Thousand Trades Events, celebrate innovation in its many forms, including the invaluable contributions of individuals, universities and catapults.

To learn more and register visit www.WMInnovationGrowthConference.eventbrite.co.uk



Clusters have become central to public policy

By DAVID KIDNEY, executive chair of WMHTC

Successive UK governments have increasingly recognised the value of business clusters as drivers of economic growth and innovation. Regardless of political leanings – from Harold Wilson's "white heat of technology" to Liz Truss's "growth plan" – clusters have become a consistent feature of industrial strategy.

Clusters are seen as engines of collaboration, knowledge exchange, and regional strength. The 2022 Levelling Up White Paper highlighted that vibrant local economies emerge when businesses and partners work together in concentrated areas, citing examples like Aberdeen's energy sector and Sheffield's manufacturing.

Incidentally, it was this Levelling Up White Paper that announced the £100 million investment in three innovation accelerators, one of which was in the West Midlands. This led directly to the creation of the West Midlands Health Technologies Innovation Accelerator.

The importance of clusters is reflected in policy: Theresa May's 2017 Industrial Strategy mentioned clusters 34 times; by 2025, the current Modern Industrial Strategy mentions them 81 times. The government now channels public funding and support toward high-growth clusters, especially within eight priority sectors (IS-8), such as HealthTech and Life Sciences.

The Life Sciences Sector Plan reinforces this approach, aiming to make the UK the leading life sciences economy in Europe by 2030 by investing in high-potential clusters. In short, clusters are where innovation happens – and where government sees the greatest return on strategic investment.

Cluster theory and practice

Even though companies can source capital, goods, information, and technology from around the world, trade patterns are dominated by what Michael Porter calls clusters. He describes these as "critical masses—in one place—of unusual competitive success in particular fields".

To Porter, competitive advantages in a global economy often rests on local things — knowledge, relationships, motivation — that distant rivals cannot match.

You may think Silicon Valley or Boston for clusters, but they are much closer to home, too. There are powerful and growing clusters in the West Midlands. From automotive and manufacturing to creatives and tech – and yes, life sciences.

Within the UK, the West Midlands has been ahead of the game in identifying sectors with growth potential and supporting them actively. The earlier West Midlands Plan for Growth took this approach and it why cluster organisations like ours are encouraged, and funded, to promote growth through clustering. The new West Midlands Growth Plan continues this approach.

The West Midlands Health Technologies Cluster

What have we been doing? Last year was a period of significant growth and impact for the West Midlands Health Technologies Cluster (WMHTC) and its partners. Our collaborative efforts have strengthened the HealthTech ecosystem in the West Midlands, fostering innovation, supporting businesses, and addressing critical healthcare challenges.

Key achievements include:

- Expanded reach and engagement through our diverse event portfolio
- Enhanced business support and connections across the sector
- Successful launch of new initiatives like the Kick Start Programme and Inclusive Health Programme
- Strengthened international collaborations and corporate partnerships
- Increased focus on skills development and talent pipeline.

The immediate outlook for health-tech in the West Midlands

Looking forward, there are many reasons to be optimistic about the health-tech sector, and life sciences altogether, in the West Midlands. Over the past two years, the WMHTIA has been particularly successful working with innovators and entrepreneurs. For a public funding outlay of £14.5 million, this programme has leveraged nearly £50 million in private investment in our region's health-tech sector.

In the same period, in no small part due to the efforts of the West Midlands Growth Company, the West Midlands has out-performed everywhere else in the UK, except London, in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). In health-tech, this very welcome trend saw Thermo Fisher Scientific pay over $2 billion for Birmingham's The Binding Site. It has been heartening to watch this new arrival grow here – from a workforce of 500 to 800.

The result is that there is a buzz in the sector. There is an appetite among our partners for expanding the WMHTIA's approach to provide more support for businesses ready to scale up, and to ensure that help and support is available everywhere in our region. A new med-tech higher level qualification has been validated at Levels 4 and 5 to fill a gap in the education and training available for our residents.

Yes, we are on course to continue our recent successes and achieve more inclusive growth for our place and our people, and at the same time to contribute to a fairer, greener future for the West Midlands as a whole.

An opportunity to be grasped

Graham Silk and Professor Charlie Craddock argue that accelerating clinical trials in the UK is key for building a sustainable network for patients, the NHS and economic growth, especially in the West Midlands.

Introduction

Over the past 70 years, trillions of pounds of global public and private investment in basic science have transformed our understanding of human disease.

Genomics, immunobiology, and cellular medicine have opened the door to unprecedented therapeutic breakthroughs, offering the possibility of long-term survival in diseases that were once untreatable.

Yet, despite these advances, the clinical trial infrastructure designed to test and deliver these therapies has failed to keep pace. In the UK, patients remain locked out of rapid access to life-saving treatments because the nation is still relying on outdated models of trial delivery.

At the same time, the NHS, universities, and life sciences sector collectively hold unique strategic assets, ranging from the diversity of the UK patient population to the global reputation of the country's scientific research base. The challenge and opportunity of 2026 is to build an accelerated, sustainable clinical trials environment that transforms patient outcomes, strengthens the NHS, and drives inward investment.

The Greater Birmingham and West Midlands region, as highlighted in the Silk Report commissioned by the West Midlands Combined Authority and former mayor Andy Street, offers a particularly powerful base from which to realise this ambition.

With its manufacturing strength, academic excellence, and clinical expertise, the region is positioned not only to transform patient access to novel therapies but also to create new industrial and commercial opportunities for the UK.

The global challenge: rapid assessment of novel therapies

The exponential growth of novel drug, cellular, and transplant therapies means that patients' lives increasingly depend on efficient trial networks. Yet trial delivery remains wedded to outdated models, with regulatory processes and infrastructure still resembling those of the 1990s. This mismatch results in three major failures:

1. Patients lose out – Individuals with resistant or aggressive disease die because access to clinical trials is slow and fragmented.

2. Pharma struggles – The business model underpinning drug development is undermined when registration-enabling trials are delayed.

3. Public trust is at risk – Taxpayers expect investment in science to translate into improved outcomes, but slow trial delivery breaks this implicit social contract.

The Covid-19 pandemic provided proof that rapid trial infrastructure is possible. The accelerated vaccine development programme showed that, given the right conditions, therapies can move from discovery to delivery at pace.

The lesson is clear: urgent innovation is needed in trial networks, not just for pandemic preparedness, but for cancer and other life-threatening diseases.

The importance of a mixed trial portfolio

An effective UK clinical trials environment must support a balanced portfolio of:

- Pivotal registration-quality trials sponsored by industry, necessary for regulatory approval.
- Investigator-initiated trials (IITs), which extend licences, refine protocols, and optimise outcomes using established treatments.

Currently, commercial trials are dominated by the global contract research organisation (CRO) sector, while IITs remain largely the preserve of university trial units. However, both models face significant shortcomings. CROs often lack meaningful clinical engagement and can be prohibitively expensive, while university-led trials are slow, underfunded, and inconsistent in data quality.

Innovative academic research organisations (AROs) such as HOVON, LYSARC, Accelerating Clinical Trials Ltd and the European Myeloma Network have shown that alternative models are possible. These groups deliver registration-standard trials with high-quality clinical engagement, proving that cooperative structures can rival or even surpass the global CRO sector.

Requirements for an effective translational trials programme

To compete internationally, the UK must build a translational clinical trials network grounded in three pillars:

1. Clinical excellence – High-quality clinical teams and specialist nurses embedded within NHS hospitals.

2. Scientific strength – Advanced genomics and stratified medicine programmes to enable patient cohorting.

3. Infrastructure – Strong support from NIHR, MRC, and CRUK, with a joined-up catchment area capable of delivering rapid recruitment in complex, genomically defined cohorts.

Critically, capacity must be expanded for clinicians to drive trial design, and investment must be made in the research nurse workforce. Without this, even the best therapies will stall before reaching patients.

The West Midlands opportunity: lessons from the last decade

The West Midlands is uniquely positioned to lead this transformation. In Graham Silk's report for the West Midlands Combined Authority he outlined how Greater Birmingham's and the West Midlands' convergence of healthcare, manufacturing, and digital infrastructure provides a natural home for a next-generation clinical trials ecosystem.
Key assets include:

The NHS base – Both nationally, but especially in the West Midlands, we are home to one of the UK's largest and most diverse patient populations. "The population of Scotland with the genome of the world", the region is ideally placed to lead the UK as it develops its rapid recruitment to genomically stratified cohorts.

- Academic excellence - The Universities of Birmingham and Warwick and their associated hospitals provide internationally recognised expertise in oncology, haematology, and immunology.
- Manufacturing and business strength – The region's industrial heritage and advanced manufacturing capacity offer opportunities to create a linked life sciences supply chain, from drug development to device manufacture. As evidence to this, the £200m+ investment into the Health Innovation Campus in Selly Oak together with the planned £3.2bn Health Tech campus in Warwick, over the last 10 years, indicate the region's intention and ambition.
- Connectivity and scale – With excellent and ever improving transport links, the West Midlands can function as a centralised hub for national and international trial coordination.

The report further emphasised that clinical trials are not just about health outcomes, they represent a driver of regional economic growth. By building a strong trials infrastructure, the West Midlands can attract pharma investment, generate high-value jobs, and stimulate commercial spin-offs in digital health, biotech, and advanced manufacturing.

Securing sustainable funding models

Historically, much of the UK's most innovative and recent trial activity has been sustained by philanthropy. However, Covid-19 has significantly reduced charitable funding, exposing the fragility of this model. To secure the future, clinical trials infrastructure must become self-sustaining.

This requires a shift towards sustainable social enterprise CROs (SECROs), organisations structured to reinvest surplus income into patient benefit. Unlike traditional CROs, SECROs embed clinical leadership, accelerate trial timelines, and provide a “one-stop shop” that is attractive to global pharma.

International examples such as the US BMT CTN and the Australasian Leukaemia & Lymphoma Group demonstrate the viability of this approach. In the UK, Accelerating Clinical Trials Ltd has already shown that this model can be applied successfully in haematology. Scaling this nationally, and extending beyond blood cancers, would allow the UK to compete with global competitors while generating re-investable surpluses.

The economic case: driving growth through clinical trials

Beyond patient benefit, a revitalised trials network is a significant economic opportunity. According to the O’Shaughnessy Review, the UK has been losing global competitiveness as a destination for commercial trials, despite its unique assets in the NHS, Genomics England, and NICE.

The establishment of a UK Cancer Clinical Trials Ltd, a company limited by guarantee operating independently of government, would create a new industrial sector in its own right. Benefits include:

- Job creation – Up to 10,000 high-value roles in clinical research, data science, regulatory affairs, and manufacturing.
- Inward investment – Pharma companies would prioritise the UK as a trial destination, reversing the current decline.
- Post-Brexit advantage – Acting as a gateway into Europe, the UK could differentiate itself with faster trial set-up and delivery.
- Industrial spillover – Synergies with the West Midlands’ manufacturing base and the university-led health and tech campuses, could lead to spin-outs in digital health, biotech devices, and pharmaceutical supply chains.
- The financial contribution to the massive UK drug budget would also be significant. Drug leverage – and at no cost to the government or the NHS – just in haematology from Accelerated Clinical Trials Ltd, is now in excess of £500 million. If other cancers were to become part of this model, the figure would multiply significantly.

This is not hypothetical: competitor economies such as Australia and the US have already embraced similar models, attracting both patients and investment. The UK cannot afford to fall further behind.

Creating a sustainable cycle of patient benefit

The central aim of a properly designed trials environment must remain patient benefit. By embedding trial access within the NHS, UK patients would gain earlier access to therapies, while clinicians would be positioned as leaders in international trial consortia. Surplus income generated through SECRO models as described earlier could be reinvested in nursing networks, clinical education and further research, creating a virtuous and sustainable cycle of innovation.

Moreover, embedding trial networks within regions like the West Midlands ensures that benefits are felt across society: patients gain access to transformative therapies, the NHS benefits from strengthened capacity, universities gain global prestige, and local businesses gain new commercial opportunities.

Conclusion

The rapid pace of medical discovery demands a matching transformation in the way clinical trials are delivered.

The UK has both the assets and the imperative to lead, but this will only be achieved through bold restructuring: moving beyond reliance on global CROs, embedding sustainable funding models, and capitalising on regional strengths such as those highlighted in the, now 10 year old West Midlands report.

If developed strategically, the UK can secure a dual win: ensuring that patients gain rapid access to life-saving therapies, while simultaneously driving economic growth through a new industrial sector in life sciences. Failure to act risks relegating the NHS to second-tier status in global biopharma and denying patients the benefits of the therapeutic revolution already underway.

The opportunity is clear, the assets are in place, and the need is urgent. By building an accelerated clinical trials network rooted in sustainability and regional strength, the UK can lead the world in delivering a sustainable next generation of medical breakthroughs.

*Businessman and investor Graham Silk and Charlie Craddock, professor of haemato-oncology at the University of Warwick and University Hospitals Birmingham, are co-founders and directors of Accelerating Clinical Trials Ltd. They also founded the charity Cure Leukaemia.

charity

A home for heroes

As the CEO of University Hospitals Birmingham Charity, which covers four hospitals in the city, Mike Hammond has his work cut out for him. A key project within the charity is Fisher House, a haven for injured service members and their families which gives its boss particular satisfaction. JON GRIFFIN reports.

Mike Hammond

Mike Hammond is in an animated mood.

We are chatting in Fisher House – the UK's only home from home for injured military personnel and their families – which sits in the vast site surrounding the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and he is keen to highlight some of the institution's facilities.

"We had 125 in here for an England World Cup game with people having a beer just like they would do at home," he says.

"We are trying to create as normal an environment as possible. Fisher House is not a dry house. Who am I to say you can't have a glass of wine after you have spent 10 hours in a critical bed?"

Hammond may have a relaxed approach to alcohol and other home comforts – including DVDs and satellite television – at the homely facility for the UK's military and their families, but his 17-year track record as chief executive of one of Britain's top 20 hospital charities speaks for itself.

Since he was appointed to the job in January 2009 – at the height of the credit crunch following the banking bailout crisis which posed an existential threat to companies big and small – Hammond has overseen an increase in the hospital charity's annual fundraising from £1 million to £6.5 million.

In its current incarnation as the University Hospitals Birmingham Charity, it is headed by the genial Londoner who swapped a lengthy executive career in banking and finance with the likes of the Leeds Permanent Building Society, the Halifax and Bradford and Bingley for the role he still holds today. During that time his work has expanded from overseeing two hospitals to four in the shape of the Queen Elizabeth, Heartlands, Good Hope and Solihull.

"Since I have been here we are reaching £80 million that we have raised and spent. We are not just raising it for the sake of it and leaving it in the bank. We are in the top 20 hospital charities in the country.

"When I came here in 2009 we were just known as the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham Charity and were raising about £1 million a year. Over time we have grown that to around £6 million to £6.5 million a year, and we have taken on three other hospitals.

"I would like us to be the largest hospital charity in the Midlands because we are the largest hospital trust in the Midlands. Our aspirations should be the same as the hospitals."

Hammond is particularly proud of the £4.2 million purpose-built facility at Fisher House, a former car park site a stone's throw from the QE Hospital, which has provided a safe and welcoming haven for

8,000 military personnel and their families since it opened its doors in 2013.

"This is a great success story for the Midlands. We have been able to offer a level of care and service to our military personnel that is not available at any other hospital in the country.

"The people of the West Midlands have also benefited because we have done so much complex and detailed surgery here at the QE that we have learnt all those skills for civilian patients.

"The QE is the main receiving hospital for the UK's military – both military that are injured and also military that are ill."

Hammond said the military personnel admitted to the QE – and subsequently Fisher House – were patients suffering from serious injuries and conditions rather than sprained ankles, cuts and bruises.

"We are talking about anyone blown up on the battlefield, shot on a training exercise, anyone who jumps out of an aeroplane and their parachute doesn't open or on a skiing exercise in Norway and you hit a tree.

"Also if you are in, say, Cyprus or Germany and are diagnosed with cancer you come here for radiotherapy. If you are on the Falkland Islands and you need an organ transplant you get flown here. We have got military patients coming from all over the world to the QE for life-saving treatment."

Fisher House takes its name from the US-based Fisher House Foundation established by the billionaire philanthropic family who have launched dozens of similar havens in the States and donated a substantial sum to the Birmingham project.

"This is somewhere where families can stay close by to their loved ones in hospital and it is also somewhere where patients can come once they are starting to recover. No medical care happens here, the medical care should be across the road at the hospital," says Hammond.

Dave, Becky and Erin in Fisher House

He and his staff at Fisher House encourage a humane and enlightened approach to the military personnel and their families who are admitted to the 77-capacity, 18-room facility, which costs around £350,000 a year to run.

"This is a home from home for them. We say to patients that as soon as they say they are well enough to go outside for a cigarette – most of them seem to smoke – they are well enough to come down here during the day if they want to, whether their families are here or not.

"Sometimes you see somebody wheeling themselves down the road and you ask are they going to see their mum or girlfriend and they say 'no, I am going to watch the cricket or the rugby'."

He says the stark contrast in environments between the QE and Fisher House is key to the facility's appeal to users.

"However nice the hospital is, you do always feel you are in a hospital. You see people in medical kit, the conversations are all about medicine, you get the beeps from the machines. Here you can feel like you are at home.

"It's for families to stay, it's for patients as they are recovering, it is also for outpatients even once they have been discharged from the military."

The facilities at Fisher House are also complemented by the medical skills and expertise of 500 military personnel based a few hundred yards away at the QE, as Hammond explains.

"We have got an MOD military unit – the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine – at the hospital working alongside their NHS compatriots.

"That is serving personnel from the Army, Navy and Air Force who are consultants, surgeons, doctors and nurses."

Family bedroom at Fisher House, above, and King Charles cutting the ribbon, right

Prince Harry chats with veteran Stuart Gemmel and his wife

Hammond stresses that, inevitably, Fisher House has witnessed heartbreak and ultimate sadness. "We have had about 8,000 people come through but not all the cases have happy endings.

"We have had people who have passed away. We have been able to use Fisher House in sad times as well as happy. Patients can come out of hospital and stay here at the end of their life surrounded by family and friends rather than being in a hospital bed.

"Likewise we have also seen amazing things where people have been evacuated from the battlefield. You look at their before pictures and you wonder how on earth that person survived. Not only did they survive but they got married and had kids as well – you get some really happy stories and some long connections."

Those connections have also extended to caring for patients from overseas injured in conflicts involving UK servicemen and women.

"We have had 13 different nationalities that have stayed at Fisher House. During the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts we had lots of different nationalities come back here, and we have had people from Ukraine."

Hammond stresses that Fisher House is a "completely charity-run project" with no money from the NHS or the Ministry of Defence.

"They leased us the land for a peppercorn rent on the condition that we used no NHS resources, and that was fine. I would much rather this be under our control because we have ended up building a better facility here."

The bilateral relationship between the NHS and the charity can also have enormously valuable spin-off benefits, according to Hammond.

"We have examples within the radiotherapy department here where we have funded some multi-million-pound pieces of kit, thinking this would be a better way to treat patients. It is more focused, there is going to be less damage to the healthy tissue, and there is going to be better targeting of the tumour."

Fisher House can also offer a haven for injured or ill military personnel who are escaping abusive families.

Hammond says: "A lot of people join the military to get away from their families and possibly the last person they want to see when they wake up in hospital is their dad who used to beat them up when they were children. They really just want their mate who they grew up with.

"Usually people are told that the only person you can bring is your next of kin, your mum and dad, but not your mate – he can't have anywhere to stay.

"But these mates are all welcome through the doors at Fisher House. We say if you want your friend here, he can come and stay. You get that flexibility from being a charity rather than a government-funded organisation."

Hammond admits that even after 17 years he relishes the day-to-day challenges of running a £6.5 million a year revenue charity during uncertain economic times.

"This is the best job I have ever had, and I still wake up and look forward to coming in to work. Something different is going to happen every single day and that is what I thrive on.

"To some people this would be the worst job in the world, people who want to know exactly what they are doing and don't want any surprises. There is nothing wrong with those people – they are called accountants. They can be in the finance team."

It is scarcely surprising that Hammond faces the occasional curveball given the wide-ranging remit of his chief executive role.

"My role oversees the fundraising side of the organisation, the grant-making side, the investment and management of the funds that we have in our bank account. I also oversee the relationship that we have with the hospital in terms of understanding what role the charity can play to support and benefit patients and families at the QE."

And whilst Hammond clearly thrives on the surprise element of the job, he also admits to enjoying the feelgood factor associated with running a charity helping the vulnerable, injured and sick, some of whom have been saved from premature death.

"You are able to meet so many of those people and talk to them, people who are alive today because of machines that we have been able to purchase or research we have been able to fund.

"You meet families that are staying in Fisher House or in our civilian accommodation across the road and they say 'I don't know how I would have been able to be with my son or my daughter whilst I am being treated without your help'."

In Hammond's eyes, that crucial help at Fisher House, provided through voluntary fundraising, exemplifies the critical difference between an NHS which is forever under strain through infinite patient demand and limited resources, and a willing charitable sector.

"In terms of the actual hospital we are very much the cherry on the icing on the top of the cake, which is exactly what a charity should be.

"A charity shouldn't be here to let the government off the hook. It is not here to replace government funding. It is here to go over and above – that is the phrase we use most. We are here to go over and above what the NHS can fund."

And whilst the University Hospitals Birmingham Charity can point to nearly £80 million raised during Hammond's time at the helm, the money will always find a grateful home.

"I have always been careful to make sure we are spending as much money as possible on our patients and our families. That is the reason we are here, not just to build up a sack of gold somewhere.

"This is a job which will never stop because there will always be things for the charity to do."

Keeping ahead of the curve

UK accounting standards are changing but, asks VICTORIA KIDDY of S&W, who cares?

The short answer is a lot of businesses.

The upcoming changes to FRS 102 (the primary UK accounting standard for companies that don't report under IFRS) are keeping accountants up and down the country busy. However, outside of the basements of big accounting firms, should UK businesses also be concerned?

FRS 102 was first introduced in 2013, with a view to bringing UK accounting standards into the 21st century and taking steps towards convergence with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) as it stood at the time. Since that point, IFRS have changed significantly with a new leasing standard and a new revenue standard, meaning the gap had widened again as FRS 102 remained the same.

That is now all set to change with FRS 102 aligning with those updates in IFRS around revenue recognition and leases.

Without going too far into the technicalities, the overall impact of the change is to bring the leases held by a company onto the balance sheet as a lease asset and a lease liability. Conversely, moving the rental charge from operating expenses to depreciation and interest – resulting in an increase to EBITDA.

The impact of the revenue changes is a more prescriptive approach and a single model for recognition, meaning whilst under current FRS 102 companies needed to develop their own revenue recognition policy to deal with gaps in current requirements. This will no longer be permitted and there will be a more uniform approach to revenue accounting.

For the accountants, this means updating accounting policies, reviewing revenue contracts and lease agreements to calculate the adjustments required to the reported numbers and disclosing them accordingly – lots of work. In some cases, finding all the lease agreements will be half the battle.

REASONS THE LIFE SCIENCES ECOSYSTEM SHOULD CARE

Bonuses and share schemes

Typically, these are based on revenue and profit based metrics. One thing is for sure, from the upcoming FRS 102 changes, those numbers are going to change. Without careful planning it can result in unintended consequences – would you want employees to hit the stretch bonus target purely because you have taken all your rent costs out of your EBITDA.

Would you want your share-based payments to fully vest, purely because the accounting standard now requires you to recognise the revenue all upfront, despite no change in the total contract value?

Covenants

In a climate where equity investment is harder to come by, an increasing number of life sciences companies are reliant on debt financing. These loans often include covenants such as earnings cover, interest cover, net debt and more. The changes in lease accounting will bring more liabilities onto the balance sheet, increase the interest expense in the accounts and increase the EBITDA, but shouldn't change the cash paid for your leases.

Would you want the company to have their funding withdrawn due to a covenant breach caused by these accounting changes, despite the viability of the business being the same? Would you want the interest payments to increase because the business is carrying more debt?

Equity funding/exits

Despite the current economic environment, some life sciences businesses continue to receive equity funding and founders/investors look for exit opportunities. Valuing a business is beyond the scope of this article, but it can be based on actual or forecast revenue multiples and EBITDA multiples.

The changes to the lease accounting and revenue recognition requirements mean these numbers will change, but has the underlying value of the business really changed? Similarly, forecasts are often a key part of establishing the value of a life sciences business. However, without having historic actual data on a like for like basis, will there be more subject to challenges and negotiations of the overall price?

Tax and cash

Accounting standards shouldn't impact the level of cash in the business, however when it comes to paying more tax, people should take notice. At a simple level, changing your revenue recognition profile can change the profits in any given year which will change the tax payment for that year. This can create a cash flow issue if revenue is now recognised significantly before cash received leading to a temporary dry tax charge.

The life sciences sector is heavily dependent on the various HMRC reliefs such as R&D tax relief – to help fund R&D activity but, in many cases, to also provide the cash runway necessary for the business to survive. Changes in the accounting result can significantly reduce this benefit. For example, if the business moves from a loss to a profit, then the headline rate of R&D relief almost halves. Ultimately, this could be the difference between an early-stage biotech surviving and running out of cash.

In summary, convergence with IFRS and keeping the accounting standards current is an important part of maintaining the robustness of the UK business landscape. However, understanding the impact of this goes above and beyond technical accounting, therefore even if we don't want to, more of us will need to care.

*S&W are one of the top 10 accounting firms in the UK. In addition to our FRS 102 specialists within accounting advisory, we also have professionals across the UK and beyond that can help businesses with the implementation of these changes, as well as audit, tax and other advisory and business outsourcing services. Victoria Kiddy is an audit director at professional services firm S&W and specialises in advising life sciences companies including pre-clinical, clinical and established pharma businesses as well as clinical research organisations.

To find out more email Victoria.kiddy@swgroup.com

Aston University project awarded grant

A project at Aston University to extract proteins from cell membranes for better drug discovery and testing has won a Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council Network grant of £345,000.

BBSRC gives Network grants to establish and support a new collaborative research network.

The IMPALA-NET (Integral Membrane Proteins And Lipid Assemblies NETwork UK) project will be led by Dr Alice Rothnie, a reader at Aston University School of Biosciences. The network includes researchers at Kings College London, Imperial College, Diamond Light Source, the University of Birmingham and the University of Leeds. IMPALA-NET is associated with the Aston Institute for Membrane Excellence, a multidisciplinary research institute combining membrane protein biochemistry and polymer science.

The researchers say that their research could lead to much more efficient and accurate drug discovery programmes and the development of new medicines to treat all kinds of diseases and conditions, such as cancer, inflammatory conditions, cardiovascular disease, genetic diseases and diabetes, as well as for pain relief and novel antimicrobials.

With a blockbuster drug potentially worth billions of pounds, IMPALA-NET's research, as well as improving the health and lives of millions of people, could have significant benefit for UK businesses and the UK economy. It will also develop the next generation of researchers in the field.

Proteins on the surfaces of cell membranes have many functions, including importing nutrients and cell communication. Around half of all drugs worldwide target cell membrane proteins.

To understand how these membrane proteins work or to identify and test potential drugs and their actions on a membrane protein, it is necessary to separate them from the cell membrane, which is a fatty lipid bilayer. Conventionally, this has been done with detergents, but while detergents successfully remove the proteins, they also destroy the surrounding lipids, which are important for the proteins' structure and function.

Dr Rothnie said: "We are aiming to bridge the gap between academia and industry by determining precise industry needs and co-creating standardised, industrially reproducible approaches to PLPs, as well as retain expertise and continuity within the research community by providing career development opportunities to early career researchers. Achieving these objectives would pave the way for PLPs to be routinely used within both academia and industry.

Dr Alice Rothnie

"I'm excited about establishing this network and bringing together researchers across the UK to share findings so that we can start to fully exploit the potential of polymer lipid particles for membrane protein studies.

"Success stories are well published, but what often isn't shared are the things that don't work, so creating a forum where people can share and work together to overcome the challenges should provide a way to really progress the research."

Trials to assess recurrence of bladder cancer announced

Early cancer testing company Nonacus has announced two West Midlands-based trials to assess a new way of monitoring the recurrence of bladder cancer, using a novel test developed in collaboration with University of Birmingham researchers.

Called Galeas Bladder, the test was developed while the company incubated at the university's bio-incubator, the BioHub Birmingham, and a previous Cancer Research UK-funded study has already shown the it can accurately and consistently detect the presence of bladder cancer from a urine sample.

The at-home urine test uses highly sensitive liquid biopsy technology developed by Nonacus in conjunction with a panel of biomarkers developed by researchers from the university's Bladder Cancer Research Centre.

These trials are the culmination of eight years of collaborative research and development between the University of Birmingham and Nonacus.

Tony Hickson, chief business officer at Cancer Research UK, said: "Having Nonacus on board to help transform promising findings in the lab into a new non-invasive test to diagnosis bladder cancer is a testament to how commercial collaborations have the potential to transform the lives of patients.

"We are looking forward to seeing the next steps as the test is developed and rolled out to the UK and beyond."

Launch event for health-tech start-up

Health-tech start-up quietnote, which explores the relationship between mindfulness and music, is holding a launch party at The Exchange in Birmingham on October 2.

Guests will have the chance to hear directly from the research team, experience live music demonstrations, and network with healthcare professionals, local businesses and industry leaders.

The results of the firm's clinical study will also be revealed which are expected to highlight the massive benefits of the relationship between mindfulness and music.

Quietnote founde Will Crawford said: "When we first set out to explore the relationship between mindfulness and music, it was a mission fuelled by passion and purpose.

"That mission is now officially scientifically backed, thanks to our groundbreaking clinical trial completed in collaboration with the University of Birmingham and funded by Innovate UK."

Mr Crawford, a former musician, founded quietnote in 2021 during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

While training as a classical guitarist at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Mr Crawford pivoted his final year dissertation research project into a business that would combine music with mindfulness with the aim of improving mental health outcomes for individuals and organisations.

In 2024 quietnote won the Creative Catalyst Funding Grant of £50,000. This allowed them to test and validate their model through a robust clinical trial.

The success of that trial now sets the stage for the company's next phase: scaling operations and expanding its reach across the UK and beyond.

Mr Crawford said: "The trial results confirm what I've known and been practising for years, that music and mindfulness together can create profound change.

"It's more than just a nice thing to do, it's a scientifically validated pathway for better health.

"For policymakers, businesses, and anyone wanting to build a healthier and more resilient mind, the trial results show us that the future of healthcare is holistic, proactive and preventative.

"Over the last 10 years, mental health has never been so prominent an issue. We see a great deal of energy and time being placed into this subject, yet at the same time never has a form of healthcare become so politicised and shrouded in stigma as the mental health conversation.

"Mental illness is on the rise, especially within the younger generation, yet the conversation has never been so prominent. So clearly there's an issue between the conversation and the necessary action.

"Our approach is highly accessible and presents the opportunity for people to feel empowered with their health. From my experience, the majority of people's understanding of mindfulness is that it's 'a bit hippy' or 'not really for them'.

"This is often because they've fallen for the misconceptions and stereotypes being branded around by influencers and the marketing world.

"Mindfulness is not about being calm or relaxed, it's not really about nice slogans such as 'living in the moment' or being 'more mindful'. Mindfulness is a process, focused on awareness, understanding and change, leading to a healthier mind and lifestyle.

"However, If mindfulness is inaccessible, then why don't we approach it with something that is extremely accessible, like music? That was the question that led me on to founding quietnote ."

The study looked at four different interventions, each of which were completed within eight weeks with a total of 88 participants.

The full findings from the research study will be released at the event on October 2, but Mr Crawford said all interventions were found to deliver positive outcomes, demonstrating that each approach had a meaningful impact on participants' wellbeing.

He added: "This clinical trial is a huge milestone for us, but there is still more work and research to be done in this space.

"What the data shows however, is that we're pointing in the right direction and we're already seeing people changing their lives as a result of it. Our goal is to bring this approach to as many people as possible, starting here in Birmingham and reaching far beyond."

Mr Crawford said that the event on October 2 is free and open to anyone interested in quietnote's work, mental health innovation, the science behind mindfulness and music, and the future of wellbeing in the UK.

Edgbaston named as one of Top 50 Meeting Venues in Europe

Edgbaston Stadium, home to Warwickshire County Cricket Club, has been named as one of the Top 50 Meeting Venues in Europe by Venue Directory.

Ranked 49th out of 44,000 venues across the UK and Europe in the inaugural list of best meeting venues from Venue Directory, the Stadium is the only Midlands sporting venue to be announced as part of the list, recognising its exceptional venue credentials and partnership-first approach.

The ranking secures Edgbaston Stadium's coveted spot on the globally recognised 'Top 50 Meeting Venues' list on the Venue Directory platforms. Its inclusion reflects its commitment to delivering exceptional corporate event experiences and exceeding client expectations.

Angela Sanders, head of conference & event sales at Edgbaston, said, "This is fantastic recognition for Edgbaston Stadium and we're incredibly proud to be named as one of the Top 50 meeting venues in Europe. This is reflective of our strong-held commitment to consistently deliver the best guest experience, whether that be through meetings, events or conferences.

"As the home to Warwickshire Country Cricket Club, Bears and Birmingham Phoenix, our world-class sporting heritage alongside outstanding stadium facilities, allows us a unique position that attracts visitors and delegates from across the globe. As a Midlands-based business, we are proud to be a world-leading venue and hope this announcement helps to further showcase the brilliant strengths and spirit of our region."

Offering panoramic views of the iconic cricket pitch and Birmingham skyline, Edgbaston Stadium's range of inspiring meeting and conference spaces provide an unforgettable experience for delegates. With best-in-class facilities, specialist on-site support and award-winning catering services, the dedicated events team are on hand to bring any event to life.

Jason Gutteridge, director of sales and operations at Venue Directory, said: "Being included in Venue Directory's Top 50 Meeting Venues list is a notable recognition that showcases a venue's ability to engage with planners and provide exceptional service standards for MICE and corporate events.

"Attendee expectations are higher than ever, and event organisers, with limited resources, seek collaboration with venues that understand their client needs, offer competitive pricing, demonstrate responsiveness, and foster trusted relationships. Congratulations to Edgbaston Stadium on achieving this remarkable recognition."

Edgbaston Stadium offers a range of eleven event spaces available for conferences, banqueting, meetings and hospitality, catering for up to 800 delegates.

Spaces include the newly-launched, 14,800sqm Edgbaston Plaza – one of the largest outdoor event spaces in Birmingham – which offers more space than both Centenary Square and Victoria Square in the city centre. For summer events, delegates can also choose Skyline, a brand-new, contemporary roof-top terrace for corporate entertainment and networking.

For more information about Edgbaston Events, please visit edgbaston.com/events

edgbaston

Five minutes with...

Vicky Gosling OBE

Chair, Invictus Games 2027. Many Invictus athletes have received treatment and recovery support through Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Fisher House.

In one sentence, what does your role involve?
I am responsible for providing strategic oversight, supporting and challenging the executive team, and acting as a visible ambassador for the games and our mission.
And perhaps tell us a little about the Invictus Games
It is an international adaptive sporting event that showcases the power of sport in the recovery process for wounded, injured and sick servicemen and women. Founded by Prince Harry in 2014, the games celebrate the resilience and determination of our armed forces and their families, using sport as a catalyst for healing, purpose and renewed confidence.

There have been seven editions of the games, including the first Winter Invictus Games which was held in Vancouver last year.

We are incredibly excited to be bringing them to Birmingham in 2027. This city really knows how to deliver big moments with heart and purpose, and with such strong ties to the armed forces and the amazing work of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, there is already a deep sense of connection to the games' mission.

What makes it even more special is the NEC Campus, where everything will come together in one accessible, welcoming space, from the sport and accommodation to community events and entertainment. It's going to be something truly powerful – and I honestly believe Birmingham will deliver the most inclusive and impactful Invictus Games yet.
How long have you been in your current job?
I was appointed chair in December 2024 but have been involved with the games since their inception. It is something that has always been close to my heart and I am honoured to be bringing it back to the UK 11 years after we started.
Please give a summary of your professional career to date
I spent 21 years in the Royal Air Force, rising to group captain and have been awarded both an MBE and an OBE for my service.

After leaving the military, I became a founding leader of the Invictus Games, serving as military executive lead for the 2014 London games and later as CEO of the 2016 Orlando games.

I am currently CEO of GB Snowsport and chair of GB Surfing, I sit on the British Olympic Association board and the Aintree Racecourse committee, and I previously chaired the Rugby Centurions.
Did further/higher education set you up well for your particular vocation?
I studied languages and business at university and have a masters in strategic HR and a masters in strategic defence. I think my combination of academia and military has set me up well.
How is your job impacted by uncertainties in the economy?
Turbulence in the wider economy inevitably presents challenges for an event of this nature, particularly one so reliant on securing commercial revenue and strategic partnerships to fund the games.
What's your view of artificial intelligence – an opportunity, threat, or bit of both?
I see it as a bit of both – an opportunity and a challenge. AI holds exciting potential to enhance how we plan, deliver, and personalise experiences around the games, from optimising logistics to improving accessibility and engagement for veterans and audiences alike.

However, we must remain vigilant to its risks, including data privacy, misinformation and the unintended consequences of automation. For an event grounded in human resilience and recovery, technology must always serve to support, not replace the human spirit at the heart of the Invictus Games.
How do you hope your colleagues would describe you?
Dynamic, empathetic and fair.
Highlights of your career so far?
Being twice honoured by the Queen.
Being a founding executive of the Invictus Games in London and subsequently serving CEO in Orlando.

Leading the transformation of British snowsport achieving record-breaking results including over 80 World Cup podiums and 17 Crystal Globes by 2024/25. We have the winter Olympics in Italy early next year, and we are all excited about the opportunity that will bring to truly showcase GB as a snowsport nation.

We have medal contenders across a number of disciplines, and seeing all the incredible work the athletes and the whole team have been putting in over the last four years, in challenging circumstances, success there would be a hugely proud moment.
Any particular faux pas or embarrassing moments in your career you would prefer to forget?
In 2014 I walked into an Invictus Games meeting with Prince Harry after just feeding my newborn and without realising, I still had my feeding bra over the top of my shirt. I think he saw the funny side.
Pet hates?
Lack of integrity.
If you could go back and give your younger self some wise advice, what would it be?
I'd say always keep believing, embrace uncertainty because it's what builds resilience, stay open-minded and ready to pivot when life takes unexpected turns, value the small wins, and take time to celebrate the growth of your character as much as your achievements. Also seek out mentors from every sphere of life as their wisdom will help you see possibilities you might have missed on your own.
How do you relax away from work?
Family time and running. We are quite an active family so I enjoy watching the kids play golf and go rowing, as well as trying to get some time to myself to head out for a run.
Tell us something about you that most people probably wouldn't know.
I was a narrator in the critically acclaimed West End musical Girlfriends, which is set on an RAF bomber command base during World War II.
You can take one book, one film and one CD onto a desert island – what would they be?
The book would be Legacy by James Kerr, the film Love Actually, and the CD Elton John's Your Song.
Your five dream dinner party guests, dead or alive?
Michelle Obama, Roger Federer, Jennifer Aniston, Mary Berry and Winston Churchill
What would you choose to eat for your last supper?
Burrata salad.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