

SIP 2030 Skills Strategy: Getting Fit for the Future

Case Study Replimune: Apprenticeships - an innovative route to develop skills for biotech SMEs



Industry Sector:
Advanced Therapy Medicinal Products

About the Company

Replimune is pioneering a new generation of cancer treatments called oncolytic immunotherapies. These cleverly designed therapeutics combine multiple mechanisms of action, enhancing the ability of viruses to replicate in and kill cancer cells, and generating a powerful patient-specific, systemic anti-tumor immune response. Oncolytic immunotherapy is expected to enhance the effectiveness of immune checkpoint blockade therapy, and become the second cornerstone of immune-oncology approaches, moving beyond incremental improvement in cancer treatment to help more patients overcome their disease.

About the SIP

The Science Industry Partnership in collaboration with the Office for Life Sciences (OLS), BioIndustry Association (BIA) and the Association of the Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) is now undertaking a wide-ranging Research Strategy which will build a clear evidence base of the status of life science skills and future scenarios to 2030.

As part of this work, science employers aligned with this work are setting out their current approach to skills development and how they see this developing in the future. These case studies will be part of the 2030 Strategy narrative as it develops.

A structured programme for developing scientific talent within advanced therapies

It can be challenging to find suitable structured training opportunities within a small organisation, particularly for more junior staff. Apprenticeships offered Replimune a structured program designed with input from other industry stakeholders, giving staff valuable exposure to other companies within the Advanced Therapies Apprenticeship Community. This gives Replimune confidence that we are providing a high quality of training and helping staff obtain a qualification that demonstrates that they have transferable skills.





The first group of advanced therapy apprentices met face-to-face for the first time at the end of 2018 when they gathered at NHS Blood & Transplant Filton.

“Replimune is a rapidly growing organisation at the forefront of cancer immunotherapy. Apprenticeships offer an opportunity to help develop, recruit and train all levels of staff and to give them the tools to succeed in a rapidly changing industry. As the growth of Replimune accelerates, the Advanced Therapies Apprenticeship will have an increasing importance across all levels of our organisation, helping to recruit junior staff and provide them with transferable skills and high quality training, through to training more senior staff to help them progress in the organisation – without losing their day-to-day contribution to the growth of Replimune.”

Robert Coffin, CEO, Replimune

How important are apprenticeships to develop future managers and leaders, as well as to upskill?

Apprenticeships are incredibly important to an SME like Replimune as a way of bringing new scientific talent into the organisation and applying their learning directly on the job within our business. They are also important for upskilling existing members of staff into new roles such as senior leadership. The diversity of talent and learning styles is important for our values of innovation and collaboration in bringing a novel advanced therapy to patients.

How easy was it to take on apprentices?

Being part of the Advanced Therapies Apprenticeship Community (ATAC) made taking on an apprentice for the first time very easy for us as a business. The project team worked with Advanced Therapy Medicinal Product employers to identify the most appropriate apprenticeship standards to address particular skills gaps and find quality national training providers who could deliver to both levy and non-levy paying organisations. This also supported us with recruitment, benchmarking of roles and salaries and provided guidance on on-boarding and

training of our early career talent. The training providers for each apprenticeship were selected based on the quality of support they can give to a wide range of organisations, including SMEs, throughout the apprenticeship. The ATAC team provided the same level of guidance whether recruiting new apprentices or training existing members of staff and continue to support us on the apprenticeship journey.

Would you recommend this route?

As an innovative, small business we would recommend the apprenticeship route of bringing in new scientific talent as well as developing those more established in their careers. It is a great way to develop new talent with the specific skills you need as a business. We don't have access to a huge training and staff development function or an HR department that can support development of colleagues and so CPD is really self-driven. Apprenticeships are a key way to structure development of specialist skills, technical knowledge and professional behaviours needed for roles within our business.

About the Apprentices (standards used, job roles)

Currently we are using the Technician Scientist apprenticeship standard at Level 5 to bring new talent into our organisation. As well as the individual apprentices developing the specific skills on-the-job, our team are developing the supervisory, coaching and mentoring skills needed to bring talent through this route. Replimune is also using the Senior Leader apprenticeship to develop key talent into leadership roles to drive the business forward.

Business Benefits of recruiting apprentices

For an SME recruiting apprentices through this route is a great way for a business to grow its own talent. As a non-levy paying organization we only pay 5% of the cost of the training and assessment of the apprentice and the remaining 95% is funded, keeping the costs manageable. Also, working together with other Advanced Therapy companies means our apprentices are part of a cohort of learners from across similar organisations,

developing an immediate professional network and learning from each other. Our business is then able to leverage specialist learning with providers who would not be able to modify apprenticeship delivery for an individual organisation.

Does your organisation undertake CPD for existing staff?

Replimune is committed to providing ongoing training to allow staff to continue to grow; in a small rapidly growing organisation this is very focused on our current roles. Apprenticeships are one of a number of programmes in place to aid development at Replimune but they are unique in that they provide more exposure to other external organisations.

What the future holds

In the future we will be taking on new apprentices in key technical roles where we have identified a skills shortage and use existing apprenticeship standards to upskill our workforce in essential strategic roles such as regulatory, strategy and team leadership.