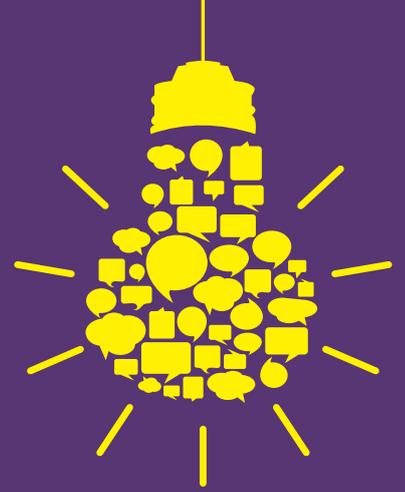


FAST-PATH

University College Dublin (UCD), OncoMark,
Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and PathXL
collaboration in FP7



Introduction

For both commercial organisations and academic-based research centres, participating in European funding programmes like FP7 can provide a wealth of benefits and prove to be very worthwhile. In this case study William Gallagher, Professor of Cancer Biology in UCD and the co-founder of the UCD spin-out company, OncoMark, along with Professor Peter Hamilton, who leads the Cancer Bioinformatics Research Group at QUB and is a founder of PathXL, will share their experiences of working on a FP7 project, worth almost €2million, and how cross-border collaboration can make the process easier and more successful.

About the project



www.fastpathproject.com

FAST-PATH is an FP7-funded project under the Marie Curie Industry-Academia Partnerships and Pathways (IAPP) stream. The four-year project was established in 2011 with the aim of finding more accurate tools and biomarkers for prostate cancer. Professor William Gallagher explains: "The goal of FAST-PATH is to investigate the possibility of fast-tracking pathology via automated image analysis and high-performance computing and applying this to prostate cancer diagnostics.

"Through the various stages of the project, we are aiming to develop tools that will address some of the problems currently facing prostate cancer researchers and pathologists. Specifically, we will generate one of the most comprehensive prostate cancer digital image libraries in the world and develop software that will enable pathologists to efficiently and effectively diagnose prostate cancer. We will also seek to identify and validate new biomarkers of prostate cancer which will impact the treatment regime for patients, improving patient outcome and survival."

Acronym	FAST-PATH
Start	Nov 2011
End	Ongoing
EU Grant Aid	€2million

Project Co-ordinator

Professor William Gallagher, UCD and
Chief Scientific Officer, OncoMark

Project Partners

Academic
University College Dublin (UCD)
Queen's University Belfast (QUB)
Lund University, Sweden
Uppsala University, Sweden
Industrial
OncoMark, Dublin
PathXL, Belfast

Why engage in collaborative EU R&D and innovation projects?

Professor Gallagher, who initiated the FAST-PATH project, is a keen supporter and subscriber to European funding streams with experience dating back to FP5.

He explains: "European funding streams

offer companies and institutions at the very top of their game excellent exposure to the transfer of knowledge and skills, which ultimately benefits everyone."

For Professor Peter Hamilton, founder of PathXL, FAST-PATH was his first experience of European funding. He comments: "While the Marie Curie stream is challenging as it involves a secondment of staff out of the company and new

people into the company for relatively short periods, we have found involvement in the project very beneficial.

"The European money has helped us to make this project a reality and we are moving ahead on schedule."

Professor William Gallagher



“R&D can be high-risk and collaboration with complementary interests through a EU-funded consortium project can offset some of this risk.”

Benefits of North South collaboration in FP7

Professor Gallagher believes there is a key benefit to having a North South element in a consortium. He explains: “When progressing funding from a European stream, such as FP7 or indeed the current Horizon 2020 schemes, working with a partner across the border can offer many advantages.

“From the outset we had very clear strategic goals of translating the funded R&D into product commercialisation.”
Professor Hamilton

“The exchange of staff between bodies via secondments in both jurisdictions is also an important element in our collaboration. It can be difficult if a partner is in another, perhaps far-reaching, European country as some specialists may be reluctant to uproot and relocate for a significant period of time. It is a much less daunting prospect to move to another part of the same island and the proximity of those involved in FAST-PATH across Ireland simplifies this element for us.”

“The simplicity and ease of working within the one island really does make it easier to have face-to face-meetings with direct communication.”
Professor William Gallagher

Professor Peter Hamilton, added: “We found the North South element in the

collaboration particularly advantageous as we had already worked with our southern partners establishing strong relationships. We are closely aligned in how we work and the transfer of knowledge and skills between us is simpler to manage as there are no language barriers.”

“Involvement in European projects can really help to open up future prospects for a business. It will clearly demonstrate that you ‘play at a certain level’ and that you have ‘proved your metal’ in the marketplace which, in turn, can offer new opportunities beyond the lifespan of the project. The networks and contacts that you will build across Europe and the kudos involvement will bring can build solid foundations for your future prospects.”
Professor William Gallagher

Project progress

FAST-PATH has reached a critical stage and has already offered new product opportunities for both SMEs, OncoMark and PathXL, in terms of automated image analysis tools involved in the recognition of tumour cells and biomarker quantitation.

Professor Gallagher explains: “During the framework of FAST-PATH, PathXL has been able to develop and commercialise a new automatic tool for discriminating between tumour and non-tumour regions, termed TissueMark, which is now being applied across various tumour types.

“OncoMark has also further adapted and refined its proprietary automated image analysis tool, IHC-MARK, for reading out protein levels expressed in tumour tissue specimens which can help to predict

prognostic outcomes without the need for manual observation.

“European funding is an important source of funding that businesses should explore as a means to progress innovative solutions and as a means of differentiating themselves from the competition.”
Professor Hamilton

*“Both of these new product development opportunities were direct results of the FAST-PATH project funding as layers of both technologies have been applied to the computer-based approach which we are collaboratively progressing.
“We are on schedule with FAST-PATH and the next stages are to progress these new technologies closer to clinical implementation.”*

How can InterTradelreland help?

InterTradelreland is helping companies and researchers from Ireland and Northern Ireland to collaborate in Horizon 2020. Professor Gallagher explains: “I would strongly advise companies and organisations wishing to take advantage of this collaborative funding to approach professional support bodies, such as InterTradelreland.

“They have a wide overview of networks and contacts who are at the top of their game and they can assist with consortium building and putting together a strong, watertight proposal.

“Collaboration within the island and beyond is an opportunity for SMEs to excel through innovation and be the “best in the world” in their areas of business.”

