

Bio-electronics collaboration with Japan brings highly skilled jobs to North East England

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The North East's leading nanotechnology company today announced a collaboration with a leading Japanese company which will bring new investment and jobs to the region.

OJ-Bio is a joint venture between Newcastle based Orla Protein Technologies Ltd and leading Japanese electronics company Japan Radio Co. Ltd (JRC).

The new venture will see a collaboration of biotechnology and electronic manufacturing expertise, to develop and market breakthrough technologies in hand-held diagnostic equipment.

Orla and JRC have been working together since November 2007 to develop a range of handheld wireless diagnostic devices, and last month cut the ribbon in Tokyo, Japan on the establishment of a joint venture to manufacture, promote and sell these devices across the world.

OJ-Bio will be based at Newcastle's Centre for Life. Capital Sharing for Orla is 80% and JRC 20%, and the company is expected to create a number of highly skilled jobs from the outset.

Dale Athey, Chief Executive Officer, Orla Protein Technologies Ltd, said: "The devices may be made in Japan but we will be designing and making the bio components in the North East and performing all our research and development here too. We plan to sell the devices worldwide and keep Orla moving forward, developing our technology and product platform in the North East.

"This sort of device will open up new opportunities in the £10bn diagnostics marketplace. It's a multi-million pound opportunity and will bring significant returns to Orla, its stakeholders and the North East economy."

The ground-breaking technology will see new diagnostic devices used by doctors and paramedics to identify, diagnose and monitor patients at the point of care.

The technology will allow rapid test results for viruses and bacteria, for example infectious diseases such as flu, bacterial infections such as 'super-bug' MRSA and protein markers of conditions such as heart attacks.

It's thought the devices could revolutionise patient testing as it allows rapid sensitive detection at the point of care where there is no need for complicated equipment and wireless transmission can send results instantly to a network.

Example uses could include testing a person for a virus in the African wilderness and sending the results back to a hospital in a main city, or testing for Foot & Mouth Disease

in a field in Northumberland with the results being sent straight back to DEFRA for co-ordinated result control.

One North East has backed the business with financial and business support to allow the company to get to this stage.

One North East Chairman Margaret Fay said: "The launch of OJ-Bio is a demonstration of how North East companies are developing world-leading technologies in areas like Healthcare and Life Sciences.

"It's also rewarding to know that One North East has been able to support Orla Protein's investment in R&D and help them build relationships overseas with partners like Japan Radio Co, Ltd. to help bring this project to fruition."

Dale added: "With their expertise in electronics manufacturing, Japanese companies were an obvious target and for around four years we have been aiming for a partnership to develop our diagnostic devices.

"We used the resources of One North East's Investment and Aftercare team from day one and I can safely say that this collaboration would not have happened if it hadn't been for the agency. We have established a network and business links in Japan thanks to One North East and now we have our own agent in the country.

"We are excited about developing this product with Japan Radio Company and continue to work on new technologies that could be brought to the commercial marketplace and seek new opportunities through our trade links in Japan."

Orla's development has also been supported by a series of investments from NEL Capital, the venture capital division of regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers Ltd.

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Notes to editors

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About Orla Protein Technologies Ltd

Orla Protein Technologies Ltd is a nano-biotechnology company focused on developing high performance biosurfaces which have applications in cell culture, Life Science tools and Reagents, and Diagnostics. The core technology was developed by Professor Jeremy Lakey, Professor of Structural Biochemistry at Newcastle University. Orla was founded in 2002 and received seed investment from NEL Fund Managers Ltd in 2003. For more information see www.orlaproteins.com