

Edinburgh Technopole Benchmark Animal Health

**Amanda Vivier****Agnieszka Jagiello-Johnstone**

Amanda Vivier, Office Manager, and Agnieszka Jagiello-Johnstone, Marketing Manager, introduce us to Benchmark Animal Health and tell us why they love working at Edinburgh Technopole.

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First, please tell us all about Benchmark Animal Health.

Amanda: We are part of a wider group called Benchmark Holdings, which is an international company employing 1,000 people worldwide, focused on the health and welfare of animals as part of a thriving and sustainable food chain. We have four major global organisations, focusing on animal feed, genetics, animal health and what we call knowledge services, which is essentially consulting and publishing, mainly in the areas of agriculture and aquaculture. All our organisations have the same shared strategy and philosophy based on the three Es of economics, efficiency and environment.

Where does your company's strong ethos come from?

Amanda: The company started back in 2000 as the brainchild of Malcolm Pye, Roland Bonney and Ruth Layton with the three Es at its heart. The population is growing at such a rate, and the challenge for the food industry globally is to keep pace with that growth, but in a sustainable and humane way. This underlying goal is very important to Benchmark; our mission is to help to feed humankind in the best possible way, and we are working closely with several major corporations to try to make the whole food chain more sustainable.

Where are the most significant strides being made in this regard?

Agnieszka: We are hearing more and more about aquaculture, largely because it's the most efficient way of producing food and, as an industry, it has experienced a global boom in the last 20 years. However, across the board in aquaculture and agriculture – and especially in Europe – there is a greater understanding now that prevention of disease in food sources is key, and far better than reaction once a disease has taken hold. Our biosecurity team works with fish farmers on improving the general health and well-being of their stocks. There is a lot of work to be done, and the health management practices vary from farm to farm and region to region, but there is a growing awareness of how important these issues are.



Are the farmers themselves receptive to a change in approach?

Agnieszka: They are; the culture is changing. The health authorities and governments have been campaigning for years to reduce the use of antibiotics in farms. I cannot stress it enough – prevention is far better than reaction. The farming community is far more open and willing to get involved with companies like ourselves, who can help with these issues. To some extent, this is also being driven by consumers who are looking for fresh food produced in a sustainable way. For fish farmers, this means not just keeping fish alive, but producing fish that have been happy and healthy throughout their lives.

And is the focus of Benchmark Animal Health to help farmers prevent diseases?

Amanda: Yes, very much so. Benchmark Animal Health has subdivisions based in 23 different countries and 200 vets focused on aquaculture, which is quite unique globally. A significant part of our work is R&D, looking at new trends in the market, emerging diseases, more efficient processes, and easier ways to achieve common goals. Much of this relies on the constant feedback and interactions we have with our customers, and our Edinburgh site serves as a hub for our communication channels.

So, you moved to the Edinburgh Technopole site in 2015; why did you choose this location?

Agnieszka: We created the Edinburgh facility in order to support Scottish salmon producers and the wider aquaculture industry, as well as to be in proximity to our Fish Vet Group in Inverness and Marine Research Facility in Ardtoe. It was also important for us to be part of the Scottish scientific scene; our product development team has close ties with the wealth of scientific expertise available locally, from the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies and the Roslin Institute to the University of Edinburgh and Heriot Watt University, as well as the University of Stirling, which is less than an hour away. And then, of course, it just so happens that it's also a beautiful place to work!

And is that an important aspect of working life for you?

Agnieszka: It is, the views from our windows are amazing. We are surrounded by mature parkland and can see the beautiful Pentland Hills. A few of us run during lunch breaks; other companies here have even set up running groups. When you're working on something challenging or have back-to-back meetings and need a break, all you need to do is literally step outside the door and you find yourself in stunning countryside. This location is perfect for improving a team's motivation, creativity and productivity.

Amanda: The assistance we get from the Edinburgh Technopole team is also very good; from health and safety to environmental considerations and recycling, the support mechanisms are really geared around high tech, forward-thinking companies. We even have our dogs in the office – sometimes as many as eight at a time – and everyone gets on so well, dogs and colleagues alike. It's such a fantastic environment to work in, that it makes you want to come to work.



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To learn more about Benchmark Animal Health, visit www.benchmarkplc.com. To find out more about the facilities and opportunities at Edinburgh Technopole, visit www.edinburghtechnopole.co.uk

