

Construction begins on new multi-million gene therapy innovation centre

A groundbreaking event has been held to mark the start of construction work for a new gene therapy innovation centre, which is set to advance scientific discoveries and promising treatment options for many life-threatening diseases.

Building work on the University of Sheffield's Gene Therapy Innovation and Manufacturing Centre (GTIMC) is now underway by Robertson Construction Group on site at the University's Innovation District. The new centre will be close to existing translational research facilities and will contribute to an ongoing programme of regional investment and regeneration.

The GTIMC is one of three pioneering hubs in a new £18 million network funded by LifeArc and the Medical Research Council (MRC), with support from the Biotechnology Sciences Research Council (BBSRC).

Professor Mimoun Azzouz, Director of the GTIMC and Chair of Translational Neuroscience at the University of Sheffield, said: "Sheffield is internationally renowned for its world-class neurodegenerative research. This centre will help to accelerate this revolutionary research into promising and innovative treatment options for many rare diseases which currently have no cure.

"Sheffield has emerged as one of the leading players in cell and gene therapy and this national network of partners, facilities and training programmes will allow us to keep pace with translational discoveries for new and potentially life changing treatments.

"This is an exciting milestone for revolutionary gene therapeutic advances not only for Sheffield and South Yorkshire, but also for the UK."

Gene therapy is a promising treatment option for more than 7,000 rare diseases that currently have no cure. It aims to treat these conditions by engineering another gene to replace, silence or manipulate the faulty one.

The state-of-the-art centre will bring together academic institutions, NHS trusts, non-profit and industry partners across the north of England, Midlands and Wales enabling academic-led clinical trials of novel gene therapies. The GTIMC will deliver essential translational and regulatory support alongside extensive training and skills programmes to enable upskilling and address shortage of skills in Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) manufacturing.

Dan Jarvis, Mayor of South Yorkshire, said:

“This is outstanding news for South Yorkshire and the North of England. It places our region right at the heart of world-class research and innovation into gene therapy. The vital research carried out here will provide hope for thousands of people with devastating genetic diseases.

“The fact that South Yorkshire was chosen is very significant – this will build on our region’s expertise in health and well-being research. The centre will be a beacon of medical innovation, will create valuable highly-skilled jobs and boost economic growth.”

Alongside the national network funding from LifeArc, the MRC and BBSRC, as well as support from the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, the GTIMC was made possible thanks to a £3 million donation from The Law Family Charitable Foundation, established by Andrew Law and his wife Zoë. This funding was part of a record £5.85 million donation from the University of Sheffield alumnus, which will also see the launch of a new student support programme.

Andrew Law, who is Chairman and CEO of Caxton Associates, said: “The University of Sheffield is rapidly developing a global reputation in gene therapy. The new Gene Therapy Innovation and Manufacturing Centre will drive innovation and world-class research, while presenting a real opportunity to catalyse the creation of new start-up companies to facilitate commercialisation in the North.

“This investment will enhance vital partnerships with biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies to help accelerate gene therapy programmes and clinical trials, at the same time as supporting regional economic growth and job creation.”

Construction on the GTIMC is due to complete in summer 2022.

Paul Turner, Regional Managing Director, Robertson Construction Yorkshire and East Midlands, said: “We are delighted to have been selected as the contractor of choice for this design and build project for University of Sheffield. This is our second project for the University, and we look forward to continuing our positive relationship to see the delivery of GTIMC which will further enhance the University’s reputation in gene therapy and support employment opportunities in this important field.”

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[Photo](#)

Left to right: Paul Turner, Robertson Yorkshire & East Midlands Managing Director, Prof Sue Hartley, University of Sheffield Vice-President for Research, Dan Jarvis, Mayor of South Yorkshire, and Prof Mimoun Azzouz, University of Sheffield GTIMC Hub Director.

About the Innovation Hubs for Gene Therapies

The network of Innovation Hubs for Gene Therapies aims to accelerate academic-led development of novel gene therapies throughout the UK. Set up in 2021 with £18m in funding from the independent research charity LifeArc, the Medical Research Council (MRC), and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the hubs will operate as a coordinated network, sharing technical skills and resources.

Three new dedicated facilities have been created at King's College London, NHS Blood and Transplant in Bristol, and the University of Sheffield.

The Hubs will enable academic researchers to progress novel gene therapy research into clinical trials, offering access to GMP (good manufacturing practice) facilities for clinical trials materials, alongside essential translational support and regulatory advice.

The University of Sheffield

With almost 29,000 of the brightest students from over 140 countries, learning alongside over 1,200 of the best academics from across the globe, the University of Sheffield is one of the world's leading universities.

A member of the UK's prestigious Russell Group of leading research-led institutions, Sheffield offers world-class teaching and research excellence across a wide range of disciplines.

Unified by the power of discovery and understanding, staff and students at the university are committed to finding new ways to transform the world we live in.

Sheffield is the only university to feature in The Sunday Times 100 Best Not-For-Profit Organisations to Work For 2018 and for the last eight years has been ranked in the top five UK universities for Student Satisfaction by Times Higher Education.

Sheffield has six Nobel Prize winners among former staff and students and its alumni go on to hold positions of great responsibility and influence all over the world, making significant contributions in their chosen fields.

Global research partners and clients include Boeing, Rolls-Royce, Unilever, AstraZeneca, GlaxoSmithKline, Siemens and Airbus, as well as many UK and overseas government agencies and charitable foundations.