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Located at the northern end of the Baltic Sea, the university town of Umeå has, with its 121 000 inhabitants, more than tripled its population since the mid-sixties and is one of Sweden's youngest and fastest growing cities. The influx from near and far has turned Umeå into a cosmopolitan city with an atmosphere characterized by openness coupled with just the right amount of inquisitiveness. Umeå is expanding through startups, existing, growing companies as well as companies attracted to the region and its strategic benefits. This is highlighted by the fact that employment in private trade and industry has grown by more than 30% in the last 10 years and has, in terms of employees, overtaken the public sector.

The life sciences and ICT sectors are, both in terms of academia and businesses, fast growing sectors in this developing town. And with everything close at hand; including northern Sweden's great distances covered by the health care system, Umeå also holds reputable networks and research for mobile medicine and e-health that are supported by the County Council of Västerbotten and Umeå University.

Umeå offers world-class art, drama, films, industries, and music. Its inhabitants and visitors can still enjoy the aftermath of Umeå being the European Capital of Culture 2014. Also worth mentioning is the internationally highly ranked Institute of Design, as a part of the dynamic interplay between academia and industry.

The Umeå region, with its cutting-edge research, has become an exceptionally productive source of life science companies, many of which are international leaders within their fields. Being home to both UCMR – Umeå Center for Microbial Research with research in infection and pathogenicity and MIMS – Laboratory for Molecular Infection Medicine, the Swedish node of the Nordic EMBL Partnership for Molecular Medicine, the Biotech Umeå cluster is well recognized as excelling in infectious disease and new antibiotics research,

and has leveraged this expertise to generate several exciting new companies active in developing anti-infectives with novel modes of action.

Other areas in which the Umeå cluster excels include medtech and diagnostics, plant and forest biotechnology at Umeå Plant Science Centre, metabolic diseases and neurodegenerative diseases.

Located across the road from each other on the Umeå University campus we find Biotech Umeå, the cluster initiative headed by Kurt Strömgren, Uminova Innovation with CEO Nils-Olof Forsgren, and Umeå Biotech Incubator with CEO Jennie Ekbeck. They are all part of a well-oiled and innovative tech transfer system that supports the process of taking an idea from the lab bench to marketable, money-making product and growing companies.

Biotech Umeå is a cluster initiative created in order to support growth of the biotech and medical technology industry in the Umeå region. Biotech Umeå's goals are threefold:

- to promote the cluster in order to create growth in existing companies
- to attract both foreign and national interest and finance and
- the creation of new ventures

A strong and systematic interplay of life science research and commerce is at the heart of the life science growth process in Umeå. The cluster is now home to over 80 life science companies, an increase of about 250 % since 2005, and about 3000 people are employed in life science research and companies. The companies present in the cluster span all stages of size and maturity – from newly founded fledgling companies right through to major international players. The spread is wide, but it is encouraging to see new projects entering the “research pipeline” and others moving towards greater maturity. Since the cluster is home to many young companies with exiting

business concepts, it offers opportunities for people with life science business competence to have an impact, and interesting prospects for investors.

With the aims to refine and make better use of the key competences at Umeå University, a new innovation and tech transfer strategy came about in 2003-2004. As a result innovations and business concepts are subdivided based on sectors and on the focus of the organization, making it possible to support the novel entrepreneurs with the right competence and proximity to other likeminded individuals. As a result the business incubator Uminova Innovation support medtech concepts, ICT, as well other businesses of innovations and UBI support business concepts in pharmaceuticals and in vitro diagnostics. In the end of 2013 Uminova Innovation and UBI were joined by Uminova eXpression, an incubator supporting creative enterprises in the cultural, artistic and creative industries.

This is a strategy that has worked out well in real life, and not only on paper. Uminova Innovation and UBI were two of the selected incubators to receive money from VINNOVA's excellence program, and both are top ranked business incubators in Sweden within their fields.

Both Jennie Ekbeck and Nils-Olof Forsgren stress how important it is that UBI and Uminova Innovation become involved early enough in a business project to make sure that intellectual property is secured before results are published. “There are several sources of innovation and business ideas here in Umeå” says Kurt Strömgren.

“On the one hand, we have Umeå University and the University Hospital, but we also have branches of the Swedish Agricultural University and the Swedish Defence Research Agency, which are additional sources of innovation and ideas”. Employees in most of these government owned institutions fall under the Swedish

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“Teacher's Exemption” principle allowing inventors to own their own intellectual property, rather than it belonging the organization where they work. This principle fosters interest in scientists to think about how their research can be used outside academia, and make efforts to commercialize their findings. The teacher's exemption rule is generally not applied to innovations originating from hospitals in Sweden, since they are owned by the regional government, but in the County Council of Västerbotten a pioneering decision was made in 2010, to apply this exemption principle to innovations and ideas originating from the hospital research environment as well.

Uminova Innovation and UBI have between themselves evaluated more than 700 life science business ideas since 2005, and in that time they have also supported the creation of over 50 exciting life science companies.

Support from Uminova Innovation and UBI means, among other things, that the companies and projects get access to project management and business development professionals, databases, experienced consultants, a network of suppliers and business contacts, and at UBI the all-important infrastructure of lab facilities.

“UBI works with early stage business concepts. Our focus is to help companies validate and develop their concepts, to start building attractive companies for investors or industrial partners” explains Jennie Ekbeck.

Meanwhile, research at the university is attracting healthy levels of funding which can only serve to increase the number of new innovations, projects and companies that will turn to UBI and Uminova Innovation for support and competence in the future, and give the cluster an even broader platform of growing and sustainable life science companies and technologies.