Backing young Britain

Pfizer is supporting a government initiative that seeks to provide opportunities for young people to build their knowledge and skills

US President Franklin D Roosevelt is famed for saying "We cannot always build the future for our youth but we can build our youth for the future." Even some 80 years on, governments still recognise the need to invest in its young people and to develop programmes to encourage them to look to the future.

Launched with much aplomb by the UK government last year, the Backing Young Britain scheme is just such a programme. Developed to bring a multitude of businesses, public sector organisations and the voluntary sector together to provide more opportunities for young people, it has seen over 1,000 companies play their part to engage and employ young people across the country.

As well as a mentoring network, job clubs and one-to-one support in job centres, when the campaign was launched last year the government pledged £40 million to fund over 200,000 additional internships to allow both graduates and non graduates to get higher-quality work experience.

Although Pfizer is one of the many organisations across the UK that have given their support for the initiative, it has long had an active programme of its own to attract younger talent to become a new generation of scientists.

Announcing the company's support for the scheme, Dr David Roblin, Head of Research and Site Director, said: "Pfizer is committed to investing in Britain's young talent and is delighted to support Backing Young Britain. Since 2006, we have created nearly 600 employment opportunities for students and graduates at Pfizer in the UK. Today's young talent is the future of science tomorrow and we pledge to continue and expand our programmes for Britain's young people."

In fact, Pfizer's work to engage the younger generation in science starts at an early age and continually offers opportunities for students to sample the world of science. From Year Six, students to graduate-level students and beyond, Pfizer's programmes are designed to help teachers to engage and enthuse children in the field of science and to support students throughout their scientific studies.

"While most children's first experience of Pfizer will be at our Science Jamboree or with one of our

Link Scientists, our support for science education continues throughout their school life across all the disciplines," explains Public Affairs Manager Kevin Charles.

"For students who are thinking about taking chemistry GSCE, we run a special event to show them what a great choice it would be. Creating Chemistry Day was developed with the Royal Society of Chemistry and allows students to meet Pfizer scientists, to watch some amazing demonstrations and to take part in a host of really cool chemistry experiments run by staff from universities such as Sussex, Surrey, Reading, Oxford and Southampton," adds David Fox, Senior Director, Discovery Chemistry at Pfizer and the company's liaison with RSC.

Continuing this engagement Pfizer supports Biology Project Week, a week-long residential course held at Canterbury Christchurch University that is designed to give A Level students a deeper insight into the processes of scientific research and potential career opportunities. Students taking part work in pairs with a Pfizer supervisor on their own research project in the University's laboratories.

Pfizer also offers work experience placements for both GCSE students and A Level students, who are assigned a young mentor with whom they are more likely to develop a closer rapport and who can also demonstrate that scientists can be young and trendy at the same time.

Support in many ways

Once someone has decided on a career in the scientific industry, there are a number of ways that Pfizer continues to show its appreciation and support, be it in educational support, internships or apprenticeships.

"Naturally, being a pharmaceutical company the majority of emphasis is on science but we also look for young people who want to work in one of the many support function such as Information Technology, Human Resouces or communications. In fact, we regulary support several engineering apprenticeships," says Kevin.

For young people who want to get a qualification but do not want to attend university on a full time basis, Pfizer runs a Trainee Research Associate (TRA) Programme with Greenwich University. Under this, students from the local community can do a part time degree spread over five years whilst working at Pfizer.

Under this scheme, the trainee works at Pfizer for four days each week doing practical bench science and then spends one day per week studying for their degree. "It does mean the student has to do their coursework in their own time," says Kevin, "but we try to support them as much as possible giving them time off for study leave and exams. It is a great way for someone who is more practically minded to get their degree. It is also a great opportunity for them to get a degree without running up debts – I suppose you could say it is a learn as you earn approach."

As well as its TRA programme, Pfizer also offers experience opportunities for students who chose to do a more conventional university degree. To give them a taste of what a science-based career could hold for them and to help deepen their knowledge, as part of their degree Pfizer offers 12 month placements to university students in their third or fourth year.

Added confidence

Scientist Jenny Middleton is a perfect example of Pfizer's engagement programme. Jenny first came to work at Pfizer as an Industrial Trainee. "When I started my degree I was very nervous about being in the lab and I had no idea which science-based companies hired graduates or even what the work might involve. I hoped a year working as an IT would help me gain confidence in the lab and help me to decide whether I really wanted to be a lab-based scientist. I also hoped it might show me the sorts of companies I could work for," she says.

When it came down to career decisions, however, having completed her degree in Genetics, Jenny decided to come right back to Pfizer. "I really enjoyed the work I'd done and the people I'd worked with during my IT year. I liked the culture at Pfizer and the pay for graduates was very competitive compared to academic labs and to other pharmaceutical companies."

Jenny says she is very grateful for the opportunity she had to work in industry for a year because it helped her decide what she wanted to do after graduating and gave her the chance to build confidence in her laboratory skills, which was very useful when doing her final year research project at university.

"Personally I found the IT scheme incredibly useful – it gave me the opportunity to experience scientific work in industry. Even if I hadn't returned to Pfizer, I think my IT year would have stood out on my CV as a major plus. I would advise anyone who either just wants to gain some experience in industry to help them stand out from the crowd after graduation or anyone needing help deciding whether they want to be lab scientists to get involved," she adds.

The highest qualification

Finally, further down the educational pathway, Pfizer also supports PhD and post-doctoral students across the UK. Through schemes such as the Medical Research Council's Collaborative Agreement with Science and Engineering, or CASE, Pfizer sponsors PhD students. Through CASE, the students are able to spend around three months in one of Pfizer's labs and they are also allotted an experienced Pfizer scientist as a supervisor. In addition to supporting and hiring PhD students, the company also sponsors individual PhD projects – in fact, in 2007 alone it gave funding to 48 projects. ■

! Pfizer's investment

Pfizer works closely with schools and universities to support science education including:

- 20 Link Scientists go out to support science education in local schools annually
- An average 20 visits to Pfizer's European R&D headquarters are organised for A level students every year
- 90 work experience placements for GCSE and A level students each year and this is due to be expanded throughout 2010
- A lecture programme for schools from Pfizer scientists
- A Trainee Research Associate Programme, run with Greenwich University, providing part-time degrees for A level students

Since 2006, Pfizer has provided nearly 600 employment opportunities for students and graduates, including:

- 136 graduates recruited to join our European R&D Headquarters
- 304 industrial placement schemes for 3rd or 4th year university students
- 24 placements for pharmacists in pre-registration training
- 17 students have enrolled on the TRA programme
- 14 PhD and post-doctoral students sponsored and hired
- 15 graduate internships in communications, government relations and stakeholder relations within our customer access department
- 4 apprenticeships in engineering
- 101 summer placements