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Alternative paths

The two recipients of this year's entrepreneur awards, given out last week by the London Biotechnology Network (LBN), provide good examples of different routes into business. One pursued a commercial career from the word go, undertaking directed training and choosing jobs in various commercial fields. The other began as an academic but found that he had to spin out a company in order to move his research closer to the clinic.

The winner of the LBN's Entrepreneur of the Year Award, Sanjay Kakkar, chief executive of London biotech firm Trigen, knew early on that he wanted to go into industry. After completing his medical degree, he earned a master's in healthcare management at Harvard University and began his commercial career by joining the venture-capital subsidiary of the Bank of Boston in London. He then moved on to stints with Sandoz (now Novartis) in Milan, Italy, and Pharmacia in the United States.

By contrast, Robert Coffin, the recipient of the Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award, launched his vaccine company BioVex from academia. The company emerged out of research done at University College London's Institute of Child Health. Coffin still maintains a balance between both worlds — he lectures at the university and serves as chief scientific officer at the Oxford-based company.

The LBN awards are not just beneficial for their recipients. They show young scientists in Britain and beyond that viable careers are possible in biotechnology, no matter what your age and career path. And they illustrate the vitality of the biotech sector in London, where about 70 of the area's 100 or so companies are less than five years old. Recognizing pioneers in these companies may prove to be a great way to get scientists involved in British biotech — whether they come from an industrial or an academic background.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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