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Unique Graduate Physiotherapy Training Academy Opens in Stirling

Scotland's first specialist academy for training newly graduated physiotherapists has been established at Stirling University Innovation Park (SUIP).

The unique facility has been set up by private physiotherapy company PHYSIOfocus and will concentrate primarily on the treatment of musculoskeletal and sports injuries.

Physiofocus academy is a division of the company's highly successful clinic based at the Brucefields golf centre near Stirling.

A key factor in the creating the Academy is to help address the critical shortage of junior jobs for new graduates.

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapists Scotland estimate that 80% of last year's (2007) physiotherapy graduates were unable to find a job in the profession five months after ending their degree course while 28,000 patients require treatment.

A major issue for physiotherapy graduates in finding employment is the professional requirement for them to work in a supervised environment in their first year.

The new project is the vision of Seonaid Airth, David Bowmaker and Fiona Gough. The clinic was established by Seonaid in 1999 and now has a team of eight chartered physiotherapists offering an extensive range of treatment.

She explained: "Everyone in the profession is aware of the difficulty graduates face in finding a job when they leave university. We receive many letters every year from graduates looking for a job and wanting to shadow the physiotherapists to get experience."

"All of us at PHYSIOfocus were fortunate enough to work initially within the NHS. That experience instils a culture of mentoring but our existing clinic doesn't have the space to allow us to undertake that commitment."

Seonaid added: "Between us we have a lot of experience that we want to pass on and give something back to the profession. That's why we decided to look at the feasibility of creating a stand-alone clinic where we could offer training to newly qualified graduates.

"We know we won't solve the wider problem, but it will help in a small way and if it inspires other companies to do the same that would be great."

PHYSIOfocus has commenced a six month pilot scheme at the Academy and has employed two graduate physiotherapists from Glasgow Caledonian University, Stewart Kerr and Fraser Young.

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At the end of six months they will begin their first year in the Graduate Training Programme and PHYSIOfocus will employ two more graduates.

The training programme will be supervised by Fiona Gough, a chartered physiotherapist and lecturer at Caledonian University, Glasgow. Clients will be made aware that treatment is being offered at a training facility which will be reflected in the fee structure.

The first year of the three year programme will offer general training and in the second year it will become more sport injury focused.

The final year will provide the option of working in Australia where two clinics, one in Canberra and another in Tasmania, have agreed to offer placements to the Academy's graduates.

It is envisaged that the training programme will count towards a Masters Degree accredited by Glasgow Caledonian University

Locating the new facility on the Stirling University Innovation Park also allows PHYSIOfocus to build on the links it already has with the University's Sports Union which has 3,000 members and 46 affiliated sports clubs.

The creation of the PHYSIOfocus Academy enhances the Innovation Park's objective of supporting companies operating at the cutting edge of development within sports related technologies, people centred healthcare and environmental technologies, sciences and heritage.

Lynn Blaikie, SUIP's Manager of Operations and Business Development, said:" The academy is an innovative and imaginative project that fits well with our strategic aims. Locating here puts them at the heart of a community of sporting excellence and a dynamic business environment capable of supporting their ambitious plans."

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Editors Notes

For further information on Physiofocus go to: www.physiofocus.com and www.physiofocusacademy.com

Details of Stirling University Innovation Park can be accessed at: www.suip.co.uk

Issue on behalf of SUIP by fs communications.

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