EVOLVE

Mentoring Masterclass

Peter O'Toole

Entrepreneurship and Professional Skills in Imaging Core Facilities

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Class Guide: Entrepreneurship & Leadership in Imaging Core Facilities

Peter O'Toole
President of the Royal Microscopical Society & Director of the Bioscience Technology Facility, University of York. Leading one of the most dynamic hubs in Euro-BioImaging's UK Node, Peter's facility seamlessly integrates Imaging & Flow Cytometry, Genomics, Metabolomics & Proteomics, Data Sciences, Protein Production and more.

With a passion for innovation and collaboration, he and his team have consolidated a space where cutting-edge technology meets real-world impact. Working closely with industry partners and the global imaging community, he continuously pushes the boundaries of what core facilities can achieve. Today, Peter shares his journey, insights, and the entrepreneurial mindset that has shaped his success—showing how imaging facilities can be more than just service providers, but drivers of scientific progress and innovation.

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Introduction

Imaging core facilities function at the crossroads of science, technology, and business, requiring strong entrepreneurship and management skills for success.

This guide compiles key strategies for **leadership, communication, user engagement, and business development** in imaging facilities, drawing insights from both speakers and participants of the EVOLVE Mentoring Masterclass held in February 2025.

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1. Developing an Entrepreneurial Mindset

Successful core facilities require **strategic vision, proactive leadership, and the ability to navigate institutional structures**.

"My mentor did not have the same career profile, but helped me understand core facilities from a business perspective."

Keep stakeholders informed. Even informal chats with peers and management can create opportunities and keep you up to date.

Engage with leadership. Maintain open communication with decision-makers—vice-chancellors, deans, and management boards. If the right person isn't available, keep knocking. Leadership roles rotate, and persistence pays off.

Break institutional barriers. Don't limit yourself to your university's traditional workflow—if a clear path doesn't exist, create your own.

Be vocal. Advocacy isn't just for you—it's for your lab and your facility. Speak up to secure resources and recognition.

Increase visibility. Ensure key stakeholders, including finance, procurement, and grants offices, are aware of your activities and needs.

Highlight authorship. Authorship in core facilities is a critical KPI to showcase to funders, faculty, and decision-makers.

2. User Engagement

A successful facility is **built on strong relationships with its user base.**

"Staff is the lifeblood of the imaging facility."

Invest in people. Staff are the core of your operations—mentoring and supporting them is essential.

Passion for technology & service. Genuine enthusiasm for imaging science and user support makes a difference.

Be scientifically multi-lingual. Understanding diverse research fields enhances collaboration and problem-solving.

Practice patience & tolerance. Users have varying levels of expertise—guiding them effectively requires flexibility.

Listen & engage. Attend user meetings, understand their challenges, and explore the tools and technologies they need.

Encourage cross-training. Developing multi-skilled staff strengthens resilience and diversifies service pipelines.

3. Leveraging Social Media for Strategy & Visibility

Social media is not just for outreach—it can be a powerful tool for growth and industry engagement.

Capitalize on commercial opportunities

Around 20–30% of facility income comes from commercial users—building a strong industry presence is key.

Track analytics

Social media engagement provides insights into industry trends and potential partnerships.

Stay alert for opportunities

Limited openings exist, but monitoring these interactions can uncover chances for consultancy, alpha/beta testing, demo sites, and industry collaborations.

4. Why Diversify and Evolve?

To remain relevant and sustainable, imaging facilities must **continuously adapt.**

“Keep the job interesting, increase staff expertise, keep the thrill!”

Expand your network

Keep your facility connected to global advancements and collaborations

Maintain flexibility

A centralized yet adaptable technology hub ensures long-term sustainability

Support faculty research

A facility that evolves with scientific needs strengthens grant proposals and institutional backing

Build long-term resilience

Embedding flexibility in staff, expertise, and funding structures safeguards the future

Deliver new impacts

A diverse facility benefits both internal researchers and external industry partners

Conclusion

Thriving imaging core facilities require more than technical expertise—they demand **strategic vision, strong communication, and dynamic leadership**. By embracing an entrepreneurial mindset, actively engaging users, leveraging social media, and continuously evolving, facility managers can ensure long-term success while keeping their teams motivated and inspired.

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