

MICROMON

In the mid-1980s it was suggested that the department should establish a unit to utilise the in-house academic and technical expertise and undertake consultation work from outside the university. The proceeds from this work would be divided between the consultant and the department.

In 1986 the Microbial Biotechnology and Diagnostic Unit was established and registered as a business entity. The unit, branded as Micromon, was controlled by a small committee of management comprising the Head of Department and academic staff.

The unit attracted numerous requests for consultative microbial work and this activity has continued with staff engaged in materials testing to detect anti-microbial properties, microbial contamination testing, and media/culture supply for both Monash departments and external organisations.

From 1986, the unit has conducted a range of educational short courses and workshops, among which the Recombinant DNA Techniques workshop has been the flagship course, earning a nationwide reputation for excellence. Along with one other in the USA, it is the longest running course of its type in the world, routinely filling its annual quota of 40 places. A far cry from the 12 places filled in those workshops during the late 1980s. All surplus funds generated from this workshop are targeted for funding staff and students to attend vital research conferences.

A great boost was received when the department gained a major grant from the Australian Research Council to purchase the first DNA Sequencer along with a DNA Synthesizer in 1993; possibly the first Applied Biosystems DNA sequencer installed in Australia. Very quickly, the unit earned a reputation for its high level of service and quality output. This reputation attracted customers from both inside and outside the university, setting up the operation with dedicated staff and the path to self sufficiency.

In the late 1990s, Mark Cauchi was appointed as full time Business Manager of Micromon. Further developments saw the acquisition of additional equipment including a second DNA sequencer, Real-time PCR instrument, a range of microarray technologies and eventually, a high throughput capillary DNA sequencer. The increased size and success of the operation provided the opportunity for it to be relocated in 2004 to custom-designed laboratories in the newly-built STRIP building.

Having changed its trading name to Micromon, the unit continues to explore new DNA/RNA technologies including the latest developments in next-generation sequencing, high sensitivity quantitation and sizing instruments, and a range of associated molecular technology applications much needed by research groups at Monash and by the wider scientific community.

From a very modest beginning, Micromon has become an important part of the department's resources.