

Scott Bruce

Scott joined Sterling in 2024 as Head of Production at our dedicated bioconjugation facility in Deeside, Wales, bringing over a decade of experience within the pharma industry.

Can you tell us about your background?

I always wanted a career in science and started out as a Trainee Lab Technician as part of an apprenticeship scheme with Cobra Biologics in Staffordshire, before becoming an Operator. I remained with the organisation for 17 years, always seeking opportunities to progress.

I then moved on to become Head of Production at NuPharm Laboratories, an API facility in Deeside, Wales, before moving back to Cobra as a Principal Scientist. I remained in this role for four years, with responsibility for operational excellence and improving process efficiencies. The last thing I worked on during this role was the manufacture and scale-up of the Covid-19 vaccine. I worked across a European consortium, collaborating with our direct competitors and working towards the same goal of finding a vaccine– this was definitely a highlight of my career.

After a total of 21 years with Cobra, I moved to cell therapy organisation, Instil Bio, as a Manufacturing Manager. I enjoyed sharing my experience with the junior team there and helping them to grow their skills within a cGMP environment.

When the organisation went through a period of redundancies, I moved into the role of Quality Assurance Manager. Having worked in industry for a long time, this was a smooth transition, and I was soon promoted to Director of Quality Assurance. The day that another round of redundancies was announced, the Head of Production role at Sterling's specialist bioconjugation facility in Deeside came up.

Sterling appealed to me because of its values, which really align with my own, and the fact that the organisation truly shows and lives those values. They aren't just words on a presentation slide.



Fast Facts

ROLE

Head of Production

JOINED

April 2024

EDUCATION

BTEC National Certificate in Science

Can you tell us about your role as Head of Production at the Deeside site?

I have overall responsibility for the manufacturing and warehouse teams. This includes ensuring safe operations, that the team have the right training and resources available to them, equipment is fully qualified and maintained, GMP batch delivery and aligning our facilities with Sterling's global quality system and regulations.

My broad experience across process development, manufacturing and quality gives me a unique opportunity to support the site as part of the site leadership team. I am also responsible for ensuring that our customers receive the best possible service. This is achieved through collaboration with other department leaders at the site to develop industry leading capabilities, understanding the customer's needs, keeping pace with market trends, developing operating efficiencies and delivering compliance.

Offering our customers direct access to the right people, at the right time, is really important and allows information to be exchanged and decisions to be made quickly.

I have lead production teams for a number of years, sharing my experience and helping to develop team members. Personal development is very important to me, as I want to support my team members in truly becoming subject matter experts. I have always prioritised operator safety, which is especially important when manufacturing ADCs, as containment is key due to their toxic nature. I am able to apply my past experiences and collaborate with experts across Sterling's global network to ensure operator safety and robust containment solutions. This access to specialist expertise from across the network allows me to not only ensure we have the correct safety measures in place, but provides me with an opportunity to further develop my own knowledge within this area.

How do you and your team effectively collaborate with customers?

We see ourselves as partners, supporting our customers' goals. First and foremost, we need to understand our customer's needs in order to achieve these goals. At a high level, they want us to produce ADC drug substance for them, but we need to understand the ins and outs of a project and how the customer prefers to collaborate. Each customer wants a different level of oversight during the process, so we need to work with them to understand their expectations. This might mean regular updates to the project manager, or directly to their team, and sometimes we might have the customer on site, further facilitating direct partnership between teams.

Understanding our customer's needs comes from listening to them. We support them from the very beginning, which means production's involvement during the scoping and proposal stage to ensure we have a clear understanding of our collective goals and to ensure the communication throughout the project's lifecycle is right for our customers. It's not just the manufacturing team that does this, it's all disciplines from process development to quality assurance. This helps us to ensure that our priorities are aligned with our customer's, helping us to create efficiencies from early on and streamlining their path to market.

We understand that expertise and flexibility are key to meeting our customers' requirements. As experts in ADC manufacturing, we can provide technical collaboration for both short- and long-term project needs to ensure the customer's product and process are robust and scalable. Our team understands that there's no 'one size fits all' way of operating, and therefore we need to be flexible. We also recognise the need for our team to be available and accessible to the customer. The antibody drug conjugate (ADC) market is rapidly growing, and everyone is competing to be the first to market. So, offering our customers direct access to the right people, at the right time, is really important and allows information to be exchanged and decisions to be made quickly.

Can you talk about some of your plans for Sterling's ADC manufacturing operations?

As we look to grow the business from a capacity perspective, with the expansion and investment into our new ADC manufacturing suite, it's key that we make sure our configuration is as flexible as possible to help meet the needs of our current and future customers. As a CDMO, no batch is the same, and so we need to standardise processes wherever we can. This means continually developing documentation, equipment and materials to ensure suitable flexibility of scale and operations.

In addition to growing capacity and investing in new technology, it's equally important to grow our ADC manufacturing team. This will involve bringing in additional talent, as well as supporting our existing experts with further training. This investment will provide new opportunities within our team, such as leadership, coaching and mentorship positions, as well as the chance to develop specialisms within specific areas.

At the end of the day, it's important to us that our customers are successful, because together, we're helping save lives.

How do you and your team effectively collaborate with other teams across Sterling?

From a site perspective, it's important that we share information effectively between our internal teams, ensuring that what we're communicating is as robust and thorough as possible. It's also key that we reflect upon projects, and discuss the lessons we've learnt together, to help us continuously improve and better support each other and our customers.

As part of the Sterling network, we benefit from support from global functions such as EHS and access to team members with niche expertise, such as our Industrial Hygienist and Toxicologist. In my experience, this kind of in-house support is quite unique, and

is typically outsourced within other organisations. Having it accessible within our own global network benefits our site as well as our customers, enabling direct collaboration and reducing the timelines often associated with accessing such specialisms.

Without partnership and collaboration, whether it's with our customers or internal global teams, we can't deliver. Manufacturing is just one small part in the supply chain. Without EHS, materials coming in and out, policies, maintenance etc, we can't go into production. As they say, there is no 'I' in 'team'.

Why do you think our customers choose to work with Sterling?

At the Deeside site, we have a really strong technical background in ADCs and decades of experience. Our senior leadership team has a lot of industry knowledge, and as mentioned, we benefit from the support of the wider Sterling network.

We have a demonstrable delivery track record, and we are committed to continuing to deliver what we've promised and to exceed our customers' expectations. We really do care about our customers' projects, which is why it's so key for us to understand our customers' needs, and ultimately, create true partnerships. At the end of the day, it's important to us that our customers are successful, because together, we're helping save lives.

What is your favourite thing about working at Sterling?

The team are great. The people here are amazing, and they all have the same energy and commitment to deliver for our customers. Everyone lives the Sterling values and it's clear that we're all working towards a common goal.

The impact that my small part in manufacturing has on patients around the world really helps to keep me driven. When you put that product in the freezer at the end of the day, knowing it's going on to support the healthcare supply chain makes it all worthwhile.