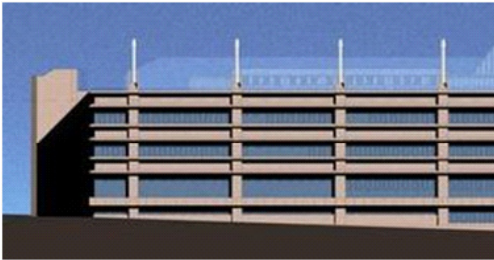


Work gets under way on uni's \$30m laboratory

An artist's impression of the new \$30 million Institute for Innovation in Biotechnology at the University of Auckland.



Work on a \$30 million laboratory for start-up science companies begins today, promising new inventions in food, medicine and environmental protection.

Auckland City Mayor John Banks will launch construction work on a purpose-built addition to the University of Auckland's Institute for Innovation in Biotechnology, on the corner of Symonds St and Waterloo Quadrant.

The building will be an "incubator" for start-up biotechnology businesses that might not otherwise be able to afford the latest technology.

It is expected to more than double the number of science companies working alongside University of Auckland scientists under an existing programme from five to a dozen or more.

The new building is being paid for by the university (\$20 million) and the Government (\$10 million). Biotechnology companies have committed a further \$10 million to carry out research at the institute under a dollar-for-dollar science investment partnership with the Government.

Biotechnology has been earmarked as a growth export industry for New Zealand, and in May scientists argued the Budget should have allocated more money to new research.

Institute director Professor Joerg Kistler said there were three big growth areas for designing new products - food, health and methods of cleaning up the environment.

Companies already at the institute are looking at bull sperm, wound healing and the benefits of manuka honey, and Government-owned farm research giant AgResearch also bases some of its scientists there.

Several more companies are expected to move there when the new building opens in 2011. Eventually, it will house up to 500 researchers and graduate students.

Professor Kistler said new companies often had little money, and the equipment needed to research biotechnology was growing more and more expensive.

"[Here] they can share use of all the expensive facilities because we all use the same machines.

"They can spend their money on products, not bricks and mortar."

As well as saving money, he said, bringing commercial scientists and university scientists together sped up the invention process.