Media release

Faculty of Science
The University of Auckland

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New High-Tech Accelerator for the Transformation of New Zealand Industry

Funding of $9.6 million over four years has been awarded to a University of Auckland-led materials development programme that aims to transform New Zealand's manufacturing sector through partnerships between research and industry.

The Materials Accelerator brings together scientists and engineers from seven research organisations into a "one-stop shop" to help New Zealand manufacturers develop high-value materials and enter new export markets. The programme is expected to generate economic growth and skilled jobs across the manufacturing sector, which accounts for approximately one third of the country's exports and three of its five-largest technology companies.

"In pursing economic growth in a small economy like New Zealand we urgently need to adopt a 'NZ Inc.' approach to innovation and commercialisation," says Professor Ralph Cooney, Science Leader for the programme. "The Materials Accelerator, with its extensive research and industry collaborations, has the potential to turbo-charge the development of high-technology exports."

The programme will focus on developing high-value products that incorporate multiple materials, such as plastics, metals, composites, ceramics, conducting polymers and coatings. It is anticipated that the benefits of the Materials Accelerator will flow across a wide range of industries, including plastics and packaging, food and beverage processing, construction, electronic devices, and the marine, transport and aerospace sectors.

"The development and prototyping of high-value, multi-material products for export is an expensive, time-consuming and risky business beyond the capability of many New Zealand companies," says Professor Cooney. "A central aspect of the Materials Accelerator is the creation of a virtual prototyping and evaluation facility that will accelerate commercial product development and greatly reduce the cost and risk for firms."

Funding for the Materials Accelerator has been awarded as part of the High Technology Transformational Research, Science & Technology initiative. This is a new government initiative administered by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology that aims to establish platforms for the accelerated development of high-technology products from basic research through to commercial use.

Professor Stuart McCutcheon, Vice-Chancellor of The University of Auckland, says "The University is delighted its strengths in basic and applied materials science have been recognised in this new research funding initiative linking science to industry. The University is committed to supporting the high technology manufacturing industry in New Zealand through the application of high quality research."

The successful proposal was led by The University of Auckland working in partnership with Auckland University of Technology, Industrial Research Limited, Scion Research Ltd, GNS Science, Victoria University of Wellington, and Massey University. "We are conscious that the Materials Accelerator involves a new model for collaboration across seven research organisations and that the contributions from our collaborators and their scientists were critical in being awarded this funding," says Professor McCutcheon.

The Materials Accelerator seeks to build on existing linkages between research organisations and industry. The concept was developed in consultation with four industry sector associations representing approximately 1,000 New Zealand companies – the Heavy Engineering Research Association, Plastics New Zealand, the Composites Association of New Zealand, and the Packaging Council of New Zealand. Discussions were also held with 20 selected innovative companies with a special interest in manufacturing materials.

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