



Biotech research centre to go ahead

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The construction of the Republic's first dedicated research and training facility for the biotechnology sector was approved yesterday by the Government.

The €90 million facility will help to train researchers in the university sector and will offer sophisticated research facilities to firms working in the sector.

The National Institute of Bioprocessing Research and Training (NIBRT) is a joint project involving third-level colleges, IDA Ireland and private sector firms. NIBRT will be located at University College Dublin but partner with three other colleges: Dublin City University, Trinity College and the Institute of Technology, Sligo.

It is understood public funding worth more than €70 million for the project was approved at a cabinet meeting yesterday. Further funding is expected to be provided by private sector firms and research grants from the European Union.

The Government hopes the institute will meet a shortfall of biotechnology skills in the Republic and attract investment to create a new "biotech cluster".

Biotechnology is the alteration of molecules, genes and cells to develop useful products, processes or services such as medications and therapies, cloning, genetically modified foods and enhanced crops.

It is becoming a force in drug discovery and manufacturing, an industry which previously focused on chemical synthesis to formulate treatments. The IDA has targeted this sector for future growth and has already had some success in attracting companies.

Wyeth, Schering-Plough and Centocor have all made significant investments in Irish biotechnology projects. The IDA is also

in advanced discussions on at least one other biotech project, which is earmarked to be located at a site close to Galway city.

One of NIBRT's roles will be to provide protein development and production services to these companies and others entering the sector.

It is also expected to house an advanced fermentation facility.