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Callaghan Innovation touted as business enabler

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Minister Steven Joyce officially launched Callaghan Innovation on February 1, telling an Auckland audience that the new crown entity is intended to connect high tech business with research and funding resources.

"The key thing is it's an enabler for businesses," Joyce said. "We've designed it to be a creative headquarters, a one-stop shop for companies to come to for help."

Joyce says that includes R&D co-funding, access to experts in particular fields or to facilities, or for guidance developing intellectual property.

"The idea is you'll have one representative from Callaghan to work alongside you," he says.

Callaghan Innovation brings over staff from the now-defunct CRI Industrial Research, as well as some from the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, and New Zealand Trade and Enterprise. The FoodBowl - a food innovation network - is also grafted to Callaghan Innovation.

Callaghan board chair Sue Suckling revealed that a main element in organising and tracking engagements with hi-tech businesses will be a central database to be shared with New Zealand Trade and Enterprise.

"With the number of companies we are dealing with, when you start a conversation it's important to know where they are coming from," Suckling told the audience. "We want to have one database for New Zealand companies, and one diagnostic, so you don't have to keep telling your stories."

Suckling did not go into detail about what the database would contain. One audience member suggested it could be used to help connect hi-tech business with research and expertise outside university departments and crown research institutes.

Joyce said streamlining and warehousing of resources were motivating factors in establishing Callaghan Innovation.

"This is a consolidation of the innovation sector that the government supports," he said. "This organisation sits at the juxtaposition of science and business."

Joyce said geographic isolation necessitated innovation throughout New Zealand's history.

"We have an excellent DNA for innovation, but the isolation that gives us that DNA is also a challenge," he said. "Sometimes we are not connected well enough to our markets. Callaghan is about speed to market."

Callaghan Innovation now begins its transition period. Suckling says this includes re-defining roles and identifying areas of the high tech industry that may need a "platform" for development.

Suckling told *Unlimited* the transition period would last until the end of June, but that all current projects and engagements inherited from IRL would continue unchanged.

"This is a new organisation that we've never had before in New Zealand," Suckling said. "It has been established to accelerate commercialisation of innovation, to step-change the performance of businesses with the application of research, science, engineering, technology and design. More of that done by business to make them more profitable. And to be able to put it out there intentionally."

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