

**Sod-turning ceremony for new Biomedical
Research Institute, Tygerberg Campus,
Fri 25 Jan 2019, 12:30
Remarks by SU Rector and Vice-Chancellor
Prof Wim de Villiers**

**Sooispitgeleentheid vir nuwe
Biomediese Navorsingsinstituut,
Tygerbergkampus, Vry 25 Jan 2019
Inset deur prof Wim de Villiers,
Rektor en Visekanselier**

[Bilingual version as prepared for delivery. Tweetalige weergawe soos voorberei vir lewering]

The University's big welcoming ceremony took place on our Stellenbosch campus last night. We had a "dream launch", in which new first-year students could write down their dreams so that they will remember why they came to university in the first place. Well, what we are doing here today is in many ways a dream come true ... for those who have been tirelessly championing this project; for the Faculty, and the University overall; for the state, who are investing substantial resources in this new facility, for which we are very grateful; and most importantly for the ultimate beneficiaries of this new facility, the patients and population in general who will benefit from research to be conducted here to combat disease.

But it's also a dream come true for the students and staff of this Faculty who have had to cope with ageing facilities for many years. Toe ek 'n student hier was, was die FISAN al hier. Dit was destyds nog redelik nuut. En hoewel dit die Fakulteit nou al jare lank getrou dien, het dit eenvoudig onvoldoende geraak. Deur die jare het die Fakulteit se biomediese navorsingswerk omvattend gegroei, maar daar is geen bykomende infrastruktuur toegevoeg tot bestaande navorsingsfasiliteite nie .

So, many of us are overjoyed that we are today turning the sod for the construction of what will be one of the most innovative and advanced biomedical research facilities in the world. The Stellenbosch University (SU) Biomedical Research Institute (BMRI) here at our Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) will be dedicated to understanding the genetic and biomolecular basis of disease, and it will be decidedly African in focus.

Its main aim will be to investigate and understand the diseases that have the greatest impact on communities in South Africa and the rest of Africa. Here these discoveries will be translated into improving the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illnesses such as TB, HIV/Aids, diabetes and cardiovascular and neurological disorders. Africa endures the most of the global burden of disease, with a number of major epidemics colliding across our continent. Met een van die top fakulteite in geneeskunde en gesondheidswetenskappe in Suid-Afrika, het die Universiteit Stellenbosch 'n enorme verantwoordelikheid om die strewe na gesonde lewens en welsyn vir almal te bevorder.

Dis waar hierdie fasiliteit inkom. When completed, the new BMRI will form a fully integrated, future-focused and superbly organised research complex that matches and, in several ways, exceeds the best the world has to offer in terms of technical sophistication and optimised workflows in a healthy, inspiring and sustainable learning, working and public space. The new BMRI will be on par with the most advanced and sophisticated facilities of this kind in the world. Our new facility will allow for the immediate expansion of current research activities in this Faculty, as well as strengthen our research and teaching capacity in fields such as bioinformatics, genomics, anatomy, surgery and neurology.

And all of this is crucial if we want to build a "thriving Stellenbosch University", which is one of the core strategic themes in our new vision and strategic framework adopted last year. In ons nuwe Visie en Strategiese Raamwerk noem ons dat ons die standaard van die Universiteit se fasiliteite en infrastruktuur wil verhoog na dié van 'n wêreldklas-navorsingsintensiewe universiteit.

Upgraded modern laboratory infrastructure in biomedical sciences is required to not only comply with current legislation, but also to continue to perform at an internationally-competitive level and to attract top researchers and postgraduate students. What's the timeframe? The construction of the new BMRI and the upgrading of the existing facility is expected to be completed by December 2022, ready to be fully operational by January 2023. This will certainly help us realise our vision of becoming "Africa's leading research-intensive university, globally recognised as excellent, inclusive and innovative, where we advance knowledge in service of society".