

New WIT labs to provide 'blue sky' vision research



Pictured at MPRG, WITs West Campus at Carriganore on Friday last were Rachel Moran (Scientist, MPRG), Minister of State Paudie Coffey TD, Alicia O'Rourke (European Research Council) and Professor John Nolan (MPRG). | Photo: Patrick Browne

On Friday last, Minister of State Paudie Coffey officially opened two new laboratories at Waterford Institute of Technology's (WIT) €4 million Vision Research Centre which houses the Macular Pigment Research Group (MPRG).

The new labs will support the MPRG's ambition to generate viable industry for the south east by developing more efficient methods of harvesting lutein, a nutrient essential for optimal vision and protection against the world's leading cause of blindness - Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD).

According to Professor John Nolan, the MPRG's Principal Investigator of MPRG: "The global demand for lutein is growing rapidly as people begin to understand the importance of this nutrient for eye health and general wellbeing.

"With the aid of our new and specialised world-class laboratories, and funding from the European Research Council (ERC), we are investigating efficient ways to generate and obtain lutein from natural sources. This is important because we are currently dependent on the marigold flower, which is highly seasonal and country dependent. If this project is successful we will greatly advance science in this area and generate opportunity for major industry in Ireland."

Said Minister Coffey said, "I want to congratulate Prof John Nolan and his team in WIT. For over 12 years, the MPRG has been at the cutting edge of eye nutrition research worldwide and the group's most recent research publications underlines the huge asset the MPRG is for this country and Waterford more specifically.

"In the last year alone, the Howard Foundation has committed €1 million to support the continuation of research by Prof Nolan and his team. This support shows yet again that Waterford can be at the centre of global research and can compete successfully internationally."

According to WIT President Dr Ruaidhrí Neavyn: "The MPRG is a shining example of how academic research can have a real impact on society.

“Over the years, Professor Nolan has helped countless people struggling with their sight and it is both rewarding and exciting to see his research grow and expand into new areas.”