

Boosting research

A dream of dramatically increasing externally funded research is a giant step closer for the Department of Information Science.

The University of Otago's commercial activities company has acquired a well-established research organisation which will develop into MediaLab Ltd. The objective is to run it as a profitable applied research company and to gain significant research income for the department.

Information Science has been associated with the original company for some time and has received substantial research assistance.

Professor George Benwell, Head of the Department of Information Science, says MLL is expected to grow in the next few years to a turnover of several million dollars. It will retain links established previously with Telecom, Vodafone, Lucent and other major information and communications technology (ICT) corporates in Wellington, Auckland and overseas.

There will also continue to be a close association with other universities and service providers.

"I believe it will be a major boost to the department's research efforts and should help us to grow," says Prof Benwell. And it needs to grow not only through research but also by increasing student numbers.

Prof Benwell says forecasts indicate there will be 125,000 New Zealand ICT jobs in seven years compared with current levels of about 41,000.

Already there are significant skills gaps between the number of jobs available and suitably qualified applicants. Last year the number of ICT jobs rose by 84 % while the number of graduates fell by 20%.

"The jobs are out there -- we need to attract the people who can fill them after a thorough education."