



Professor Tulio de Oliveira and right is the view from Vital-IT and the Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics campus in Lausanne, Switzerland, which KRISP team recently visited to set-up collaborations and learn more about their successful business plan.

KZN Research and Innovation Sequencing Platform Established

BY: .

The Technology Innovation Agency (TIA) and UKZN have signed an agreement for the establishment of KRISP – the KwaZulu-Natal Research and Innovation Sequencing Platform.

This signed agreement with TIA takes the omics/informatics facility to new levels.

KRISP, the result of hard work by, among others, Professor Tulio de Oliveira, Professor Deresh Ramjugernath and Professor Salim Abdool Karim, was previously known as the Genomics and Bioinformatics Centre.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Head of the College of Health Sciences, Professor Rob Slotow, said KRISP is one of many exciting research projects driven by de Oliveira.

De Oliveira is a full Professor at the Nelson R. Mandela School of Medicine at UKZN and a Research Associate at the Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa (CAPRISA). Recognised as an expert on HIV genetic data and bioinformatics software development, he received his PhD at the Nelson R. Mandela School of Medicine in 2003, was a Marie Curie Fellow at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom in 2006, and has recently been awarded a Royal Society Newton Advanced Fellowship.

In total, he has published more than 100 manuscripts, and developed dozens of bioinformatics software applications and databases. De Oliveira leads a group of 18 researchers and/or postgraduate students.

The concept for KRISP started in discussions with the executives of UKZN, CAPRISA, TIA and the Department of Science and Technology, funded by the South African Research Infrastructure Roadmap (SARIR) DIPLOMICS programme.

'We decided that it was wise to build KRISP on our strength in genomics, epidemiology and bioinformatics and to use our existing facilities at the School of Laboratory Medicine and Medical Sciences in the College of Health Sciences to host it,' said de Oliveira.

The vision of KRISP is to produce and analyse omics data at the same speed and quality as the top genomics centres in the world. This will produce cutting-edge research, support industrial development and capacitate the next generation of scientists in South Africa.

A critical function of KRISP will be to enable and facilitate access to genomics, epigenetics and bioinformatics technology to a broader community of users who might not otherwise pursue these technologies or use alternative international resources. KRISP aims at creating, in collaboration with TIA, a professionally run and accredited service component that is available for academic, commercial and industrial clients.

This agreement will see TIA providing R5 million a year for the core of the facility, but there is now opportunity to leverage additional funding for flagship projects, including a flagship programme from the

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South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC). The SAMRC Flagship programme has been very successful - it has published 60 manuscripts, graduated nine MScs and PhD students and trained 1 150 participants as part of capacity building workshops in the last three years. KRISP is now looking for opportunities to collaborate with key stakeholders and funders to identify new flagship programmes that can generate similar scientific and capacity building output.

'We are very passionate about training and capacity building. For example, in the last three years, we have organised 16 workshops during which 1 150 individuals were trained. As part of KRISP, we will continue and expand our training programme. We also expect to graduate more PhDs and MScs in order to create the scientific leaders of tomorrow,' said de Oliveira.

Director of CAPRISA Professor Salim Abdool Karim has been crucial in the planning processes and will act as chair of the board.

KRISP has thanked SAMRC for its support and look forward to a very positive interaction in the future.

'A big thank you to everyone who worked hard towards the establishment of KRISP. I am very glad to see this has happened and we will work very hard to become a success history,' added de Oliveira

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