

MGU Gives Boost to Biotechnology Startups

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MGU biology faculty chief Mikhail Kirpichnikov congratulating students. **Daria Shipacheva**

The first Russian biotechnology incubation program, designed to boost innovation and commercialization in the sector and organized by the Moscow State University Science Park, kicked off its second phase Thursday.

The program, called Formula BIO, inducted 50 current students and graduates of top local universities with backgrounds in biology, chemistry and medicine. About 25 percent of them are also versed in management, law and economics.

"I came here to get an understanding of how to transform science into real life and clearly communicate my scientific ideas to potential investors who have no special knowledge in this field," said Natalya Petukhova, a graduate of MGU's biology department.

Formula BIO was set up jointly with the Russian Venture Co. and is focused on helping

startups in biotechnology and medicine.

"We want to connect scientists and managers into teams that will be able to successfully bring biotechnological innovation to the market," said Oleg Movsesyan, director of MGU Science Park.

Some participants already have a specific project they want to bring to fruition.

"I have an idea for a special device aimed at treating human brain dysfunction," said Daria Chepurnova, another MGU biology graduate. "I came here to find a team and get more understanding of how innovative business works."

Winners were selected from 200 applicants. Organizers first assessed candidates' educational and professional background, then eligible candidates were invited for an interview, where their motivation was evaluated.

Formula BIO participants will attend MGU lectures by experts in intellectual property rights, biotech marketing, financial management and project management. The curriculum also includes basics of biotechnology and pharmaceutical production and leadership development.

The second part of the program is aimed at commercialization of potential projects. Participants will work in teams formed by the organizers. Typically, ideas come from the project's partners, local biotech firms Gemakor and Ruskhimbio, and also from the competition Vanguard of Knowledge, held by Swedish-British pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, whose winners are invited to join Formula BIO.

During this stage, students can also gain practical experience by meeting and consulting with entrepreneurs already successfully leading biotechnology businesses.

After six months, the top participants will be invited for a two-week internship in Boston in autumn 2013 sponsored by the Science Park. Projects that are ready to be commercialized will be presented to potential investors.

Participants will also attend business training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and talk to mentors at biotech businesses in the United States. The MGU Science Park will help link participants to Russian venture funds.

The Formula BIO program was established by MGU in 2011. Out of eight project teams that presented results of their research in January, some have already registered their business and started to implement their ideas.

A startup called Biochips is designing a device for early diagnosis of leukemia, and Pharmacocytes is developing a method for delivery of anti-cancer drugs with human erythrocytes.

"This program gave me an opportunity to work on a real project," said Marat Lutfullin, a chemistry graduate student at MGU working at Biochips. "What is most important is that it also gave me an understanding of what to do when you have an idea — where to get money for your project, how to build a good team."

MGU supports innovation by students and university graduates via the Science Park, where about 50 companies working in such spheres as medicine, optics, geophysics, IT and chemical manufacturing are located.

Former and current MGU students are given preferential treatment, but any relevant company can rent facilities in the Science Park, which is at the main campus on Lomonosovsky Prospekt.

Formula BIO is a subset of an ongoing program called Success Formula, which is designed to help students and young scientists interested in establishing startups.

After completing the program, participants get a chance to present their business plans to investors. Winners are granted seed funding.

Initially they can get up to 1 million rubles from venture foundations cooperating with the Science Park, including Russian Venture Co., Development Foundation, Bortnik Foundation and companies interested in investing.

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