The Incubation and Innovation Centre University UGhent (IIC UGent) is a service centre for spin-offs of the Ghent University Association. It is at the disposal of spin-offs coming from the various faculties of the association and their partners.

IIC UGent was established in 1990 as one of the first Incubation and Innovation Centres in Flanders. It is a joint project of Ghent University, Hogeschool Gent, the province of East Flanders, the city of Ghent, the Gewestelijke Investeringsmaatschappij Vlaanderen, BNP-Paribas Fortis, ArcelorMittal, Suez (now Engie), Ethias, Nokia Bell, the Internationale Jaarbeurs Vlaanderen, LVD, imec and UCO.

“The IIC University of Ghent is first and foremost a business generator,” says managing director Prof. Dr Marnix Botte. “We want to stimulate the start-up, growth and development of young innovative high-tech companies there. By fostering intellectual synergy and networking, as an incubation centre we want to create a dynamic environment for young and creative entrepreneurship, where new ideas can grow into successful businesses.”

Strategic service package

In practice, this means that spin-offs of the Association University of Ghent receive logistical and operational support there. “Our offer also includes a strategic service package. We advise on concluding leases and provide information on financing opportunities, subsidies and other support measures. We also provide support in obtaining the necessary permits. The IIC can achieve the right guidance mix for each project by drawing on its extensive network of technical, legal and financial advisers. It offers solutions for every challenge in the start-up and growth process, thanks to close cooperation with strategic partners such as Ghent University Technology Transfer, Hogeschool Gent, the East Flanders Regional Development Agency, the city of Ghent and our other shareholders. But we do remain independent, Ghent University is one of our shareholders, but the shareholding is so widely spread that no one can take a dominant position there.”

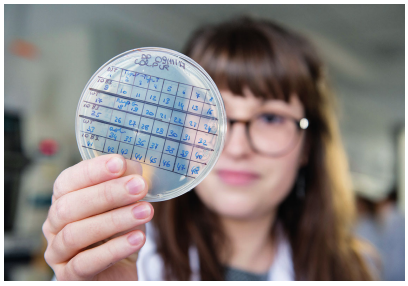
© IIC - The latest IIC building has been in operation since 2021.
© IIC - Building IIC2 from year 2000 Ardoyen campus has an area of 1,350 m².
© IIC - Building IIC1 from year 1991 on the Ardoyen campus has an area of 1,350 m².

Clustered knowledge

The wider synergy is also helped by the fact that IIC's buildings are located along the so-called 'Tech Lane', south of the core city and close to the cloverleaf of the major traffic axes Lille-Kortrijk-Ghent-Antwerp-Eindhoven and Ostend-Brussels. "Tech Lane Ghent Science Park consists of two nearby campuses, Ardoyen and Eiland Zwijnaarde. It is a vibrant ecosystem of international corporate R&D centres, public research institutes and high-tech growth enterprises, providing a very stimulating environment for innovation and entrepreneurship. Currently, the park hosts eleven university labs, twelve public research centres, eight industrial pilots and test-facilities and more than ninety knowledge intensive start-ups, academic and corporate R&D centres."

Importance of biotechnology

At the end of 2023, the IIC had four buildings, three on the Ardoyen campus and one on Eiland Zwijnaarde. "Three in full ownership and one in co-ownership with Ghent University. Altogether, this involves a floor area of 6,400 m²," said Botte. "When we erected our first building on Ardoyen in 1991, we only found two neighbours there, Texaco and Ghent University. The choice of location was partly dictated by the proximity of various departments of the university, such as veterinary medicine and pharmacy, and those of Ghent University Hospital. Importantly, meanwhile, the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) is also present on this campus and uses our facilities by placing a number of start-up companies within IIC Ugent. Several companies that we house and others, which have established themselves elsewhere on the campuses are active in biotechnology. From historical growth, pharmaceuticals also weighs heavily, but otherwise there is a broad mix, in which technology is very strongly represented."



© IIC - One of the current users of the IIC is Inbiose.

© IIC - One of the current users of the IIC is Inbiose

Growth and flow

The second and third buildings of the IIC were constructed early this century, and the fourth has been in use since 2021. “The occupancy rate has always been very high. It currently stands at 97%. Of our current tenants, we can consider six to be large companies, the others are a mix of small and medium-sized businesses. Many past and current users started here with just one or two premises, usually a combination of a lab and office space. Some grow very quickly and then need a lot of extra space. We then like to see them move on. The fact that they are then not always inclined to move quickly anyway is due to the lack of available locations near the university buildings. For ourselves, we do see an opportunity for expansion within the Tech Lane campuses in the near future.”

Collaborations

Foreign companies are also welcome. “They must then have signed a cooperation agreement with the Ghent University Association,” Botte underlines.

Great diversity

Since its inception, more than a hundred high-tech companies have so far started up in the IIC Ghent University. Some 30 companies are currently based there. “The fact that there is a wide variety of fields and activities in the Incubation and Innovation Centre leads to a pervasive synergy, which is a breeding ground for the emergence of new innovative activities,” explains the managing director. In the past, it already housed DevGen/Syngenta (crop protection) and CropDesign (agrobiotech), among others. Current users include breast milk sugars specialist Inbiose, Primoris (nutritional analyses), Crodeon (monitoring systems), eTherNa (immunotherapy), Morrowoptics (smart lenses) and ThermoFisher (scientific instruments).

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