

Our future economic success will have roots firmly in Innovation – Tánaiste

8th National Innovation Conference

Tánaiste, Ms Mary Harney, T.D. and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, today (Thursday 20th November, 2003) opened the **8th National Innovation Conference** organised by Forfás. The conference, which focused on exploring the critical need for cooperation and partnership between education, enterprise and Government in the development of Ireland's innovation environment, heard keynote speeches from Mr Richard Riley, Former US Secretary of Education and Ms Claire Nauwelaers, Research Director of the Maastricht Economic Research Institute on Innovation and Technology.

Commenting on the importance of providing an environment which proactively supports innovation, the Tánaiste said "Building innovation capacity is a fundamental long term development challenge facing Ireland. Our ability to innovate will determine how successfully we can compete in the future global marketplace. We cannot look to the past. We must acknowledge that Ireland can no longer compete just on the basis of costs and skills, and that our future requires the development of additional competitive advantages. To this end Government has made a substantial further commitment to research and innovation and spending in my own Department and on PRTL in 2004 will be in the region of €285 million, an increase of 39% on the current year"

Keynote speaker, Mr Richard Riley highlighted the imperative of partnership for increased innovation and encouraged a greater interchange between Ireland and the US. "Irish universities would do well to develop a new sense of partnership and cooperation in order to compete on the world stage. It is clear to me that no nation can hope to innovate if it remains insular, bound by tradition alone and dominated by structure and institutions that diminish individual creativity. Individuals who risk, who are willing to break the mould, make the difference when it comes to sparking innovation."

He also outlined the important role that the Irish education system played in shaping the creative and economic successes of Ireland in the 80s and 90s. "Ireland now seeks to move forward and clearly the Irish education dimension will play an important role in achieving ongoing success. Sustaining and supporting excellence at second level is just as important as achieving success at third level. You cannot have one without the other," he continued. Pointing to the decline in numbers of Leaving Certificate students he suggests that "every Irish student must become more valuable".

The National Innovation Conference provides a unique networking forum for members of enterprise, education and Government on policy issues important for industrial development and future national competitiveness. Previous conferences have contributed significantly to the development of national strategies to encourage innovation.

Mr Peter Cassells, Chairman, Forfás said “This conference and its participants over the years have made an important contribution to informing policy advice to Government from Forfás, ICSTI (Irish Council for Science, Technology and Innovation) and the NCC (National Competitiveness Council). I have no doubt that this 8th conference, focusing on partnerships as the foundation for innovation, will form an equally valuable input.”

“Innovation in a global environment depends not just on how firms, universities, research institutes and regulators perform individually, but also on how they work together. The key to building a successful innovation system, which is critical for our development as a knowledge-based economy is partnership,” he continued.