

PRESS RELEASE

Statement by Dr Edward Walsh, Chairman of ICSTI, in relation to the Statements issued by Noel Treacy T.D., Minister for Science, Technology and Commerce on the funding of basic or fundamental research

I warmly welcome Minister Noel Treacy's recent Statements, which deal with progressive developments to underpin the national research effort. These confirm the outcome of the most constructive consultations between representatives of ICSTI and the Minister which took place on 9 June 1998.

The £5 million fund to be administered by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) to further develop the research capabilities in our third level institutions is an important initial stage in filling a serious gap in Ireland's system. This programme, to be operated by the HEA, addresses the need to assist institutions in achieving international excellence in areas of strategic importance.

It is clear that the HEA programme is additional, and complementary, to Forbairt's Basic Research Grant Scheme, which continues under the strategic remit of Forbairt/Enterprise Ireland. Selection of projects under the latter scheme is conducted by an independent peer-review system, which is designed to ensure excellence in the research system, and to support the emergence of new research talent and new areas of research and innovation. The Minister has announced that the initial £2million for the Forbairt/Enterprise Ireland scheme has been increased for 1998 by a further £500,000, and that in addition he is reasonably optimistic of securing further funding for new projects in the current year.

I welcome the Minister's initiative to establish a Working Group with representatives from the Departments of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Education and Science as well as Forbairt/Enterprise Ireland and the HEA to examine future funding arrangements, to ensure coherence in overall national research and development.

The Minister deserves great credit for his work in building on the national funding and mechanisms for research and taking important initial steps towards bridging the considerable gap between Ireland's research and development programme and that of other countries with which we compete.

Ends

18/06/98

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