

“NCC calls for improved development agency collaboration”

“Support for industry from Government and its development agencies should increasingly be organised around ‘clusters’ and ‘networks’ of related business activities”, according to Mr. William Burgess, Chairman of the National Competitiveness Council (NCC). Mr. Burgess was speaking at the publication of the NCC’s submission to the Enterprise Strategy Group on February 25.

Participation in industry clusters and networks is widely recognised as being of growing importance for innovation and international competitive advantage at the firm-level. According to a recent international survey, however, network and cluster development in Ireland remains limited compared with other advanced economies.

In its submission, the NCC has made a number of proposals designed to address this weakness.

- Firstly, there needs to be greater collaboration by IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland to identify and exploit opportunities for cluster development. This may require new coordination structures.
- Secondly, the Government should concentrate public funding for research in a number of niche sectors of strategic economic opportunity. Irish public research funding is currently spread too thinly across a wide range of government departments and agencies. Greater concentration should be co-ordinated by a new Cabinet Sub-Committee on Science and Technology, to be chaired by the Taoiseach or his nominee.
- Thirdly, the Government should commission a detailed review of the barriers to greater networking and collaboration between industry and the third level sector in research, which, despite numerous initiatives, remains at the levels reported over a decade ago.

According to Mr. Burgess, “Ireland’s small size means that we need to have greater focus in our efforts and resources, requiring greater co-ordination among the departments and agencies of government that support industry, including the third level sector.” This is not about “picking winners” among competing technologies and sectors, but about finding ways to reinforce existing industrial strengths and exploit emerging business opportunities.

Ends.