



Advisory Council for Science
Technology and Innovation
An Comhairle Eolaíochta



Advisory Science Council recommends need for greater competence in applied research

The Advisory Council for Science, Technology and Innovation today (Wednesday, 4 April 2007) released a report examining the relationship between enterprise and higher education in Ireland and identified key areas which need to be addressed to ensure Ireland remains at the forefront of international trends in research and innovation.

The report, **Promoting Enterprise-Higher Education Relationships**, benchmarked Ireland's performance in collaborative research against comparable countries, in order to understand the driving forces between the relationships and assess what changes are needed in critical areas influencing these relationships.

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Micheál Martin TD welcomed the report and work of the Advisory Science Council in contributing to the implementation and monitoring of the Government's Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI). "The Strategy recognises the importance of developing enterprise-higher education (HE) relationships in Ireland. Strong enterprise-HE relationships are beneficial to all parties. Companies, both large and small, can use the knowledge, expertise and facilities of the universities and institutes of technology to help build capability and technologies that will underpin future products and services."

Mary Cryan, Chairman of the Advisory Science Council said "innovation driven, research based economies have worked to develop strong collaborative relationships between enterprises and HE, and joint research programmes which promote direct collaboration are well established in comparable countries. To ensure that Ireland has the ability to compete internationally the Council recommends that the development of an applied research capability be prioritised under the SSTI. This will give companies, including SMEs, access to scientific and technological knowledge that they can apply to the development of products and processes, completing the 'concept to commercialisation' cycle."

The report found that while there have been some success to date higher education-enterprise collaboration operates at a very low level in Ireland and that structures in place to encourage and support the process have failed to achieve significant results. Collaboration is also more prevalent in the medium-large companies sector and there is a need to increase the number of SMEs undertaking collaborative research.

The Council identifies two key factors that are continuing to impede progress the development of the Enterprise-Higher Education sector - the low absorptive capacity of enterprises for research and a gap in the availability of applied research capability that enterprises can readily access.

Welcoming the report Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin TD said, "the recommendations of this Advisory Science Council report makes a very important contribution to the implementation of the Government's objectives for advancing research and development activity. With the enormous investment now underway in higher education research under the SSTI, it is essential that effective mechanisms are in place to ensure that research outcomes translate into real benefit for our enterprise sector. There

are already many very good examples of higher education-enterprise linkages in practice in Ireland and this report will assist all concerned in building further on these."

According to Dr Leonora Bishop, Chairperson of the Task Force responsible for the report, "in modern economies closer interaction between public knowledge institutions and enterprise is increasingly important. Increasing global competition forces companies to specialise and strengthen their core areas and by working with HE institutions companies gain access to both the latest technologies and new knowledge bases."

The SSTI has set out a range of initiatives to address the applied research gap and to build the absorptive capacity of firms. The report makes a number of recommendations, which will optimise the impact of the Strategy:

- A major new initiative is required to develop in-depth competence in applied research and new applied research groups in support of innovation in enterprises.
- Agencies need to work to strengthen the absorptive capacities of SMEs in relation to R&D, innovation, management capabilities and the use of external knowledge and advice.
- Development and research funding agencies to identify where collaboration would be most useful.
- Collaborative groups should be enterprise led and located on or close to existing third level campuses.
- Business and higher education representative bodies should establish fora to facilitate networking.
- Introduce competition based approaches of allocating public money to ensure the most appropriate knowledge partners participate in HE-enterprise joint projects.