

**SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND SCIENCE,**

**BATT O KEEFFE, T.D.**

**European University – Business Cooperation**

**Thematic Forum**

**New Skills for New Jobs – the Role of Higher Education  
Institutions and Business Cooperation**

**Grand Hotel, Malahide**

**11am, 22 October 2009**

**Good morning everyone. I would like to welcome you all, especially those who have travelled from abroad. And I would like to pay a particular welcome to the moderators and speakers. It is a diverse line-up that will provide for an interesting and fruitful discussion over the next two days.**

**The topic we have chosen for this forum – “new skills for new jobs” – is one that is now found at the heart of economic policy across Europe. We know that future jobs, investment and the strength of the European economy depend on the quality of our workforce and on our capacity for research and innovation. Our collective ambition for Europe to become the world’s leading knowledge-based economy can only be achieved through investment in our people. A well educated and well trained work**

**force that embraces knowledge, innovation and lifelong learning will be the very basis for our future competitiveness.**

**Last December, the Irish government published *“Building Ireland’s Smart Economy - A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal.”* That blueprint focused on key areas for action in securing our enterprise economy, promoting competitiveness and establishing Ireland as an innovation hub.**

**Our ambitions for Ireland’s ‘smart economy’ and ‘smart society’ will only be realised through the vision, originality, creativity and invention of our people. Education and training, and its relevance to the needs of individuals and employers, will be key in this regard.**

## **University – Business Cooperation**

**The Commission communication, “New Skills for New Jobs”, provides a strong basis for enhanced European co-operation in anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs. It recognises the need to not only upgrade skill levels, but to ensure that there is a better match between the supply of skills and the labour market demand.**

**Central to this is the concept of the knowledge triangle; the intersection between education, research and innovation – the key drivers of a knowledge-based society. And of course at the very essence of this is the relationship between higher education and business.**

**Close co-operation between our higher education institutions and business has benefits for all. It promotes the relevance and attractiveness of higher education programmes, provides business with the skilled people that it needs and provides assurances for graduates around the relevance and marketability of their skills.**

**That relationship is more important now than ever before as we seek to regain economic stability and ensure growth and sustainability for the future.**

### **Curriculum Development**

**With the advent of multiple careers, and a shift in focus from job security to employment security, a key challenge for higher education institutions is to provide graduates with broad, transferable knowledge and skills to equip them for a potential**

**variety of careers and sectors, and to enable them as lifelong learners. This was acknowledged by Ministers in the 2009 Bologna Leuven Communiqué.**

**The importance of this is underlined by a recent study which showed that employees now have on average between 10-14 jobs by the age of 38 and that the top 10 in-demand jobs in 2010 didn't exist in 2004.**

**Changing labour market needs and people's openness to career mobility emphasises that need for closer, continuous cooperation and partnership between higher education and business in shaping curricula and defining the skills and competences needed for the modern knowledge worker.**

## **Research & Development**

**Business must also be involved in devising and implementing research and innovation strategies to ensure commercialisation opportunities are maximised. In recent years, we have seen significant investment in research across Europe through the Framework Programmes and national initiatives. We also understand the imperative to maximise that investment by creating the means to turn a significant number of the ideas generated into commercialised products and services. And this is where the strength of partnership with enterprise and entrepreneurs comes to the fore.**

## **Initiatives in Ireland**

**The challenge for us now is to create new competitive strength for Ireland and for Europe in building stronger higher education-enterprise partnerships.**

**We are starting from a strong base in Ireland, where interaction between the worlds of business and higher education is a well established and well accepted concept. Our speakers today will no doubt provide us with many examples of good practice. There are some initiatives worth highlighting such as:**

- **The role of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs in developing a range of responses to labour market needs and in supporting the development of a National Skills Strategy.**

- **The significant responses of higher education institutions to the needs of people who are losing their jobs. Over the past number of months, I've announced some 7,000 up-skilling and re-training places in the further and higher education sectors to help workers who've lost their jobs to get back into the labour force. This includes provision specifically aimed at upskilling workers for jobs in the sectors of the economy considered key to driving economic growth: ICT, Engineering, Business and Energy.**
- **There are a range of initiatives supported under the Strategic Innovation Fund to enhance flexible and lifelong learning, and to encourage work-based learning as well as in the incorporation of**

**generic competencies into the undergraduate curriculum.**

- **We are restructuring the way we educate our PhD students to attune this more closely with the needs of industry.**
- **Centres for Science, Engineering and Technology and Strategic Research Clusters have been created within our institutions with the support of Science Foundation Ireland. These research groups are formally linked to over 300 multinational and small to medium high-tech enterprises. We are also establishing Competence Centres which are led by industry, resourced by highly qualified researchers associated with**

**research institutions and will undertake market focussed applied research.**

### **Conclusion**

**These are just some good practice Irish examples. I hope that this conference can allow other ideas to grow and to be shared. Skills are the engine room of the modern knowledge based economy. Supporting citizens to develop the knowledge, skills and competences they need to be active and successful participants in a smart society is a central objective of a higher education system. Strong communication and partnership between higher education and business is a critical element of achieving that. Our shared pursuit of a smart economy and society demands us all to accept this challenge and work together for the benefit of society as a whole.**

**ENDS**