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**Address by Minister of State for Research and Innovation
Seán Sherlock T.D.**

**Opening of European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)
Conference on 'Fostering Innovation and Strengthening Synergies
within the EU'**

Trinity College Dublin, 29 April 2013

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Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, I am delighted to welcome you to Dublin and to address you at the opening of the European Institute for Innovation and Technology conference on ***Fostering Innovation and Strengthening Synergies within the EU.*** This conference provides a wonderful opportunity for the EIT and the KICs to not alone showcase their achievements, but also for all of us to reflect on the potential impact of EIT and KIC activities on the innovation capacity of the EU.

It is fitting that the conference is being held in the Trinity Biomedical Sciences Institute, which is one of Ireland's flagship centres for research and innovation. Its strategic goal is to create an environment which promotes convergence, interdisciplinarity, and thematic strength in pre-clinical biomedical sciences and one where innovation can flourish – very much aligned with the fundamental mission of EIT.

I was particularly taken by the theme running through the plenary sessions today – “achieving and measuring impact”. This is a focus that must be at the centre of all our efforts as we develop new mechanisms, funding programmes and other supports to advance Europe's capacity for and capabilities in research and innovation. In times of restricted financial resources, we must make even greater efforts to ensure that available resources are achieving maximum impact and benefit for Europe and its citizens.

Presidency

Ireland's overarching priority during our Presidency of the Council of the European Union is to seek ways of supporting sustainable jobs and growth in Europe and of restoring economic stability and competitiveness to the European economy. An enduring focus on education, research and innovation will provide the fundamental bedrock for the European economy of the future, and these have therefore been placed at the centre of the Europe 2020 strategy to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

I don't need to convince any of you here today of the importance of this agenda. Europe is experiencing one of its most economic challenging periods. To meet these challenges we must ensure that our education systems are producing highly skilled graduates that have the breadth, depth and range of skills and knowledge appropriate to a 21st Century economy. We must promote entrepreneurial qualities, and we need to provide the right environment so that high quality research,

development and innovation can flourish and bear fruit. And above all, we must ensure that academia and researchers engage proactively with the enterprise community.

EIT

EIT and its unique approach to innovation, with its focus clearly on the integration of the knowledge triangle, presents a powerful potential to deliver a real step change in the EU innovation landscape. Close co-operation between the three parts of the knowledge triangle has benefits for all.

- It enhances the relevance and attractiveness of higher education programmes;
- it provides business with the skilled people that it needs and access to cutting edge research; and
- it provides graduates with assurances on the relevance and marketability of their skills.

Moreover, the bringing together of these key actors in the innovation chain, each bringing their own perspective and expertise to the table, provides a truly holistic approach to innovation and provides the platform for achieving real impact. It creates an environment where new ways of approaching and solving modern dilemmas can flourish.

Despite its relative youth, EIT has already proven itself as a highly successful model for fostering innovation. The three KICs are engaging in a wide range of activities that are resulting in real outputs be it: entrepreneurially-focused graduates; new products or services; new companies; enhanced processes are just some. The impact of KIC activities will continue to grow as the EIT matures, KICs further develop their working methods, and best practice approaches are disseminated across the Union. I know you will consider important issues tomorrow in relation to EIT's role within the broader EU innovation landscape, synergies with other instruments and initiatives, and EIT's engagement with stakeholders and regions. These will all be important features as EIT and KICs continue to grow and develop.

Ireland

From Ireland's perspective, our Programme for Government emphasises the role of knowledge and innovation as driving forces of economic productivity. A central part

of the Government's plan for jobs and growth is to ensure that research is better targeted at turning the good ideas of scientists into products and jobs.

As a Government, and as a system collectively, we are seeking to embed many of the traits and underpinning principles of the EIT approach in our national research and innovation system. Our research capabilities have been dramatically enhanced over the past decade, and as a country we have increased our international rankings in terms of the quality of our research. The focus now is on building critical mass across the system and ensuring real impact – a topic you will be examining today in detail in relation to EIT.

We are undertaking a major process of reform in our higher education system which will see the development of regional clusters of institutions, which will act as beacons for innovation in their region.

We have recently completed a major Research Prioritisation process, which recommended priority areas for future state research investments based on (1) the current expertise in our higher education institutions and (2) enterprise needs and opportunities. The fundamental pillars of this process were – delivering critical mass and ensuring impact. A robust monitoring process is now being put in place for all state investments in research.

We are lucky in Ireland that we already have a strong foundation of higher education and business working together. This is something we are continually seeking to enhance and grow, and is now a central feature of national funding programmes.

Ireland recently announced major funding support for world-class researchers in seven research centres. These centres will collaborate with a large range of enterprise partners, spanning large multi-nationals and SMEs. The underlying philosophy is the forging of deep and lasting alliances between industry and our research community and this represents Ireland's drive to better integrate the three sides of the knowledge triangle.

Horizon 2020

To conclude, I am looking forward to watching EIT's continued development over the coming years, to the establishment of new KICs and the further embedding of current activities and the expansion of the EIT philosophy and working methods across Europe.

As you will all be aware, proposals for the future development of EIT are currently under consideration in Brussels. The Irish Presidency is working hard, in cooperation with the European Parliament and the European Commission, to finalise the strategic Innovation agenda for EIT over the next 7 year period, as part of the broader package of Horizon 2020 proposals. I would like to thank both the Parliament and the Commission for their efforts in this regard.

This package of measures has the potential to make a real difference to Europe's competitiveness and innovation capacity.

The Irish Presidency will continue the Horizon 2020 negotiations against the background of a number of key principles, including : the paramount principle of excellence in research and innovation activities; the concept of widening participation in a broader sense, including fostering participation across member states and regions; and the overall importance of synergies between Horizon 2020 with other EU programmes.

Conclusion

I would like to thank in advance, all the speakers for their agreement to participate and provide us with their expert insights.

I would also like to congratulate the Governing Board of the EIT, its Chairman Alexander von Gabain, and its Director, José Manuel Leceta, for the work they are doing. And of course our host and Governing Board member – Patrick Prendergast. Finally, I would like to thank the staff of the EIT for organising the conference. I know it takes an enormous amount of work to make this happen.

I hope your stay in Dublin will be productive and enjoyable.

ENDS