

Business Women's Conference will put focus on the future

GEORGE Osborne's budget last week laid out a long-term vision towards building a resilient economy, and our organisation particularly welcomed the fact that the small business annual investment allowance will be doubled to \$500,000. Support for the SME sector is vital to driving economic growth and inspiring entrepreneurship.

Equally we were pleased to note the increased investment and policy improvement in childcare support for working parents. Better flexibility and assistance for working parents can help to unlock the full potential of a diverse workforce.

Encouragingly, the chancellor laid down a promise to support more apprenticeships for young people; to equip them with the skills they need to secure good jobs. Seeding empowerment and encouragement at a young age will help grow a future generation of entrepreneurs.

While the statement reassured us that we are in economic recovery, with an expected growth rate of 2.7 per cent predicted for 2014, it pointed towards key areas such as investment and exporting, which will remain vital to 'future proofing' that recovery.

With just 50 days to go until WIBNI's first International Business Women's Conference (IBWC 2014), the notion of 'future proofing' is in the forefront of our minds.

Our conference will bring business people together to look towards the future and examine how we can help create a new economy, one built around maximising potential, partnerships and opportunities for all.

Just as the budget sets out long-term plans for growth, our confer-



■ **IN BUSINESS:** Entrepreneur and US media personality Ingrid Vanderveldt, who will be speaking at the International Business Women's Conference in May

ence will encourage delegates to consider how they can have the best possible long-term impact in the future of their career, their community, their business and the economy.

Prevalent at the conference will be two of Women in Business NI's core themes – encouraging entrepreneurship and driving business growth.

Our opening keynote speaker on

Tuesday May 13 will be entrepreneur and well-known US media personality Ingrid Vanderveldt.

She has made "Empowering a Billion Women by 2020" her mission. By leveraging her business, policy and media initiatives, she strives to guide motivated women to success and help make their visions a reality by providing the tools, technology,

and resources they need to do so.

Ingrid is the entrepreneur-in-residence for Dell, and in this role helps entrepreneurs worldwide build and grow their companies. Her presence at our event will seek to inspire and motivate entrepreneurs to do just that.

On Wednesday May 14, closing keynote speaker Anna Lise Kjaer,

founder of trend forecasting agency Kjaer Global, will address IBWC 2014. She is an expert in futures studies and consumer mindsets and having worked with major corporations such as Sony, Nokia, Swarovski, IKEA, Gap and Toyota, she will explore "The New Economy 2035: 4Ps: People, Planet, Purpose and then Profit" – a fascinating insight into the trends and issues that must be considered in future proofing our businesses.

Against the backdrop of a recovering economy, looking towards the future need not be a daunting task. For WIBNI, the most salient points made in the budget statement were those relating to investment in the workforce – in encouraging, supporting and driving the potential of the individual.

Whilst we, as business people, are well honed in forecasting and projecting, it's worth considering how much are you planning to invest in yourself and your people this financial year? Without budgeting for this most valuable resource, no business can be future proof.

You can find out more about the International Business Women's Conference 2014 at www.ibwc2014.com or @IBWC2014

■ **Roseann Kelly** (roseann@womeninbusinessni.com) is chief executive of Women in Business (www.womeninbusinessni.com), the largest and fastest growing business network for female entrepreneurs and senior women in management in Northern Ireland with more than 1,000 members. Follow Women in Business NI on facebook at www.facebook.com/womeninbusinessni or on twitter @wibni.