

Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation of I : Innovative SMEs key to growth and job creation - Sherlock

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Under the auspices of Ireland's Presidency of the EU Council, the EURO-SME 2013 Conference was officially opened in Dublin Castle today (Tuesday) by Minister for Research and Innovation Seán Sherlock TD. Organised by Enterprise Ireland, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, and the European Commission, this high-level conference will take a closer look at what it takes to be a thriving entrepreneur in the 21st century, how small companies can compete effectively in an increasingly globalised world and how they can gain maximum benefit from both existing and future public and private support mechanisms.

A key aspect of the conference will be its spotlight on Horizon 2020, the EU's upcoming Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. EURO-SME 2013 also provides an opportunity to help entrepreneurs influence and shape the EU's Innovation agenda. The hundreds of entrepreneurs, policy makers, public and private SME support organizations and other intermediary bodies will all share ideas on how to improve the EU eco-system for innovative enterprises. The conference will also introduce SME-specific measures within Horizon 2020 to this community.

In his opening address to the conference, Minister Sherlock said: "Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the engines of economic growth, the backbone of the Irish economy and the principal sources of new employment. By increasing their ability to innovate, we will drive job creation and economic growth. That is why Ireland has championed an increase in the target for SME participation in Horizon 2020, the EU's research and innovation programme, from 15% to 20%. I am hopeful the Irish Presidency can achieve our target of gaining political agreement on Horizon 2020 during June. This programme can play a decisive role for jobs and growth and help create the European economy of the future. The programme seeks to secure major investment in key enabling technologies, bridging the gap between research and the market and promoting real commercial partnerships between Member States and the private sector".

'In the current economic conditions, the main challenge for the EU - and many other developed countries for that matter - is providing the conditions for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth,' says Dr Imelda Lambkin, National Director for FP7 at Enterprise Ireland. 'Sustainable, long-term growth and job creation will be

delivered best through SMEs that gain and sustain their competitive advantage through innovation. SMEs are the core of business activity in Europe and they need to exploit current trends to their advantage,' says Dr Lambkin. 'Innovation in all its aspects is the key to sustainability. So, promoting SME growth through innovation and entrepreneurship should be done at every opportunity'.

High profile expert speakers include Anne Lise Kjaer, a leading global futurist, Keary Crawford, co-founder of The Growth Strategy Company and Wim Vanhaverbeke, co-author of 'How Smaller Companies Can Benefit from Open Innovation'.

Anne Lise delivers out-of-the-box thinking and facilitates a new understanding for SMEs of the consumer of the future through thought-provoking thinking. Keary will look at Growth Thinking, The New Blueprint for SME growth and Wim will discuss Small and Open Innovation for SMEs.

Previous EURO-SME conferences and many of the recommendations coming out of them have contributed to reshape the EU's policy landscape when it comes to innovation in SMEs.

For further information on the conference or to see the full conference programme, go to <http://eurosme2013.eu>

For further comment or to arrange an interview, please contact:

Marc Kelly / Ciara Clogher