

Irish Academy of Engineering Innovation Council – A Proposal

Introduction

In earlier papers, the Irish Academy of Engineering (IAE) highlighted the importance of innovation (*Innovating for Growth - Improving Ireland's Innovation Ecosystem July 2019*) and the case for an innovation Council (*The Case for an All-Island Innovation Council Nov 2020*). This paper looks at establishing a council.

With a relatively high cost base, Irish companies, North and South, cannot compete on the basis of cost alone. They must compete on the basis of value and differentiation. They must provide innovative products and services that meet the needs of customers and markets in a superior way. To create competitive sustainable enterprises we should raise the internationalisation of indigenous firms, increase the rate and innovation intensity of startups and raise the skills levels of the workforce.

Ireland should seek to brand itself as an **Innovation Island**; an island that differentiates itself as the innovation leader. We should seize the opportunity of time and geography to develop unique connections to Europe and the UK and to leverage our strong links to highly innovative US companies.

We believe that the creation of Innovation Councils will accelerate the move to becoming an 'innovation leader' and will keep a focus on the urgent need to improve productivity and innovation performance on the Island. The island of Ireland has an opportunity to capitalise on the work of Science Foundation Ireland on '*achieving impact from excellence*' and the initiatives of the Royal Society on '*transforming translation*'.

Innovation Councils can provide independent mechanisms to provide expert policy advice to governments and can ensure a long term approach to developing the appropriate ecosystem.

To achieve maximum impact and differentiation the IAE, as an all island body, is recommending that we adopt an all island approach.

Scope

The innovation councils should adopt a holistic approach to the formulation and evolution of policy.

Structure

We should adopt an approach that achieves optimum synergies and international impact while recognising that there are two distinct governments involved. A starting point might be

separate councils North and South with similar strategies and structures with both being coordinated by an All Island Council (with membership drawn partly from the two).

It is important that the councils are independent with members drawn from industry, academia and the public service. The virtual experience of 2020/2021 opens up the possibility to harness an innovation diaspora as contributors to the work of the councils.

It is proposed that the Innovation Councils should meet quarterly and publish an annual report.

The All Island Innovation Council should meet twice a year and play an oversight role evaluating progress, removing barriers and looking to maximise synergies and create international awareness for the Innovation Island. It is suggested that InterTrade Ireland, the Irish Academy of Engineering and the Royal Academy of Engineering should play a central role in the governance of this council.

Further discussion and consultation is required on the functions of an Innovation Council. In its paper on *Fostering Innovation in Irish Innovation Policy* (https://publicpolicy.ie/downloads/perspectives/2020/fostering_innovation_in_irish_innovation_policy.pdf) the UCD Centre for Innovation, Technology and Organisation (CITO) suggests that the functions of an Innovation Council should include:

- Advising Government on policy for science, technology and innovation
- Promoting public and private investment in research and development
- Encouraging a co-ordinated application of innovation in all aspects of society
- Ensuring that public policy for science, technology and innovation addresses all
- key elements of the innovation system.

Councils should have the necessary financial resources and suitably qualified personnel. The model of autonomy and resourcing that existed for the successful Irish Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (ICTSI) is worth revisiting.

Proposal

The proposal is that the IAE should actively promote the concept of Innovation Councils in Ireland and should engage with appropriate bodies to define the scope, resourcing, structure and timing.

Next Steps

- Seek approval for the approach from the Enterprise, Innovation & Education Standing Committee.

- Present the proposal to the IAE Council.

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