

# Promoting the all-island business agenda



## About the JBC

The Joint Business Council is a partnership of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), formed in 1991. Its mission is 'to be the voice of business on the island of Ireland working in collaboration with its members and strategic partners to sustain and develop economic co-operation and advance international competitiveness'.

Economic priorities and the needs of companies have changed significantly from when the JBC was established and, over time, the role of the JBC has evolved in line with these changing priorities. The current role of the JBC is as follows:

- Providing a single business voice for the island of Ireland in policy formation;
- Providing a challenge function to public sector policy, including government and state agencies, where there is an all-island dimension of interest to both business communities;
- Providing a high level all island business network and acting as a bridge to greater mutual understanding and as a means of increasing North-South business flows;
- Providing strategic leadership around

Reg McCabe, Chief Executive of the IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council (JBC) examines the role of the JBC and some of the work it has been involved in since its formation in 1991.

global business and competitiveness issues from an all-island perspective;

- Deepening the JBC remit beyond the east coast corridor and also building on JBC work to date on strengthening the East-West dimension;
- Facilitating mutual understanding and development of partnerships between SMEs north and south.

The JBC work programme is part-financed by the European Union's Regional Development Fund and through INTERREG IVA cross-border programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

## Work of the JBC

The work of the JBC is centred across a number of core areas:

- People (including skills, training and education, employment, social cohesion and labour mobility);
- Infrastructure (including infrastructure accessibility, logistics, supply chain enhancement of the environment, energy and telecommunications);
- Innovation and entrepreneurship (including innovation, technology, entrepreneurship (including social entrepreneurship) and research and development;

The three JBC themes of people, infrastructure and innovation are complemented by a cross cutting theme of partnership and network development. As well as providing linkages to IBEC's regional office network, other JBC sector partners in Ireland include Chambers Ireland, the Construction Industry Federation, the Irish Management Institute, the Irish Road Haulage Association and the Irish Exporters Association.

## JBC initiatives Education

During spring 2009 the JBC organised a forum in Queen's University, Belfast, where business leaders from north and south met senior officials from the two education departments and called for coordinated action on education to boost the all-island economy. Speaking at the forum, CBI Northern Ireland Chairman Brian Ambrose said that it is very important that business on the island contributes in a constructive way to the development of a business and enterprise-friendly curriculum. In parallel, the enterprise sector can assist educationalists by supporting the roll-out of leading edge ICT technologies. The forum also addressed the need for a competitive international benchmarking exercise for key business sectors north and south.

## Co-operation with Scotland

At the end of 2008 a JBC delegation met with Scottish partners in Edinburgh, hosted by the Irish Consul General to Scotland, Cliona Manahan. The meeting provided an opportunity for engagement on wider trade and economic cooperation opportunities. JBC recognises the potential for greater coordination between Ireland-Northern Ireland and Scotland in the areas of transport, energy, R&D on renewable energies, universities and entrepreneurship. The JBC is currently engaged with Enterprise Ireland, Scotland on identifying appropriate issues that can serve to progress the business cooperation agenda across the three regions.



Pictured at the JBC meeting at Queen's are Brian Ambrose, Chairman, CBI Northern Ireland; Alastair Hamilton, Chief Executive, Invest Northern Ireland and Reg McCabe, JBC Chief Executive.

## All-island electricity policy statement

The JBC has developed an all-island electricity policy statement which places particular emphasis on energy competitiveness as a key long-term priority for the all-island economy. Actions identified by the JBC to remove log-jams to the delivery of targets, while at the same time achieving and maintaining competitiveness include:

- Ensuring the island's competitiveness is enhanced, while decarbonising its economies;
- Developing the grid on an all-island basis;

- Ensuring planning alignment and effectiveness;
- Creating market certainty for investors and consumers;
- Establishing a medium and long-term strategy and associated road-map for the evolution of the island's energy market;
- Targeting initiatives that decarbonise Ireland's economy.

The all-island electricity policy statement will be sent to relevant government departments and ministers and used as a basis for engaging with policy-makers.

## Roads infrastructure

The JBC made a presentation to IBEC's North West Regional Executive in December 2008, at which it was agreed to target the cross-border N16-A4 Enniskillen corridor as a development priority. A number of prominent companies from the region have committed to supporting this lobby effort. The JBC presentation was based on a joint consultancy study by Sligo County Council and Fermanagh District Council which was published in 2008 and which looked at prospects for upgrading the route from a cost benefit and economic perspective. JBC and IBEC North West Region are currently arranging a cross border workshop which will deal with the status of cross border roads in the North West. This event will take place following the local elections.

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Reg McCabe, Chief Executive, JBC with Northern Ireland Minister for Regional Development, Conor Murphy, MP, MLA at the annual all-island Transport Ireland conference which was supported by the JBC.