

**IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council and Universities Ireland Press Release**  
**For immediate release: Tuesday, 16 February 2010**

- **Call on Minister Empey to support All-island Graduate Talent Acceleration Programme with Universities and Industry**
- **Urgent need for Governments to address obstacles to cross border mobility of undergraduates**

At a meeting held in Stormont today a delegation representing IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council (JBC) and Universities Ireland (UI), urged Minister for Employment and Learning, Sir Reg Empey to support the introduction of an innovative cross-border Talent Acceleration Programme for graduates. The programme's objective is to provide outstanding students with the opportunity to avail of education opportunities in the other jurisdiction, an objective which can be achieved at low cost with support and endorsement from the two Governments.

For the past five years the Joint Business Council and Universities Ireland have been running an innovative scholarship scheme which has seen 20 high-achieving graduates from Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland crossing the border to undertake Masters and PhDs in the other Irish jurisdiction. This year, for the first time, the scheme will incorporate a job placement opportunity with a sponsoring firm, to be managed by IBEC's Export Orientation Programme, the Republic's longest-running and most successful graduate placement programme.

Paula O'Dwyer, Projects Manager of the JBC said: "The inclusion of a graduate placement opportunity will boost the pool of highly educated graduates on the island of Ireland by supporting education provision and also through provision of positive work experience. This unique combination can deliver value for graduates, for companies and for the island economy in the current environment where talent uptake opportunities are very limited".

JBC and UI also raised concerns with Minister Empey in relation to the very low numbers of students registering for undergraduates courses in the other jurisdiction.

Enrolment figures indicate that Northern students represent only 1% of the Republic's undergraduate population while the corresponding figure for Southern students in Northern Ireland is just 3.5%. As a result there is very limited cross-fertilisation in terms of education opportunity taking place between the two jurisdictions.

Andy Pollak, Secretary of Universities Ireland said: "Entry requirements for A-Level students attending Republic of Ireland universities can be significantly higher than for Leaving Certificate students. The JBC and UI urge the Department for Employment and Learning and the Irish Department of Education and Science to undertake an assessment of these requirements to ensure that students from one jurisdiction are not being placed at a disadvantage relative to students from the other jurisdiction".

Hugh Crossey, Chairman of the JBC Steering Committee said: "Differential fee structures between universities in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland may also contribute to creating obstacles to cross-border mobility. It is important therefore, that fee structures on both sides of the border do not exacerbate this".

"Equity and equality of cross-border university access should underpin the future policy decisions on fee structures in both jurisdictions", he said.

## **ENDS**

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## **Note to Editors:**

Universities Ireland promotes cooperation and collaboration between the two universities in Northern Ireland – Queens University Belfast and University of Ulster – and the seven universities in the Republic of Ireland: Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin, Dublin City University, University College Cork, National University of Ireland Galway, National University of Ireland Maynooth and University of Limerick.

The Export Orientation Programme (EOP) is the Republic of Ireland's longest-running and most successful graduate placement programme. It provides recent graduates with a valuable introduction to exporting and international business and to develop practical skills and to gain hands-on experience in a fast-moving business environment. Since 1983 more than 2000 graduates have successfully completed the EOP programme, and with retention rates in excess of 88%, EOP's have used their experience to launch highly successful careers across all sectors of industry and sponsor companies have experienced an exponential rise in their export revenues.