

PRESS RELEASE

Expert Group Calls for Focus on Skills Needs of the Biopharma-Pharmachem Sector

(Monday, 15 November 2010) A new report from the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, published by Forfás today, finds that an appropriately skilled workforce will be critical for the Irish biopharma-pharmachem sector to meet the significant challenges it faces. Patent expiries coupled with global consolidation are changing the face of the industry. The study finds that while some job losses are inevitable in the pharmachem sector, these are likely to be balanced by job gains between 2010 and 2015. Additional jobs are forecast in the biopharma sector and in new activities for pharmachem companies, including higher value added activities such as process and product development, and services such as supply-chain management and corporate services. The study concludes that if the industry succeeds in transforming to these new activities, employment in the next five years is likely to hold firm. The report also identifies a number of skills challenges and makes recommendations on how they might be addressed to ensure the industry's future success.

Launching the report, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation, Batt O'Keeffe T.D. emphasised the importance of the sector to the Irish economy, commenting: "The pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical industry is one of our most strategically important sectors, employing more than 25,000 people directly, with a further 24,000 people employed in wider support to the sector."

"This industry exported goods to the value of €42 billion in 2009, representing 50% of total goods exported from Ireland. In a rapidly changing environment, we must ensure that those working in the sector are continually upskilled and those joining the industry are equipped with the appropriate skills to drive the industry's development."

"This will enable companies and employees to seize the opportunities the industry presents and to remain a leading location for the development, manufacturing and supply of biopharma-pharmachem products."

Martin Shanahan, Chief Executive, Forfás, said: "The study is the result of extensive research and consultation with industry, government departments, state agencies and the education and training sector in Ireland and other international locations where the sector is particularly successful. It identifies the main drivers of change, skills challenges and opportunities in the industry. Cost pressures; patent expiries; a shrinking research pipeline; an increasingly global market; biotechnology; technological advances and converging technologies; increasing and changing regulation; and global consolidation are considered to be the main change drivers. These contribute to a number of skills challenges in the areas of commercial acumen and leadership, science and technology, operational excellence, and blended and converging skills."

Una Halligan, Chairperson, EGFSN, commented: "Our research points particularly to the importance of industry-academia collaboration. This is an industry that is undergoing change and programmes provided by our education and training institutes will have to reflect that change. The international study visits we conducted showed that in North Carolina, Singapore and Switzerland

there was strong industry-academia collaboration, which plays a critical role in ensuring that graduates are equipped with skills required by industry. In contrast, many links between industry and academia in Ireland are informal and rely on individuals rather than formal structures and processes which is not sustainable. We are therefore recommending a number of actions to improve that collaboration.

“We also found that in these locations, student work placements are considered to be a critical part of biopharma-pharmachem third level programmes, and key to the employability of graduates. In Ireland, there are still large numbers of third level students in this discipline who do not have access to a work placement, and who are at a disadvantage in terms of their employability. This study recommends a placement of at least 6-9 months duration for all third level biopharma-pharmachem related courses.”

The report also recommends the development of structured postgraduate programmes that would include taught courses as an integral part of the programme, dedicated research and training to address the strategic development of the pharmachem sector, and an operative upskilling programme.

“Prompt implementation of this report’s recommendations will help ensure that the biopharma-pharmachem sector is equipped with a high calibre workforce that will position the industry to develop in the future,” concluded Una Halligan.

The full report, *Future Skills Requirements of the Biopharma-pharmachem Sector* is available to at www.skillsireland.ie and www.forfas.ie

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