

Second-Friday Lecture Series

11th February 2005

**Address by Mr. Michael Ahern T.D.,
Minister for Trade and Commerce
at the launch of “the Second-Friday” Lecture Series
On Intellectual Property
Forfás, Wilton Park House,
Friday, 11 February 2005
09h00**



Mr. Michael Ahern T.D., Minister for Trade and Commerce at the launch of the “Second-Friday” Lecture Series on Intellectual Property.



Left to right:

*Ms Helena Acheson, Manager, Competitiveness and Innovation Division, Forfás,
Mr. Michael Ahern T.D., Minister for Trade and Commerce,*

Ms Yvonne McNamara – Chairperson, Licensing Executives Society,

Mr Seamus Bannon – Manager, Trade and Innovation Department, Forfás

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to address this formal launch of “the Second Friday” Lecture Series on Intellectual Property and its exploitation in the Irish research and entrepreneurial environment. It is important that more of us know how best to manage Intellectual Property. The knowledge-based economy requires a far wider understanding of the competitive issues around innovation, how it is produced and the legal/financial rules for using it. This need is greatest for people in commercial, academic and policy fields dealing with innovation.

We have seen how Ireland has developed over the past decade. Compared with other countries and earlier years, the pace of that development has been rapid.

Our experience in this regard has not been unique, however. Rapid change is evident in many parts of the world ; think, for

example, of the changes taking place in countries such as China. The globalized economy puts new challenges before us to ensure the future wealth of our small, open economy. We need to be more competitive than the best countries and then to stay ahead of them. Given the wide consensus, which I share, that the way ahead for Ireland is a knowledge-based economy and society, it is vital that we come to grips quickly and effectively with intellectual property issues.

‘Intellectual property’ – or knowledge developed by and, most importantly, owned by, people is the lifeblood of a society based on knowledge. Fail to create knowledge, to secure access to it, to protect it or – of course, to use it and we will suffer as a result. The world has other countries, firms and communities who will succeed. By the same token, if we succeed in fields like this – and continue to do so, ahead of our competitors, IP can provide the basis for our continued success.

I am optimistic that we are rising, and will continue to rise, to this challenge but we have to act on many fronts to ensure this.

Government, business and community all have roles to play in this effort. The Government role requires sustained action across a range of policy fields. In the case of my own Department, this includes legislating for the intellectual property context, providing the best service possible through the Patents Office to developers and owners of intellectual property and –as we see in today’s initiative –supporting the diffusion of wider know-how and use of IP by business.

The European Union and other international bodies play an important role in addressing the policy and legal environment for IP in Ireland and elsewhere.

The EU Lisbon Strategy of 2000 set out to make the EU –and I quote –“*the most dynamic and competitive knowledge- based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment*”. The Commissions recent mid – term review on the results to date points to individual Member States making some real gains but also to a lack of consistent success across the range of issues. It proposes to refocus the Lisbon Strategy on actions to promote growth and employment.

There have also been various national policy reviews and inputs in recent months to inform and improve our efforts towards the new economy. The *Enterprise Strategy Group Report* presented its analysis of enterprise performance and identified steps needed to underpin the move to a new phase of enterprise development.

The “*Innovate Market Sell- Review of the Sales, Marketing and Innovation Capabilities of Irish Exporting SMEs*” which I launched last November pointed to the importance of improved innovation, marketing and sales for exports by SME’s.

The “*National Code of Practice for Managing Intellectual Property from Publicly Funded Research*”, published by ICSTI and, perhaps - the most directly relevant to you here today, is another important element. All of these point to the need for active steps to transform to an innovation-driven knowledge economy.

In regulatory terms, EU Member States like Ireland already have well developed codes of intellectual property law but factors like technological change - if not the Commission’s efforts to complete the internal market, mean that there are always needs to change that code.

Arising largely but not exclusively from European Union and our other international commitments, I have an ambitious regulatory development programme on hand.

This year, for example, I hope that the Patents (Amendment) Bill currently before the Dáil will enact updates needed in the current Patents Act, to bring Irish law into line with the revised European Patents Convention. I expect to secure the agreement of the Oireachtas to the Bill later this year. In the copyright area, my Department is developing proposals to transpose into Irish law the European Community Directives on Artists' Resale Right, and to introduce a Public Lending Right into Irish law. These will create new forms of intellectual property rights in this country. Again, the recent Directive on the Enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights - agreed during our recent European Union Presidency may require further adjustments to be brought into Irish law. I expect to see strong progress towards the enactment of the necessary legislation in the copyright and enforcement areas during the course of this year.

The important point, Ladies and Gentlemen, - whether we look at the policy, regulatory, customer service or shared learning aspects of the work is that we need to be pro-active when it comes to our future.

It is very much in that spirit that I welcome these “Second-Friday” lectures organised jointly by Forfás and the Licensing Executives Society (LES). They provide a welcome and important means of explaining changes that business can make to meet the challenges. The lecture topics range from the practical aspects of using licensing to exploit innovation through technology transfer, through to the use of tax efficient corporate structures in obtaining the return from innovation. There are also two talks specifically directed to the two areas of technology-biotech and ICT- where Science Foundation Ireland is focusing its support.

I compliment the LES for its initiative and thank Martin Cronin and Forfás for giving its support. I hope that the lecture messages are spread and acted upon as widely and as soon as possible. I know that a new website has been set up for the purpose of making all the documentation available to a wider audience and I wish LES every success with this.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.

