

FOSTERING INNOVATION AND ENTERPRISE

ENTERPRISE IRELAND'S CAMPUS INCUBATION PROGRAMME CULTIVATES AN ENTREPRENEURIAL CULTURE. GRÁINNE NÍ UID EXPLAINS.

As a nation, we rely on our ability to innovate in order to drive forward our economic growth and international competitiveness. The promotion of such innovation is one of the core objectives of Enterprise Ireland. The Campus Incubation Programme has been established to exploit the full potential of the many innovative business ideas created by the groundbreaking research being undertaken at third level institutions throughout the country.

By supporting such centres of research excellence, Enterprise Ireland aims to foster innovation by facilitating the development of these potential research ideas into viable commercial realities.

FUNDING

Under the programme, we have, to date, invested over €46m in campus business incubation activity. This covers 19 incubation centres, 16 of which are based in Institutes of Technology or equivalent third level colleges and three are located in Universities (DCU Invent Centre, UCD Nova Centre and NUI Galway).

Enterprise Ireland has also supported six specialist Bio-incubation facilities on University campuses. The bulk of the funding, €38m, is directed towards the incubators in Institutes of Technology, which is provided under the National Development Plan, 2000-2006, and part-financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

GETTING STARTED

According to Gráinne Ní Uid, who manages Enterprise Ireland's Campus Incubation Programme, incubation space is an essential complement to the very significant public investment in scientific research in Ireland. "Incubators provide an essential transitional space between the research and business worlds, in which the commercial potential of the scientific



research undertaken in our third level institutions can be maximised."

Companies applying to use the centres include those involved in manufacture, software, communication technologies, biotechnology, biomedical and digital media.

"All the new businesses locating within the incubation centres would have some link with the actual institution itself. Either the entrepreneurs themselves are graduates or academics seeking to commercialise their research or the start-up is seeking to hire graduates," advises Ní Uid.

START-UP SUPPORT

Locating within a business incubation centre can also greatly improve the survival and growth prospects of start-up campus companies, where start-ups can avail of a range of supports in addition to the actual physical space required to establish and grow the business. Enterprise Ireland provides funding for the building and, in the case of Institute of Technology centres, gives support towards a manager for each centre. That manager will then be available as a resource to help the tenant companies through all the challenges in the set-up stages. This assistance extends from helping the company to develop its business plan, to identifying and accessing the necessary support, right down to looking after finances.

At present, the incubation programme provides support for about 70 companies employing about 250 people, although this is a figure that changes. "The aim is to provide support to start-ups in the crucial early stages and bring them to the point where they are well established and can operate independently. The company should then be ready to move on to a location outside the campus, thus making way for the next start-up," explains Ní Uid. The usual contract for companies in the incubation centres is two years and nine months.

GROWTH PROSPECTS

"Experience has shown that incubators in third level institutions throughout Ireland can generate a seedbed of innovative knowledge intensive enterprises, with the potential to grow rapidly, export internationally and provide sustainable high value employment in their home location. The Campus Incubation Programme plays a fundamental role in ensuring that the potential from this seedbed is exploited to the full," Ní Uid concludes. **ie**

Gráinne Ní Uid, Manager of EI's Campus Incubation Programme.

Incubation space provides an essential transitional space between the research and business worlds, in which the commercial potential of the scientific research undertaken in our third level institutions can be maximised. For more information contact your local Enterprise Ireland Regional Office.



TRANSITIONAL SPACE BETWEEN THE RESEARCH AND BUSINESS WORLDS



↑ Gráinne Ní Uid, Manager Enterprise Ireland's Campus Incubation Programme

SUCCESS STORIES

TABLANE TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATION IN BUSINESS CENTRE (IIBC), CASTLEBAR

"We moved into the new Innovation Centre in March this year and, since then, the facility has been ideal for our purposes. Although we are still in the early start-up phase with our business projects, we are confident that we will be expanding in the autumn. In so doing, we hope we'll be doing our bit to create opportunities for people locally to get involved in some exciting new technologies."

Julian Ellison, Principal

Tablane Technology is a start-up Internet technology company dedicated to enabling people to gather, organise and share content from the Internet more efficiently. The company is one of four high potential start-ups that have joined the Innovation in Business Centre (IIBC) at the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GIT) Castlebar campus, since the centre officially opened for business in March 2006.

T5 PROCESS SOLUTIONS, MIDLANDS INNOVATION AND RESEARCH CENTRE

"As a start up company, the Midlands Innovation and Research Centre provides us with state-of-the-art facilities and a comprehensive business support programme, while Athlone Institute of Technology provides a ready-made research capability for the development of our technology."

Joe Temple, CEO.

T5 Process Solutions are developers of specialist control software for demanding process industries. The company is currently working with the Applied Software Research Centre at Athlone Institute of Technology, under Enterprise Ireland's Innovation Partnership Programme, on the development of its Thermal Remote and Intelligent Management System for manufacturing processes.