

Space agency may set up Irish training centre

By Adrian Weckler

The European Space Agency (ESA) is considering setting up a training centre in Ireland, according to a space industry expert.

"At present, Ireland has the only recognised space skills training facility in Europe," said Danny Gleeson, network

promoter of Space Industry Skillnet (SIS), an Irish state-funded seminar series.

"The European Space Agency has had a good look at what we do and how we do it. We get people from Nasa and the ESA coming over to take part."

Gleeson said that the ESA was making a decision on establishing a formal skills training centre. "If they decide to do

it, we are very much in the running because of our experience," he said. A spokesman for the ESA did not return calls on the issue.

SIS gives seminars on safety, space technology and management skills. Once completed, participants receive an SIS certificate which, according to Gleeson, is favoured by major space agencies.

"The European Space

Agency likes companies bidding for contracts to have this certification," said Gleeson. "Because the organisation is partly political, it helps to know the language and thinking of the organisation."

Gleeson said that the last SIS training seminar was in Athlone, with an Irish venue yet to be fixed for its 2008 seminar. He said that the Irish government wanted to increase its

annual €15 million contribution to the ESA.

The annual ESA budget is €3 billion, €400 million is allocated to technology, research and development. Gleeson said that Irish firms were often not recouping the full value of these contracts.

Gleeson is also the managing director of G&L Technologies, an Athlone-based space consultancy.