I am delighted to have been given the opportunity to address this Irish EU Presidency Associated Conference on Accessing Horizon 2020. The Conference was officially designated as a Presidency associated event as it is very much in line with our Presidency priorities for research and innovation.

**Horizon 2020**

The key research and innovation priorities during the Irish Presidency are to achieve political agreement on the Horizon 2020 Programme - the next European Research Framework programme due to commence in 2014, and to make further progress on the achievement of the European Research Area.

We have been working hard with the Member States, the European Commission and the European Parliament to finalise agreement on Horizon 2020 during our Presidency and this work will continue right to the end of June. It is a very complex process to reconcile the various interests of all the parties involved. However, I welcome the shared commitment among all the parties concerned in advancing these negotiations. It is vital that we demonstrate to the citizens of the European Union that we are representing their interests efficiently and effectively. And it is essential, therefore, that we make progress as speedily as possible to ensure that there will be sufficient time to give effect to the necessary legislative procedures to implement Horizon 2020 from the start of 2014.
An important feature, indeed an important innovation, of Horizon 2020 is the focus on addressing the major societal challenges - major concerns shared by citizens in Europe and elsewhere. A challenge-based approach will bring together resources and knowledge across different fields, technologies and disciplines, including social sciences and the humanities, to help address issues such as climate change, developing sustainable transport and mobility, making renewable energy more affordable, ensuring food safety and security, and coping with the challenge of an ageing population. Research in these areas offers enormous opportunities for European citizens and for you as researchers and entrepreneurs. The scale of the budget for Horizon 2020, some €70bn, is testament to the importance attached to continuing to invest in Europe’s science base.

Science, Technology and Innovation Policy

In Ireland, the policy of investing in our science base has had a very positive impact on our industrial development and highlights how research, development and innovation contribute significantly to job creation and economic prosperity.

It has been based on an ambitious two-pronged strategy of investing in people, infrastructure and associated facilities to build the science base across many areas of scientific research in both our higher education institutions and other public research organisations; and direct support to the enterprise sector to help individual companies to build their capacity for research and development.

This investment in scientific excellence has, and continues to have, many positive impacts including powering an innovative and enterprising economy, creating high-value jobs, attracting, developing and nurturing business, scientists and talented people, and ensuring Ireland is connected and respected internationally.

The Government intends to build on this success. We are keeping science centre stage by ensuring that it delivers for the economy and society.

We draw much encouragement from the fact that Ireland has enhanced its standing in global research by steadily building a very credible research base, particularly over the past decade and more. Our publication rates have doubled, for example, with Ireland’s citation rates now surpassing US and EU averages.

Government budget appropriations and outlays on research and development increased from €504 million in 2002 to €823 million in 2011.

Moreover, 3,200 new scientific posts have been created in our Third Level Institutions in this time, which are now more aligned to industry needs, and, in parallel, Business Expenditure on R&D has increased significantly.
The Government’s strategy is to accelerate the economic and societal return on our science, technology and innovation investment, to further strengthen enterprise engagement and take-up of public research and to drive commercialisation.

In recent years it has been a very challenging task to try to maintain support for research and innovation in the face of a severe economic crisis. Many people might think that this type of investment is a luxury that Ireland cannot afford. In contrast, the Irish Government firmly believes that investment in Research and Innovation is a critical part of our economic recovery.

**Role of Agencies North and South**

I would like to take the opportunity today to recognise the role played by two Agencies, in particular, in promoting and maximising the participation of researchers from this island in FP7.

I am very pleased to see that over the years InterTradeIreland has proven its ability to adapt to changing economic demands and align its activities with the policies of Governments in both jurisdictions. This nimbleness has meant that, in recent years, Innovation has become a key focus for the Body’s work.

Since 2011, InterTradeIreland has devoted specialist resources specifically to increase collaborative participation in FP7. It has also co-ordinated a group which brings together the key players from relevant Government Departments and agencies to investigate practical actions towards such collaboration. It has been shown that joint North/South research proposals have a significantly better chance of securing funding under FP7 than individual proposals from either jurisdiction on the island. And the added bonus of this collaborative approach is that we can offer other interested parties a ready-made partnership comprising two Member States should they wish to form a consortium and apply for EU research funding.

Complimentary to this approach by InterTradeIreland, Enterprise Ireland, who operate the National Support Office for FP, has led an all-island approach by the relevant agencies in the South to promote FP7 and support the participation of companies and research organisations to provide significant competitive advantage for the island of Ireland. The aim is to focus on areas and instruments that present opportunities for cross-border collaborations, including opportunities to exploit existing and future sectoral networks particularly through the cooperation research programme in FP7.
The National Support Office aims to continue this approach for Horizon 2020.

- Promotional events organised by Enterprise Ireland and the Horizon 2020 National Support Office will be routinely open to the participation of Northern companies and delegates.
- The National Director for Horizon 2020 will invite the Northern Ireland Coordinator for Horizon 2020 to ALL meetings of the Horizon 2020 network and will ensure the establishment of operational linkages with National Contact Points in areas of mutual interest.
- Enterprise Ireland also participates in the Brussels-based network which facilitates information exchange and co-operation between members and their national research systems and the European institutions on issues related to EU research programmes. Interactions between Enterprise Ireland and relevant Northern Ireland individuals and activities will continue in Brussels.

I would also like to pay tribute to Enterprise Ireland in helping to make Ireland’s participation in the European Framework Programmes for Research a success story. In the period from commencement of FP7 in January 2007 to March, 2013, almost 7,000 applicants from Irish-based organisations took part in proposal submissions requesting European funding. From these proposals, 1,500 applicants were successful receiving awards totalling €503 million. This is more than twice that of the previous programme and we are on track to reach our target of €600m. The National Support Structure led by Dr. Imelda Lambkin has contributed enormously to this and I am pleased to say that Imelda will be leading our participation in Horizon 2020.

As we enter the transition phase from FP7, which ends this year, to Horizon 2020, we are currently reviewing the role of the national support structure. The resources allocated to Horizon 2020 support will be reviewed to fit its broader scope. Our support system will cover all Horizon 2020 areas including Humanities and Social Sciences. We have already identified key areas of national investment through our national Research Prioritisation exercise, which also links closely to the themes of Horizon 2020.

I am sure Alastair that you will tell us about the work of your Administration and its Department and Agencies in this area. I know we agree that it is essential that our respective Departments and Agencies continue to work very closely for mutual benefit.

To all of you here today, I hope you find it a productive day. I know there is a wide range of assistance available and waiting to be tapped into for those who wish to collaborate to innovate and to successfully access Horizon 2020.