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**Speech by Mr. Seán Sherlock, T.D., Minister for Research and Innovation, at the
Irish EU Presidency Conference on Responsible Research and Innovation**

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(Check against delivery)

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very glad to be here today for the launch of this conference on the influence of communication and media on Responsible Research and Innovation. Under the auspices of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Permanent Platform of Atomium Culture has organized this second European Intersectoral Summit on Research and Innovation with the participation of the Irish Ministry for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Trinity College Dublin and the Irish Times.

Irish Presidency

This is the first in a series of Irish EU Presidency conferences which we are hosting in line with our priorities for research and innovation. Research and innovation are of major importance given their potential role in contributing to economic recovery, competitiveness

and growth across the EU. That is why we have chosen enhancing engagement between science and society on responsible research and innovation as a priority. This event is designed to create a unique opportunity for intersectoral and interdisciplinary discussions between leading stakeholders to define the role of research and innovation in the development of a strong and competitive knowledge society and to discuss the relationship between science and society.

Conference Objectives

I understand that one objective over the two days will be to facilitate the formation of professional networks, knowledge sharing, and exchange of best practice. Among the themes that will be addressed during the conference are: Engagement, Gender Equality, Science Education, Open Access, and Ethics and Governance. It is no coincidence that all of these themes are deeply embedded in Horizon 2020, the next European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation covering the period 2014 to 2020, which is currently being negotiated between the three European Institutions, under Ireland's Presidency.

Horizon 2020

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. I see the focus which this conference brings to

the role of the media in society, in addressing these challenges, as timely and constructive to the process and an important contribution to addressing these societal challenges over the course of Horizon 2020.

Open Access

While I don't intend to pre-empt any of the conclusions of this conference, I would like to comment briefly on some of the important topics you will be discussing. Firstly, in relation to Open Access, this has a very important bearing on the goal of exploiting science for the benefit of society. The European Commission is committed to making open access to scientific publications a general principle of Horizon 2020 and has recommended that Member States take a similar approach regarding the results of research funded under their national programmes. Ireland supports this approach. The impact and importance of open access in order to increase the efficiency of the research system and increase the positive spin-off effects of publicly funded-research is pivotal if we want Europe to be a leading knowledge economy. Broader and more rapid access to scientific publications and data would make it easier for researchers and businesses to build on the findings of public-funded research. This could be an important enabler of competitive advantage for the Union and give our citizens and enterprises quicker access to scientific discoveries.

Tomorrow you will be debating what can be done at a European level to increase the dissemination of open access resources by societal actors. This is very timely as it relates both to the work we are doing on Horizon 2020 and the completion of the European Research Area. That is why the Irish Presidency tabled this topic for discussion at the Competitiveness Council which I chaired last week. I am pleased to say that there was agreement in the Council on the principle of Open Access. While issues such as common standards, e-

infrastructures and technical issues need to be determined, the key point is there is commitment to the principle.

Discover Science and Engineering

Another topic on your agenda which I am particularly interested in is the session on “Rethinking Science Education”. I fully subscribe to the context in which this topic has been set, that the strength of the European economy in the future will depend on our capacity to develop and attract talent. And that rethinking our education system thus becomes a priority in order to ensure that young people are ready for the very different world they will be facing.

In addition to my responsibilities as Minister for Research and Innovation, I also have responsibility, in the Department of Education and Skills, for curriculum development and reform in STEM subjects. An important objective of the Irish Government, in the Irish societal context, is the ongoing efforts to make Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics vibrant and interesting to students in our primary and secondary level schools and colleges. One such initiative is the Discover Science and Engineering Programme (or DSE) which is Ireland’s national science awareness programme.

DSE aims to contribute to Ireland’s growth and development as a knowledge-based economy, thereby helping to keep Ireland among the world’s most competitive economies. It does this by fostering a greater understanding of science and its value to Irish society and an appreciation of its importance to the economy.

DSE initiatives, such as, “Science Week Ireland”, “St. Patrick’s Festival Big Day Out” and “DSE Online” are designed to raise general awareness amongst the public at large, while other initiatives are more focussed on particular age groups – for example, “Discover Primary Science and Maths” and “An Award of Science and Maths Excellence” are targeted at primary level students, while “Scifest” and “Discover Sensors” are targeted at students at secondary level. In practical terms, DSE is about ensuring that a sufficient number of young people choose careers in the sectors that comprise Ireland’s knowledge-based economy. The flexible programmes of DSE are designed to satisfy this need by enthusing young people at primary and secondary level with an appreciation of the career opportunities available in the enterprise economy and achievable through the study of the physical sciences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as Minister for Research and Innovation, I see science as being a core part of employment creation and retention. In Ireland, our scientific research capabilities have been dramatically enhanced over the past decade, and as a country we have leaped up the international rankings in terms of the quality of our research. Ireland is now in the top 20 countries in overall scientific global rankings and we are excelling in a range of key disciplines such as immunology, nanotechnology, materials science, genetics and genomics. We are uniquely positioned to examine the role that science plays in addressing societal challenges and the contribution that communication and media can make to raising public awareness of the benefits of science.

This conference on Responsible Research and Innovation will explore the specifics of the interaction between science and an evolving society and how separately, or in tandem, both

can be drivers of progress for the future. Against that background, I would like to wish all of the conference participants an interesting and productive experience over the next two days.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the conference organisers; in particular Atomium Culture, the European Commission, Trinity College, and the Irish Times for making this happen. It is a significant contribution to the official calendar of Irish EU Presidency events that this conference is being hosted in Ireland. I very much look forward to having the opportunity to study the conference findings, and I will arrange for them to be brought to the attention of the Competitiveness Council.

Thank you.