

## **Industry survey urges more internships and compulsory science for Junior Cert**

*PCI holds workshop to draw experts' views on future skills needs in life science sector*

15<sup>th</sup> December, 2011: A new survey of Ireland's life science sector has found that nine out of 10 companies believe more internships are needed to give students better workplace experience while the same number of respondents agreed that the Government should make science a compulsory subject for all junior cycle students.

PharmaChemical Ireland (PCI), the representative body for the chemical and pharmaceutical industry, partnered with healthcare leader MSD to carry out the survey of 50 life science companies.

Twenty-seven multinational and indigenous life science industry leaders completed the survey, putting the response rate at 54%.

The survey covered 7,082 employees and about half the respondent companies employed 250 or more people while just over one-fifth employed fewer than 50.

The survey findings are the first part of a plan to produce recommendations for Government on how graduate skills can be improved to meet the changing needs of Ireland's life science sector.

PCI brought together leading educationalists and industry leaders for a workshop, supported by MSD, in the National Institute for Bioprocessing, Research and Training in University College Dublin to discuss the survey results and start producing a set of actions for Government to help meet future skills needs in the life science sector.

The Director of PCI, Matt Moran, said it is crucial that industry be consulted on the shaping of a public policy environment conducive to meeting the future skills demands of a changing global life science sector.

'We want to ensure that Ireland's life science sector is optimally positioned to continue to grow and create high-quality jobs.

'This survey, and the resulting recommendations to Government, help us to stay close to industry in planning for future skills needs while at the same time ensuring that our education system is responsive to a rapidly evolving life science sector,' said Mr Moran.

Brendan O'Callaghan, Vice-President for Biologics, Therapeutic Proteins and Contract Manufacturing Operations at MSD, said the survey was important to capture the views of industry which can then inform a set of recommendations for Government.

'Life science is our top-performing export sector and it is crucial for Ireland's economic recovery.

'The sector is likely to be a key determining factor in whether Ireland can generate sustainable high-quality jobs in a globally competitive, innovation-intensive, knowledge-based economy over the coming years.

'As the nature, scope and business of global life sciences changes, it is timely for ourselves and the Government to ask how our education system can be adapted to meet future industry needs.

'We believe that now is the time to ask ourselves what Ireland needs to do to produce the best graduates capable of developing the next-generation medicines and healthcare products through advancing our capacity for innovation in the areas of research and development and competitive, high value-add manufacturing that will enable us to compete successfully in new and emerging markets in the face of intense global competition for these activities,' said Mr O'Callaghan.

**The following are the main findings of the survey:**

- When asked whether the life science industry needs to boost the number of standardised placements and internships, 24 of the 27 respondents agreed.
- Sixteen respondents believed that Project Maths, the Government's curricular reform plan, would tackle deficiencies in how students learn maths while 24 respondents, or 89%, felt that science should be a compulsory subject for the Junior Certificate exam.
- Twenty-six of the 27 respondents said science, engineering and technology (SET) programmes should have integrated business, communications and management skills while 22 respondents, or 81%, said colleges do not consult industry enough when designing SET programmes.

- Nineteen respondents believed the Government is not doing enough to upskill existing employees in line with changing demands in the global life science sector while 25 respondents, or 93%, said there was a need for a more innovative approach to science teaching in schools.
- Twenty-two respondents said a science grant should be awarded to schools based on student numbers taking the subject while the same number believed that an industry placement programme was needed to help train science teachers.

The workshop was aimed at facilitating the debate on how our education system needs to adapt to the rapidly changing needs of healthcare in areas such as convergence between informatics, pharmaceuticals and medical technology to ensure that we are properly placed to produce the human resources and skill sets that will be required to sustain a stronger, more innovative life science sector.

The pharmaceutical sector generates over 50% of our exports, making Ireland the second largest net exporter of medicines in the world.

The sector employs over 50,000 people and contributes over €3 billion in taxation to the State.

The group of experts who took part in the workshop, facilitated by former RTÉ Head of Radio News Leo Enright, is now preparing a set of detailed recommendations which it plans to present to the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn, at a special event early next year.

**-ENDS-**

### **Notes to Editor**

#### **MSD in Ireland**

Today's MSD is a global healthcare leader working to help the world be well. MSD is known as Merck in the United States and Canada and MSD elsewhere. Through our prescription medicines, vaccines, biologic therapies, and consumer care and animal health products, we work with customers and operate in more than 140 countries to deliver innovative health solutions. We also demonstrate our commitment to increasing access to healthcare through far-reaching policies, programmes and partnerships. MSD employs 2,300 people directly in Ireland and provides an additional 9,000 indirect jobs through its operations at sites across the country. In the past five decades, the company has invested over €2.2 billion in Ireland. MSD is one of Ireland's leading exporters and contributes significantly towards making the pharmaceutical industry the country's leading export sector.

MSD is a member of Guaranteed Irish and manufacturers or packages many of its leading products for the world market in Ireland. For more information, visit [www.msd.ie](http://www.msd.ie).

## **PCI**

PharmaChemical Ireland represents the chemical and pharmaceutical industry in Ireland. Our member companies research, develop and manufacture pharmaceutical products, ingredients and general chemical material. PCI represents their member companies' views to the Government, relevant State agencies, local authorities and the public. The association is committed to providing a receptive environment for a strong and progressive industry in Ireland.

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