

## Press Release

7 September 2017

### Departments launch Co-Innovate programme

#### ***Over 1,400 SMEs to benefit from €16.6 million cross-border scheme supporting innovation***

The Minister for Culture, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht, Heather Humphreys TD, has today launched the Co-Innovate programme in Monaghan, along with Permanent Secretary of the Department for the Economy, Dr Andrew McCormick and Gina McIntyre, Chief Executive Officer of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

Co-Innovate aims to increase the numbers of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) involved in research and innovation across the border region of Ireland (Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan, Sligo), Northern Ireland and parts of western Scotland, from 22 per cent to 33 per cent over the next five years.

The five year €16.6 million project was the first funding offer to be announced under the EU's INTERREG VA Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body. It is one of 60 funding programmes across the European Union that have been designed to help overcome issues that arise from the existence of borders.

It brings together the three regions' key development agencies to deliver a programme aligned with each government's strategic priorities, led by cross-border body InterTradelreland in partnership Enterprise Northern Ireland, East Border Region, Local Enterprise Offices in the border region, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Launching Co-Innovate, Minister Humphreys, said: "This is a very positive development for SMEs in our border counties. Supporting SMEs is a key strategic priority for the government and it's crucial we continue to encourage and nurture innovation.

“Initiatives like Co-Innovate are central to this goal, providing one-to-one help and mentoring for smaller companies to help embed a culture of innovation in their businesses. I would like to acknowledge the work and contribution of the partnership of organisations that have come together to establish this important funding programme for the border region.”

Match-funding for Co-Innovate has been provided by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation in Ireland, the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Welcoming the funding at the Co-Innovate launch, Dr Andrew McCormick, Permanent Secretary for the Department for the Economy, said: **“I’m a firm believer in the power of innovation to act as a catalyst for economic growth and prosperity. With Co-Innovate, we have a unique opportunity to drive innovation capacity among our small and medium enterprises.**

**“SMEs are fundamental to the economy in Northern Ireland, representing 75 per cent of our private sector turnover and employment; significantly more than for the UK as a whole. Co-Innovate will provide practical assistance to our SMEs enabling them to work towards turning innovative thinking into noticeable results which will generate a tangible legacy for years to come.”**

Speaking at the launch event, Gina McIntyre Chief Executive Officer of the Special EU Programmes Body, said: **“The Co-Innovate project will allow the region to make a significant contribution to the achievement of the European Union’s 2020 target of increased investment in research and innovation.**

**“The region, as a whole, is still characterised by low levels of innovation activity. Cross-border co-operation can however be used to help address this issue, by encouraging new partnerships between business and relevant research institutions. By working together through the Co-Innovate project, on a cross-border basis, participating businesses will become ‘innovation active’ and thereby more competitive and profitable.”**

Co-Innovate gives companies the tools and tailored support to help businesses innovate, differentiate and compete successfully. The programme offers graduated levels of support including free workshops, individual business health checks, detailed innovation audits, sectoral networks, project management placements and one-to-one expert mentoring.



Neil Ryan, Co-Innovate Programme Director, said: **“Every company’s innovation needs are different so each company’s journey through Co-Innovate will be unique. Over 1,400 businesses will receive support at Co-Innovate workshops over the next number of years. These workshops are aimed at demystifying innovation and helping firms understand how it can drive their company’s growth and profitability.**

**“Companies who complete our workshops and subsequent assessments will be selected to take part in advanced programme supports. These advanced supports are designed to help develop detailed innovation delivery plans: bringing ideas to fruition.”**

For more information on The Co-Innovate Programme, please visit [co-innovateprogramme.eu](http://co-innovateprogramme.eu)

- ENDS.

**For more information please contact John McCandless, Communications Manager with the SEUPB on Mob. 07834 778018 or via e-mail [john.mccandless@seupb.eu](mailto:john.mccandless@seupb.eu)**

#### Notes to Editor:

#### SEUPB

- The Special EU Programmes Body is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland. It is responsible for managing two EU Structural Funds Programmes, PEACE IV and INTERREG VA which are designed to enhance cross-border co-operation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society.
- The Programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and in the case of INTERREG VA, Western Scotland.
- The INTERREG VA Programme has a value of €283 million and aims to address the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders.
- For more information on the SEUPB please visit [www.seupb.eu](http://www.seupb.eu)