



MEDIA RELEASE

Strengthening ties between SMEs, entrepreneurs and higher education "crucial" to Ireland's economic success according to leading careers experts

Emma Goode was speaking ahead of the launch of the Association of Higher Education Careers Services annual industry event.

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) employ 7 out of every 10 Irish higher education graduates in Ireland but most report that competing with larger employers for graduate talent is a real struggle.

Considering SMEs make up 99 per cent of all enterprise and generate over half of the State's annual turnover, this competitive disadvantage when it comes to employing the best students is a real problem.

"It's really vital that we do everything we can to strengthen the ties between SMEs and our graduates," said Emma Goode, Employment Officer, NUI Galway. "Considering how important SMEs are to Ireland's economy, I think that these measures are actually crucial for Ireland's future success."

Goode was speaking ahead of the launch of the Association of Higher Education Careers Services (AHECS) annual industry event which will bring together leaders from Higher Education, industry and recent graduate entrepreneurs to focus on the SME/entrepreneurship landscape in Ireland. The aim of the event is to explore how engagement with Higher Education Institutions and careers services can benefit both SMEs and graduates. The event also aims to focus on the perception of entrepreneurship and supports offered by Higher Level Institutions to budding entrepreneurs.

Emma Goode, Employment Officer with NUI Galway said, "As career service professionals we support the recruitment processes of SMEs when hiring students and graduates from our institutions. Our unique position means we are able to bridge the gap between new graduate talent and growing businesses to match the ambitions of both. Our remit is to provide a service to all stakeholders in Ireland's third level education system; students, graduates, employers and the broader economy."

Caroline Kennedy, Careers Officer with the National College of Ireland observed that while major corporations are attractive to graduates, smaller companies can offer a greater breadth of experience to their employees. "Students who begin their career within an SME enjoy a real agility that is part of an SME environment," she said. "The breadth of exposure they gain within their work, the early responsibility and a higher profile within the firm from day one, together with their ability to impact the business early on in their career can make it a much more rewarding option than a graduate job with a multi-national corporation."

The AHECS event is happening on the 27th of April in the National College of Ireland between 12 and 3pm. Entrepreneur and RTE Dragon Gavin Duffy will host a number of panel discussions on the day. Panellists will include John Breslin, founder of Boards.ie, Paul Healy, chief executive of Skillnets and Edel Browne, award winning entrepreneur and founder of Free Feet.

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Notes to Editors

1. AHECS is the Association for Higher Education Careers Services across the 27 Universities and Institutes of Technology in Ireland. Every year our member services support approximately 220,000 students studying in the higher education sector – 64,000 of whom are preparing for graduation
2. **HEA Key Facts & Figures** - <http://www.hea.ie/sites/default/files/hea-201516-key-factsfigures.pdf>
3. **What the entrepreneurs say:**

Devan Hughes founder of BuyMie:

“For me starting a business always felt like it would be a natural part of any career path I took. I think a big part of that was because I grew up in a world where the barriers to effecting change on a large scale seemed to be dissolving at pace, I watched as the world was transformed by people in their 20s with nothing more than a laptop and an idea.

“There is really a huge amount of supports out there for creating a business today. The obvious ones come from Enterprise Ireland, they've created a host of different programs to help any type of business get off the ground, ourselves, we went through the Competitive Start Fund program. For me though the most important support has come directly from the start up community. Starting a business is very much a journey and the most value comes from connecting with people who are also on that journey, there is a massive culture of helping each other whenever possible and if you make a sincere effort to connect with that community, it will connect with you.”

The Panels

Industry Panel:

- Paul Healy, Chief Executive, Skillnets
- Patricia Callan, Director **SFA**;
- Liz Carroll, Training and Development Manager **ISME**;
- Natasha Kinsella, Regional Skills Forum Dublin **Regional Skills Manager**;
- Dr Ruaidhrí Neavyn, HEA **Adviser on Higher Education Policy**;
- Bertie Kelly, National College of Ireland **Commercial & Business Incubation Manager**;
- Gavin Davidson, DIT Hothouse **New Frontiers Project Manager**;
- Lorraine Greene, AIB **SME Market Engagement Manager**;
- Tom Early, Enterprise Ireland **HPSU Start Department Manager**

SME Panel:

- Dr John Breslin, NUI Galway, Boards.ie, Adverts.ie, Galway Innovation District – **Senior Lecturer and Entrepreneur**;
- Mark Kellett, Magnet Networks **CEO**;
- Paddy O’Connell, Paddy O’s Cereals **Founder**;
- Greg Canty, Fuzion Communications **Managing Partner**;
- Michael O’Dwyer, SwiftComply **CEO**;
- Sarah Martin, MamaBud **CEO & Founder**;
- Lorraine Bowen, Entrepreneurs Academy **Head of Business Development**

Entrepreneurs Panel:

- Cathal O'Sullivan, Gamex.io;
- Edel Browne, Free Feet;
- Josh Chao, PathoStrips;
- Luke Mackey, Bamboo;
- Devan Hughes, Buymie;
- Finn Murphy, Idly System;
- Johnny Deane, MatchDay