

## Minister for Skills, Research and Innovation announces €1.5 million SFI funding for SSPC



Minister for Skills, Research and Innovation, Damien English TD recently announced a new industry academic collaboration at the Synthesis & Solid State Pharmaceutical Centre (SSPC) in University of Limerick. The research led by Professor Kieran Hodnett, will work with seven industry partners – Allergan Pharmaceuticals Ireland, BioMarin Manufacturing Ireland Ltd., Eli Lilly and Company, Genzyme Ireland Ltd – A Sanofi Company, Janssen Biologics, MSD and Pfizer Ireland Pharmaceuticals– and three research performing organisations, the National Institute for Bioprocessing Research and Training (NIBRT), Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and Dublin City University (DCU) - as part of the new Advanced Biopharmaceutical Technologies research collaboration. €1,050,000 million funding will be delivered by the Department of Jobs through Science Foundation Ireland’s (SFI) Spokes programme, coupled with €450,000 in cash and in-kind contributions from industry partners.

Commenting at the launch Minister for Skills, Research and Innovation, Damien English TD said: “Government and industry are setting a stake in the ground as to the direction of Irish research into the future – creating centres of research excellence in areas that are strategically important and relevant to Ireland’s future. This new initiative in the Synthesis & Solid State Pharmaceutical Centre will deepen the roots of the pharmaceutical industry in Ireland, which supports over 60,000 Irish jobs and exports over €50 billion annually, by encouraging innovation and expanding career opportunities in the sector.”

The manufacturing process of biotherapeutic drugs is complex and costly, with problems relating to formulation and protein instability often affecting the biological performance of these therapeutics. As a result of this new Advanced Biopharmaceutical Technologies collaboration, some of Ireland’s leading scientists and engineers will work with industry

partners to develop innovative single-use disposable plastic bag systems for bioprocessing. This project will generate significant intellectual property for Irish universities and gain commercial advantage for Irish-based biopharma companies, with the goal of establishing Ireland as a Global Hub for Pharmaceutical Process Innovation and Advanced Manufacturing.

Professor Mark Ferguson, Director General of Science Foundation Ireland and Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government of Ireland, welcomed the announcement: “The establishment of the Advanced Biopharmaceutical Technologies research collaboration is further evidence of the Government’s commitment to investment in science, technology and innovation, which is critical to Ireland’s continued social and economic success and to the creation of high value jobs. The addition of new spoke projects to existing SFI Research Centres is how SFI ensures these Centres can grow and stay relevant by adding new projects, industry partners and academic collaborators. It forms part of SFI’s strategy of prioritising support and funding of excellent research with impact in areas where Ireland is ideally placed to excel. We are already home to eight out of the world’s top ten pharmaceutical companies, with six of the top ten blockbuster drugs manufactured in the country. This new research collaboration will help to keep us ahead of the competition, enabling us to continue to attract foreign direct investment and encourage the development of new and existing Irish companies.”

Professor Kieran Hodnett, SSPC, “By combining academic and industrial resources, this collaboration will open up unique world class capabilities for addressing key biopharmaceutical issues. This will in turn lead to further investment and result in the incentivising of R&D activities in Ireland. The collaboration will enhance the research ecosystem in Ireland and will significantly augment the retention, creation and transformation of direct jobs within the Biopharmaceutical sector in Ireland”.

Dr Mary Shire, Vice President Research, University of Limerick, added: “The calibre of industry partners involved with the Advanced Biopharmaceutical Technologies Spoke collaboration speaks volumes about the standard of research in Ireland. This will lead to a multitude of benefits such as enabling promising researchers to develop impactful careers here in Ireland, building on the existing expertise in our academic institutions, positioning our research community to compete for additional funding streams, attracting new talent and further developing partnerships between industry and the research community.”

The SFI Spokes Programme is a vehicle to enable the addition of new industrial and academic partners and projects to a SFI Research Centre, enabling it to expand and develop in line with new priorities and opportunities. The Programme has been designed to deliver excellent research results and discoveries in targeted projects associated with SFI Research Centres and hence deliver significant economic and societal impact during the lifetime of the programme.

The SFI Research Centres including, the SFI Spokes programme, helps link scientists and engineers in partnerships across academia and industry to address crucial research questions, foster the development of new and existing Ireland-based technology companies, attract industry that could make an important contribution to Ireland and its economy, and expand educational and career opportunities in Ireland in science and engineering.