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Contact: HHS Press Office
(202) 690-6145
InterTradeIreland Press
44 28 3083 4100

Inaugural Meeting of the Steering Group of the United States-Ireland Research and Development (R&D) Partnership

Today, by videoconference in Washington, D.C. and Newry, the U.S.-Ireland Research and Development (R&D) Partnership met. The videoconference marked the inaugural meeting of the high level Steering Group composed of senior representatives from Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the United States. The Steering Group members, drawn from government, academia and private industry, include Dr. Killian Halpin, Dr. William Harris and Prof. Ferdinand von Prondzynski representing Ireland; Prof. Fabian Monds, Prof. Peter Gregson and Dr. Hugh Cormican from Northern Ireland; and from the United States, Alex M. Azar II and Dr. Elias Zerhouni from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Cassandra Dudka, representative from the National Science Foundation. Government observers from Ireland, Northern Ireland and the United States were present at the meeting, and the Secretariat was provided by InterTradeIreland, the All-Island trade and business development body.

During today's videoconference, the Steering Group agreed on:

- the Terms of Reference;
- the rotating Appointment of the Chair;
- the wish to build a durable research partnership based on joint participation in projects, joint funding and competitive peer review.

The Steering Group also agreed:

- confirmation of the initial priority areas of: diabetes, cystic fibrosis, sensor technology and nanotechnology;
- to focus on a current topic of global interest and importance--avian influenza and human pandemic influenza preparedness as a fifth priority area;
- to establish sub-groups for each priority area;
- to identify avian influenza, diabetes and nanotechnology as immediate priority areas for action; and
- for these three sub-groups to report at the next Steering Group meeting, to be held in Washington, D.C., on March 14, 2006, and to be Chaired by U.S. HHS Deputy Secretary Alex M. Azar II.

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The Steering Group has also initiated a report to be completed by the March meeting that will identify the mechanisms available to fund competitive research proposals developed under the R&D Partnership.

Background Briefing

On January 18, 2005, former HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson, Micheál Martin, Minister for Enterprise Trade and Employment, Ireland, Barry Gardiner, the then Minister with responsibility for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and Employment and Learning, and Angela Smith, Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety Northern Ireland, announced the establishment of the U.S.-Ireland R&D Partnership.

The U.S.-Ireland Research and Development Task Force proposed the establishment of a “small, overarching steering group...comprised of senior government officials, academics and business interests from the three parties to guide, monitor and evaluate the collaborative efforts.” Each of the three parties identified three senior members for the Steering Group, and today’s teleconference marked the inaugural meeting of this group.

The purpose of the U.S.-Ireland R&D Partnership is to encourage and support research between the best and brightest to generate innovations to the marketplace and to lead to improvements in health promotion, disease prevention, health care and other technologies.

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