

High-tech blueprint unveiled

By John Manley

A BLUEPRINT for the development of the north's high-tech industries was unveiled yesterday with a warning that the relationship between industry and academia must change.

The report by Matrix, the Northern Ireland Science Industry Panel, makes a series of recommendations aimed at positioning the north among the world's most successful economies.

One of the key proposals is the establishment of industry-led 'communities' that would bring together business, academia and government to focus on emerging market opportunities.

Matrix chairman Damien McDonnell said such communities were central to the goal of creating a world-class knowledge-based economy.

Matrix was set up in February last year and tasked with

advising the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Deti) on how best to maximise the north's strengths in science and technology.

The panel includes representatives from most of the region's biggest technology players, including Bombardier, Radox and Almac.

Yesterday it presented the fruits of 18 months of work – eight volumes in all – to enterprise, trade and investment minister Arlene Foster.

Mr McDonnell said Matrix's proposals were designed to create a "cultural shift" where the relationship between industry, academia and the government changed.

"Northern Ireland is brimming with ideas, talent and skills," he said.

"What we now need is the muscle of business and academia to take these recommendations forward and the foresight of government to facilitate them.



■ **HONEYCOMB:** Matrix chairman Professor Damien McDonnell and enterprise minister Arlene Foster are joined at the launch of the Matrix report in W5, Belfast, by Dromore High School students Simon McCracken and Matthew Duddy
PICTURE: Simon Graham/Hansen Photography

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Damien McDonnell

"It's time for all of us to put our foot on the accelerator and move on to the next phase."

The Matrix report also recommends:

- industry-led communities setting out future strategies to demonstrate and create specific goals for all members
- the establishment of a

world-class intellectual property (IP) infrastructure to enable companies to better exploit opportunities quickly and easily

- a flexible and responsive skills system that can meet changing demands and reflects the specific requirements of industry
- changes in the regulatory

regime that allow the north to take and manage a higher level of risk.

Ms Foster has promised to give the report detailed consideration and to bring forward an appropriate plan to implement its findings.

"What I hope and expect to get from the outworking of this Matrix report is a blueprint for accelerating our economic growth, to give us a genuine step change in the effectiveness and competitiveness of our economy over the medium to long term," she said.