

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE:
Enterprise Minister Arlene Foster yesterday received the first report of the Northern Ireland Science Industry Panel (MATRIX). With Ms Foster are Professor Damien McDonnell, who presented the report, and Drumore High School pupils Simon McCracken and Matthew Duddy.

PICTURE: Simon Graham/Varian Photography



‘Everyone has part to play in future success’

BY RICHARD SHERRIFF
Business Correspondent

rsherriff@newsletter.co.uk

THE future success of Northern Ireland as part of a global economy depends on the whole community from government to business right through to the schools and tomorrow's students, the head of an influential new report said yesterday.

After almost two years consulting with some of the most experienced business people across industry, Professor Damien McDonnell presented the report of the Northern Ireland Science Industry Panel MATRIX to Enterprise Minister Arlene Foster.

The ambitious report contains a blueprint for the development of key sectors of the economy from engineering and ICT to agri-food and life and health sciences.

In the latter, one recommendation is that the Province be used as a global development model for tele-medicine, enabling people to remain in their own homes while having their condition monitored remotely by professionals.

Paying tribute to the "unprecedented and overwhelming" contribution of the panel which involved more than 80 of the biggest names in local business, including Bombardier Aerospace, Randox, Wrightbus and Moy Park, he said its proposals would exploit the region's strong science and technology base and kick-

start an exciting new era of enterprise and innovation.

"Individuals and small groups of individuals invent and generate knowledge but it's really communities that innovate, bringing together marketing skills, finance skills and manufacturing know-how."

Business, government and academe, he said, must form new type of partnership.

"The future innovation, science and technology agenda in Northern Ireland must be led by business and must be based on the demands of the marketplace and as business steps forward to lead, government needs to increasingly adopt the support and facilitation role."

The role of education was also "enormously important".

Beginning with the primary sector, he said it was critical that young people emerged with sufficient literacy and numeracy skills to progress through vocational and academic training to take their place in and add to the growth of society.

"People feel good when they are adding value to something," he said.

"Absolutely everything must be done to make sure that those opportunities are given to all young people."

Welcoming the report Mrs Foster said the recommendations carried the value imparted by the calibre and experience of those taking part.

"MATRIX was deliberately created to represent the voice of high-technology industry in

Northern Ireland. It is of the utmost importance that we in government listen to and act upon what our leading business people have to say."

Ahead of detailed study she said there were some key messages emerging.

"At this particular time it could be very easy for governments to get bogged down in the here and now. This is actually looking at the future and what we need to be doing to make sure that we are ready for those markets in two five or 10 years' time."

MATRIX identified five key areas to make the region's technology and innovation buoyant - ICT, advanced engineering (transport), agri-food, advanced materials and life and health sciences. Each sector was represented by a separate Horizon panel of industry experts.

MATRIX also recommends that:

- industry-led communities create roadmaps which demonstrate and create specific goals for all members - thereby driving effective knowledge and technology exchange among partners;
- a world class intellectual property (IP) infrastructure is set up to enable companies to better exploit opportunities quickly and easily;
- a flexible and responsive skills system is established that leads Europe in its ability to meet changing demands and reflects the specific requirements of industry;
- the regulatory regime is transformed to allow Northern Ireland to take and manage a higher level of risk.