

File name: Chapter_7_-_Innovation_in_our_DNA_-_Panel_Session[1].mp3

Moderator questions in Bold, Respondents in Regular text.

KEY: Unable to decipher = (inaudible + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** (ph) + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode), **Talking over each other** = (talking over each other + timecode).

Moderator: Innovation, as part of Northern Ireland's DNA, is the subject for the next panel, and Barry is ably getting things ready. I'm going to invite, first of all, the chair of that panel to come to the stage, that is Mark Ferguson. He is the chair of the European Innovation Council, he was Director General of Science Foundation Ireland and Chief Scientific Adviser to the government of Ireland previously. Mark is the recipient of numerous international research prizes and awards, and a prolific writer as well, making him the perfect chair for this panel. Welcome, Mark, and welcome also to the rest of the panel who you'll be talking to today. That is Mary McKenna, founder of AwakenHub. Paul Murnaghan, Head of BT in Northern Ireland, and Dave Mosley, the CEO of Seagate. Welcome. Mark?

Mark Ferguson: Very good. So, innovation is really part of Northern Ireland's history. You probably know about James Dunlop with pneumatic tires, you probably know about Harry Ferguson with ploughs and tractors, you probably know about Sir James Martin with ejector seats, and you probably know about Frank Pantridge with portable defibrillators. Now, I was listening to the earlier comments and, keeping on the aeroplane theme, Sir James Martin tells a story, or told a story, he's now dead, that he got the idea for an ejector seat when he was on an aeroplane flight and he was sitting beside a particularly annoying person who wouldn't shut up, and he fantasised that he could press a button and make this person disappear. And that's how he got the idea of an ejector seat. So, I hope none of you need an ejector seat or a portable defibrillator during this panel. So, I have a fantastic group of people here. Immediately beside me is Mary McKenna. She's a serial entrepreneur, has founded education businesses, exited those, is doing a huge amount for women in tech.

Beside Mary is Dave Mosley, who is the Chief Executive Officer of Seagate. Seagate is a fantastic company in Derry, they make hard drives and hard drive readers. About one in three, or one in four, of the world's hard drive readers are made in Derry. That's a remarkable figure. Now, think about artificial intelligence, think about the Cloud, it's basically made of storage disks, and that's what Seagate do, they make hard drives and, and readers. And beside Dave is Paul Murnaghan, who's the head of BT in Ireland. BT is a fantastic presence in Northern Ireland. People probably know there's twice as much fibre penetration in Northern Ireland as there is in the rest of the United Kingdom. BT are doing a lot of interesting stuff on the docks with Belfast Harbour, with Angoka, that's a start-up company. So, I'm going to start off by asking each of the people, starting in the order they're here, you know, say a few words about yourself. What's special about Northern Ireland, why you want to innovate here. Mary, over to you.

Mary McKenna: Thank you. Thanks, Mark and great to be here and actually, as a new graduate, my very first job was with a little company called British Telecom Mobile Communications. I was person number five in what then became, obviously, like, a big, big company later. So, as Mark says, many people in the room probably know the business that I started here in Northern Ireland, which is Learning Pool in Derry. A company that we started with myself and a co-founder, and grew to a significant size of a business in, up there in the north-west. So, I guess I am living proof that that can, that is possible and that can happen. As Mark said, I'm an exited technology entrepreneur which, as a female, is a small and elite band of people to be part of, regrettably. And so, I guess, what I'm trying to do these days is to try and make, make it a reality for other women to become entrepreneurs and to grow their businesses and sell them. So that's why, along with three of my friends, I started AwakenHub three years ago as a social enterprise. And that's me. I'm here all day, I'd love to chat to anybody that's interested in working with us. So, thank you.

Mark Ferguson: Dave.

Dr Dave Mosley: Dave Mosley, CEO of Seagate. I've been with the company for 27 years but I'm still a rookie compared to a lot of people and, and we've been in Derry for 30 years now. It's been quite a journey, and I'll tell you about that a little bit, but I would say that everyone uses our technology, very few people that appreciate how fast it's moving. I started with the company, I was working on one gigabyte disk drives. And now we're shipping 30 terabyte disk drives. So, that, that's been quite a journey and, actually, a journey for the, the team as well in Derry. They started as manufacturing and they've been through at least five different transitions of technology, to the point now where it's one of the highest scale, most impressive recording fabs in the world. And roughly 25% of the world's data storage starts its life in wafer fab over there in Derry. It takes about seven to nine months for a wafer to get out of the fab. It's the most sophisticated 3D printing on the planet. Nano-scale, very, very impressive technology and I, I love the comments before about agility. That's really how the team's been able to pivot so many times through the tech, different technologies. So, I'm quite proud of what they do.

Mark Ferguson: Paul.

Paul Murnaghan: Thanks Dave, Mark. I'm Paul Murnaghan, I'm the, the regional director for BT in Northern Ireland and I also have an interest with the Northern Ireland Chambers, current board member and past, present. And the reason I say that is, is I've spent all of my career working in Belfast. And my job within a group like BT over 100,000 employees is to try and sell Northern Ireland within the group. And, and we're doing that quite well. I, I have a huge passion, most people in the room have here, to make this place a better place and to get people like Emma earlier on this morning to come and work for us. Emma, if you're still here, come look me up on LinkedIn and we can have a conversation. Wasn't that wonderful? I did that degree back in the day in Queen's and she is-, she is succeeding much better than I did. But from BT's perspective, we have-, we have chosen to, and we're talking innovation today, we've chosen to use an analogy of, of the Goldilocks story. Northern Ireland is a small place, but it's quite a big place. It's one-point-eight, 1.9 million people.

You've heard a little bit about the connected nature of our public sector, our political entities when we have them, and our private sector. No better place to do business when it is effective, and David no doubt can speak to that. But that one-point-eight, 1.9 million people is a fantastic, it's a sandbox, it's a test bed for organisations like Seagate, for like BT and many others in the room to try and innovate beyond where they have come from and where they want to go to. We and BT are a telco, but we're much more than that and our ambition is to be the world's most-, world's best connector of people, devices and machines. And what we're working, and I'll talk a little bit more to this. You mentioned Belfast Harbour and Joe O'Neill and the team down there. We'll talk a little bit about what we're doing in a reasonably innovative way to use technology beyond just the core connectivity to drive value. And, and if we can make that happen in Belfast, in Belfast Harbour, then the opportunity is to do that beyond into the rest of Northern Ireland and, hopefully, further beyond. So BT is, is betting on Northern Ireland, and yeah, I'm very happy to talk more about that shortly.

Mark Ferguson: And you're also a sponsor of the BT Young Scientists competition, which is probably the best young science competition or exhibition anywhere in the world. I mean, I can tell a story, when I was in Ireland, a former British Prime Minister was visiting and I introduced him to a couple of girls who had entered the competition and developed a formula for horse feeding. Which allowed race horses not to have ulcers. They subsequently adapted it for camels for Middle East clients, for camel racing. And, and the British Prime Minister asked a young girl, aged fourteen, what he could do to further young entrepreneurs. And immediately she said, 'Allow people under eighteen to open a personal business bank account.' She said, 'I'm fourteen, the business is turning over 2 million a year and I have to put it all through my parents' bank account.' So only in Ireland would you find somebody, a child of fourteen, saying, 'I want my own bank account to put my money in, not in my parents' bank account.' It's not usually the other way around, isn't it? But the BT Young Scientist's a fantastic exhibition, isn't it?

Paul Murnaghan: Mark, it's in its 60th year this year. BT have been involved for 27 years. It's a wonderful programme, which is an all-Ireland programme. We had last year 31 of the 32 counties represented. We'd love this year to have full representation and that gap, I won't call it the county, but it was in Northern Ireland. It's a-, it's a truly phenomenal programme of work. Those of in there, some in the audience that I know that we've invited down to, to experience it, you and I talked about, about the buzz that's in the place. It's, it's something to behold. And it is absolutely driving people who might not otherwise consider STEM and, and innovation and technology to, to consider that. So, again, anybody who has an interest in that, please come and talk to me. Mary, you'll love to hear that 57% of the participants last year were female and, and it is a truly entrepreneurial programme that is non-academic, that is all about driving economic benefit. And it's something that we could learn from.

Mark Ferguson: Absolutely. And I remember the first year I started as the Chief Scientific Adviser to the government of Ireland. I went to the BT Young Scientist exhibit, and on the way in, a nun elbowed me in the abdomen. In her hurry, she went like that so that she could get in front of me to get into the exhibit. And I thought, 'Only in Ireland could a nun elbow the Chief Scientist to get into a science exhibit.' You know, this is really cool. Dave, you are doing a lot on photonics and, and Seagate is absolutely at the front

of this, kind of, atomic engineering, precision engineering with what you're doing in Derry. Tell us a bit about that and what do you see about the future there?

Dr Dave Mosley: Yes, like I was referring to earlier it's the, this nano-printing, if you will, that goes on and people don't appreciate very much. But, you know, it translates into these 30 terabyte disk drives that'll become 50 terabyte disk drives and so on. There's an inflection going on right now in the, the technology. We're starting to add lasers into the heads and the recording heads that come out of these wafers are about as big as piece of pepper. So you can imagine adding a laser in and then having the light path and this is quite precision, what's going on. It'll ramp to a high volume, and the good news is it, it already works. The team here has actually spearheaded all the critical material science that's happened to get this to work and also built a, a cluster of like-minded companies that have been able to, to really power us through some of the last steps of getting the innovation into the markets. And, you know, Ireland-wide as well, it's been quite a good success story. And we've also really pushed this smart-nano NI initiative that's helped to not only, you know, apply the technology for ourselves but also to, to give other people an inkling of what they could use the technology for.

So I, I believe in the future, photonics will be very big. It's lower power, it's much faster than traditional electronics. And it'll be miniaturised as well. This cluster will be a powerful entity, I think, if it's handled properly.

Mark Ferguson: Yes, it's really interesting. You know, photonics is also, I guess, something where an all-Ireland, as you talked about, approach is interesting. Because that's one of the advantages in Northern Ireland, it's part of a wider community. And, I guess, all of you have that. You know, we talked about the Young Scientist, Seagate's an, an Irish company, and Mary, you live in Donegal but a lot of your work's in Derry, so.

Mary McKenna: I do. Now I'm actually, I was born in the county Tyrone but as people will hear from my accent, I was brought up in Yorkshire. And I moved back to Northern Ireland in the year 2000 to join one of the Queen's University's spin-out companies, which was a semiconductor IP company. You can't get any higher tech than semiconductor IP. Best engineers in the world are in Belfast, and, you know, three weeks later I was in Silicon Valley, selling the business to the West Coast multinational corporations. And, yes, I'm not one bit surprised, actually, to hear-, to hear Paul talk about the Young Scientists. One of the pro-bono things that I do is I'm an entrepreneur in residence. So they're, post-primary school in the north-west in Derry, St Mary's College. And you would be really surprised at the number of teenagers who have a little business on the side that they're starting at school. And I think that's a, really a fantastic thing. So, yes, letting them have their own bank account so they don't have to pull it through the bank of Mum and Dad is a brilliant idea. Because they're, they're ready for it. They want to-, they want to get going, they want to make money.

Mark Ferguson: Absolutely. And, I mean, I think that's really important and it's really interesting what

you said to Dave, you know, about the engineers who are in Derry. Because a lot of people are talking about chip manufacturing, advanced chip manufacturing. There's a US chips act and there's a European Chips Act and there's a UK semiconductor programme and so on. But, I mean, the people who can do that, you've got them on Seagate. I mean, they can make advanced technology, that's kind of cool. Do you think there's a real interest there, people would want to be beating the path and poaching your folks or?

Dr Dave Mosley: I think they already are. It is a global community that, that tries to pull skill-sets. But I also think that building these clusters like we talked about before is actually the way to combat that. I mean, and if you lose someone to someone else in the cluster, that's okay. It's, that's what success looks like sometimes. But having the cluster, you know, really being the anchor point for, you know, your technology is what's critical. And we're also not just high-tech but we're a manufacturer and we need consistency of demand throughout the world and we need predictability and all the things people talked about earlier about business. So, you know, from, from my perspective, the, the team in Derry has, has built themselves up into be world-class. Now they will be poached, but I think also we can actually attract people from various geographies around the world. We have 120 PhDs in Derry. There'll be people come to continue the technology, march it forward.

Mark Ferguson: Yes. It's very interesting. The R&D and the manufacturing together, yeah, I just read a huge biography of Edison and, yeah, that was one of his things, you know. It went from the research all the way through development, all the way through to manufacture, and, and I think that's, kind of, really interesting. What I didn't know, which I learned in this biography, was that Henry Ford worked for Edison. I didn't know that. And then secondly, that Henry Ford got the idea for the assembly plant actually from Edison's bench-to-manufacturing concept. You know, going along the line. Now, I've got a question for all three of you, okay? We're a high power audience here, lots of political representatives here and so on. If you had a wish, okay, and you were able to ask either the British Prime Minister or the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, the one thing that that they could do to boost even more innovation in Northern Ireland, what would it be? Mary, we'll start with you.

Mary McKenna: Oh, thank you for that opportunity, Mark. So if it was Christmas morning and I could have a wish, I would wish for the Prime Minister to make it more interesting and perhaps more-, to incentivise people to invest in businesses that women are starting. So to actually offer tax incentives for investment into women-founded businesses. That would be my wish.

Mark Ferguson: Very good. So more diversity.

Mary McKenna: Everybody, join me, thank you.

Mark Ferguson: More diversity, more inclusive innovation, more woman founders.

Mary McKenna: More women founders.

Mark Ferguson: Absolutely. Dave?

Dr Dave Mosley: I think, like we talked about before, agility is the superpower or the ability to, to really leverage into the future, and it's the reason we've been successful in the past. So I think it's, that all starts with education. The anchor point for that is education and it's so critical. Continue to invest in education. As far as pointing towards future technology, we're, we're big into photonics right now. So I would say, you know, help build the photonics cluster, help sponsor companies that are participating in it. I think it'll be important in the future.

Mark Ferguson: Very good. Paul?

Paul Murnaghan: So, Belfast over 100 years ago was a powerhouse. It had all the things that the guys have talked about earlier on. We were the largest rope manufacturer, linen manufacturer, ship builders in the world. And that was-, that was originated with Joe O'Neill here from the harbour. That was done, Belfast Harbour commissioners took a risk and they took a bet and they dug out the Victoria Channel. And that then opened up Belfast and Northern Ireland to become something that, actually, I would probably proffer they weren't sure would materialise. So they invested, and things happened. I think that we've got an opportunity now and you'd expect a telecoms, BT person maybe to suggest this. But we need-, we need to look at the next level of connectivity. We're doing some clever stuff with Joe, and you can see it outside in, in terms of the Harlander. But we need to invest, and Northern Ireland is the best connected fixed region in these islands. Compared to our cousins south of the border and our brothers and sisters in England, Wales and Scotland. Sub-regionally in the UK, we're sitting at about 95% connectivity. That's a fantastic reality for, for any potential investor. But there's more that can be done, and there's more to be done in that 5G space.

So, so I would be encouraging the Prime Minister to, to light up Northern Ireland. Maybe in terms of investments, in the first instance, but maybe beyond that to allow for both our indigenous SMEs and others to, to work out what is the next rope, linen or indeed ship-building that will be digitised into the future. And it is about risk, it's about encouraging that risk appetite. And Joe Kennedy mentioned this morning, we don't take enough risk. And I would encourage our politicians to encourage our public sector to be a bit more ambitious in that regard.

Mark Ferguson: Very good. Very good. So, risk-taking is something that I would really be into with the European Innovation Council. You know, there's a very fine line between a high risk and a stupid risk. There's not much difference between those, which is, kind of, interesting. But innovative procurement, you know, I know that folks in Northern Ireland have done some innovative procurement. I see Jayne Brady in the front row there, and, you know, you innovatively procured this hydrogen hydrolyser, didn't

you? And you can use the spare oxygen from it in the sewage works which is, kind of, innovative and, I think, really cool for the sewer service. So more of that, kind of, innovative procurement. Very good. Now, net zero. Okay. Everybody's into climate change and climate tech, and, you know, you can make a pile of money by forming a good climate company, employing lots of people, doing good for the planet, make some money at the same time. What do you think about climate tech? What do you think women are going to do on climate tech, Mary?

Mary McKenna: So, I think that women have really great ideas, because they're in the kitchen doing things in the, you know, in and around the-, so I would expect that there'll be some amazing businesses that come out of, of climate change, in terms of recycling and reusing and generating energy out of things that you might not expect to get it from. That would be my suggestion there, Mark.

Mark Ferguson: Very good. And Dave, you use a lot of energy, so I guess you're really interested in cheaper energy and more renewable energy and more sustainable energy, wind and so on. You guys thinking about that?

Dr Dave Mosley: Yeah. We've made 3.5 billion hard drives, so you can think about how much material that is. Rare-earth magnets, we've procured more than anyone else on the planet. So, these, these components coming into us, and how they're sourced and whether that's an efficient sourcing or whether it's coming from stable regions of the world, all of these things are very important. But then we make a product that goes into data centres, and data centres are starting to consume more and more power in the grid. If we can just impact things by a tenth of a Watt, that has an enormous impact in the future. And then, recycling. Recycling is still something that's pie in the sky, but data centres need to be recycled in the future. It'll be a much more efficient way to, to, to reuse, to save power, so that-, not have to scratch these elements out of Mother Earth anymore, but to, to, to get lower cost for, for the entire supply chain. So, this is the way we think about it and this is the way we want to continue to drive it.

Mark Ferguson: Very good. And, and, Paul, you're going to have a lot of spare copper cable lying around, you know, 'cause you're fitting all this fibre in and you've got this copper cable everywhere. You got some innovative uses for that?

Paul Murnaghan: Well, by 2025, we will have, have converted the copper network to, to digital, and Northern Ireland's well ahead in that regard, as I've already said. We're beginning to move that project forward. But by 2025, we will have turned that network off. Today we are the third largest consumer of electricity in Northern Ireland, and probably second or first across the UK. So, yes, we're going to take the copper out. We're going to repurpose that, sell it, and use the new investment that is there to consider how we can deliver on our commitments in terms of, of net zero. We will be net zero by 2030, because that's what we've told our shareholders we will deliver. That's, that's something that BT and Openreach will do in isolation. But we are now considering, and, and looking to, to the place. Northern Ireland, again, that Goldilocks region as a test bed to explore that infrastructure that, that currently serves that Openreach copper estate and the power that is within it. So rather than just doing it on behalf of, of our

Openreach fleet and the data centres and the telephone exchanges that are currently needing power, we're looking at EV and the future of EV charging.

With that estate that we have across Northern Ireland, 450-odd telephone exchanges. We've over 60,000 green boxes that you'll be familiar with, all of which have a significant amount of power to them. And that will be green power by 2030. We're looking at how we can convert that asset as it currently is to potentially be the new broadband in, in the future as we move from a telco to a tech co.

Mark Ferguson: Very good. That's really interesting, you know, how you could, you know, switch, and it's, kind of, older technology perhaps to service a newer area like, you know, electric charging of electrical vehicles and so on.

Paul Murnaghan: And the reason-, the reason we're doing it here is because we believe we will do it faster here. And we'll either prove it successfully or we'll exit quickly.

Mark Ferguson: Very good. And, you know, being able to do that at scale and cheaply. You know, another thing that came out of Edison's biography that I've just read was, you know, he was struggling for three years to try and wire lower Manhattan. And they had a load of investors and he hadn't put up a single lightbulb and hadn't got the generators connected correctly and so on. And, and he was getting a lot of stick from, and one day he turned to them and said, 'One day we will make electricity so cheap that only the rich will burn candles.' And isn't that true? You know. So someday you're gonna be doing that with your-, with your EV charging. Okay, I'm going to come to questions for the audience. As you can tell, I'm kinda impatient so I don't like gaps. So think of your question, then when I ask, put your hand up. If there's a whole pile of you, we've got five minutes remaining, I've got the, the sign here, then we'll come to that.

So, before I go to the audience, artificial intelligence, that's the next big thing. I'm told that the last thing that artificial intelligence will replace is comedians, because it's extremely difficult for the algorithm to distinguish, you know, double innuendoes and double entendres and all that kinda stuff. So, in my next life, I want to become the next, the chief joke officer not the Chief Scientific Officer. I won't be replaced by an algorithm. Anyway, artificial intelligence. Mary?

Mary McKenna: So, I mentioned that I'm entrepreneur in residence at a school, and we did a-, we did a whiteboard experiment one day where we all put up the jobs of the-, we crossed out the-, we did the top twenty best paid jobs and then we crossed out everything that's gonna be gone. And there were only three jobs left that can't be replaced by artificial intelligence.

Mark Ferguson: And what are they?

Mary McKenna: They were hairdresser.

Mark Ferguson: Don't need that.

Mary McKenna: Childcare, because the-, because the, the students said that they wouldn't trust their child with a robot carer in case it went mad. And there was one other that I can't remember. But, you know, those sorts of jobs. So, AI, yes, bring it on.

Mark Ferguson: Dave, how's AI gonna impact Seagate?

Dr Dave Mosley: Well, I think that it'll, the amount of data in the world is about to explode and, but I do think this is a natural progression. There's a lot of hype cycles going on right now about AI, but I think this is applications and compute power that's just been progressing all of our lifetimes. In, I do think it'll impact a lot of people's jobs and in, some in a negative way, but I also think there'll be a lot of people who use it to improve our productivity and, and I'm excited to see that. And I think, you know, from my advice to everyone would be to embrace it and just go learn about it as quickly as you can.

Mark Ferguson: Paul?

Paul Murnaghan: I think Mark, in terms of AI, regulation is going to be really important from our perspective, connecting people, devices, machines. That data hungry piece that AI will drive even more of will be a positive thing. I think it could, in the happy path, I, I may be doing a three day week in five years' time rather than a five day week. I think it'll give us all an opportunity to focus on stuff that's really important. I'm involved in a pilot at home and now in work where I see some of the possibilities and, and, yeah, it, it's going to transform the future of what we do.

Mark Ferguson: You know, one of the coolest things that I heard recently was one of my colleagues who's actually an entrepreneur in the IT world employed his fourteen-year-old son and three of his school friends over the summer to tell him the things that you could do with ChatGPT. Because he figured that they would be the best people to do it. I thought, 'Oh, isn't that cool?' Right, who would like to ask a question from the audience? Please, the lady in the green, hand up immediately, here we go, come on with the microphones, chop chop, here we are. And who's next? Who wants to be next after the lady in the green? Yes, here. Number two. So, you'll know where to go next, very good. I'm sorry I don't know your name so I'll call you lady in green.

Roisin Molloy: I'm Roisin Molloy, I'm from Trimedika. So, Mary, right behind you. Yeah, I'm a female founder of a business here in Northern Ireland, so all the way. But I just wanted to ask a question. We're talking about innovation and DNA, we're, obviously, a medical device manufacturer in healthcare. There's a-, we're, we're involved in some of the United Nations, we look at the innovation of healthcare for care delivery in the future. And a lot of that is in connectivity, care at home, virtual wards and so on. So, what have-, is there anything you guys have been involved in or are doing in Northern Ireland for, sort of, more connected healthcare and care delivery? Especially out into the communities and, you know, we see Encompass is gonna-, is starting kicking off 9th November this year in our hospitals. Is there anything you guys are doing there and could you comment on it?

Dr Dave Mosley: Connected to healthcare, you first, Mary.

Mary McKenna: I've invested in a company that is in the room, called Respiratory Analytics. It's a medical device to help people take their asthma medication better. So, fantastic innovations happening right across Northern Ireland in the connected healthcare space, Roisin. Thank you for your question.

Mark Ferguson: Paul?

Paul Murnaghan: Yeah, BT has an organisation within the organisation called etc., which is pretty much a start-up within a large, large corporate. And health tech is very much one of the areas that we see opportunity it is and that exploratory space. If you talk about virtual wards and the connectivity, that can hopefully help us transform our health service. We're not there yet. We have lots of ideas and lots of stuff in prototype, but you can be absolutely assured that if we can-, if we can crack it, and it won't just be us. There's so many out there using the connectivity to keep people like me out of hospital because I'm being tested well in advance and, hopefully, stopped getting sick as I get older.

Mark Ferguson: Dave?

Dr Dave Mosley: Not a Northern Ireland story but a Singapore story, we have an investment in a company that's really speeding up genomics analytics and it's been fantastic trials that have-, that are happened so far. And it strikes me, a lot of the interesting discussions I've had in the last day, we should probably connect some of those discussions here.

Mark Ferguson: Very good. We have another question down here, so.

Dr Dave Mosley: Paul Lynam.

Mark Ferguson: Go ahead.

Dr Dave Mosley: Paul Lynam from the British Irish Chamber of Commerce. Mark, congratulations on sharing, your energy could power the room. My question is in relation to Horizon Europe and the UK's great news that the UK is now an associate member. How important are these bilateral and global collaborations in terms of driving innovation to Northern Ireland? And what more can the UK government do to facilitate greater collaborations across these islands and between the entire European research area in Northern Ireland.

Mark Ferguson: Very good. Want to go first?

Mary McKenna: So, the closest thing I have to a day job is I actually work for Horizon Europe as a jury member, seeing the fantastic innovations and the breakthrough innovations that come through to us. So I am over the moon that the UK has rejoined Horizon Europe and, you know, it is the place. I would love to see some more applications from Northern Ireland businesses.

Mark Ferguson: And Mary's a jury for the European Innovation Council, so you might want to speak to me because I chair the board. I'm useless, okay, talk to Mary. She actually makes the decisions about the applications. Dave?

Dr Dave Mosley: I think the, the fantastic partnership that I've seen between academic and the various companies that are forming in our cluster just are a great pillar to start from, and I think should be replicated everywhere. And so, that, that'd be my reaction.

Mark Ferguson: Paul?

Dr Dave Mosley: We've got a fantastic local project with Ulster University and, actually, in Invest NI from an R&D perspective, where we take in interns from Ulster and we, we co-collaborate. These types of projects wouldn't happen without the likes of, of the Horizon project. And last week's decision was massively important. If I'm allowed a second thing, I would ask-, I would ask for the universities to take a percentage equity in, in their start-ups. I think that would help.

Mark Ferguson: Very good. And I think there's a unique opportunity for people in Northern Ireland because, remember, colleagues in, in Ireland have been in the Horizon programme. So north-south collaboration, I think, can really give a boost. And particularly early on. So I would be really encouraging of north-south and east-west collaboration. But there's a kinda unique angle there. Okay, who else would like a question? I'm not getting the evil eye yet, no, no, okay, very good. Who else, come on. Nobody? Because I'm gonna talk if you don't talk. Okay. Alright. Well, there's none so far. So let me then change

the subject very slightly and say, here we are looking at investment and innovation within Northern Ireland, okay. And you're looking at women role models in this.

Mary McKenna: Yes.

Mark Ferguson: You know, what more could we do? You know some of the stuff that's been done in Europe, but, I mean, the number of female investors is really low. I mean, it's single digit percentage. What can we do there?

Mary McKenna: Very, very low in Northern Ireland, yeah. I'm aiming to change that. So, anybody in the room that would like to join our syndicate, it's called AwakenAngels and any, anybody else that's involved in an Angels syndicate that would like to co-invest alongside us, we have 87 businesses that have come through our accelerator. It's founded by women, innovative, fantastic, great investment opportunities. Come and talk to me later.

Mark Ferguson: Very good. Any comments, Dave, Paul?

Dr Dave Mosley: Our, our company is two-thirds women.

Mark Ferguson: Wow, that's brilliant.

Dr Dave Mosley: And, and culturally it's very interesting how we got there. Especially in South East Asia, a lot of what you would call operations jobs that moved on, just like the, I described the plant and dairy, and are now very high tech jobs running very sophisticated robots. And then growing all the way up through management. We've seen this progression over time, to the point where, you know, I, my personal feeling right now is if you're not recruiting actively and, you know, sustaining everyone in your organisation, you're gonna have a problem anyway, so. And, and learning to communicate cross-culturally, as well, is very, very critically there. So, you know, I think these are all things that are, in my opinion, build an inclusive environment by listening to one another, talking to one another, building a team. You know, very critical for the future.

Mark Ferguson: Paul?

Paul Murnaghan: Just to close on diversity and inclusion in general. You know, whenever I was a grad, I didn't really care what the values of the company was, I just cared about what car I got or what money I got, right. Kids coming out of university now have a much richer sense of, of purpose, and in particular, I have three daughters, they, they want to know what those things are.

Captions by Verbit Go.