



Is the South East still a winner for foreign companies?

Genzyme Chief flags up key challenges at Waterford MBA Association event, and asks, seven years on – is the region still a good value proposition for foreign companies?

The question was topical and the ensuing debate lively when Genzyme opened its doors this week for a site tour and seminar for business guests of the MBA Association of Ireland's South Eastern Chapter and the Spirit of Enterprise Forum.

Genzyme MD Dominic Carolan told the invited audience that the South East had the "right people, with skills in abundance" coupled with a strong tradition of engineering, which had made it very appealing to Genzyme - and these factors continue to be the area's strongest attractions for foreign companies, in parallel with Ireland's benign tax climate.

The dynamism of the area's R&D reputation had been a decisive factor for Genzyme in 2001 when the Boston headquartered Biotech Company, which spans 70 locations and 30 countries, opened its plant in Ireland.

Mr Carolan also highlighted the role of Waterford Institute of Technology in pro-actively meeting the new plants skills requirement, and the South East's emergence as a "new frontier of biotechnology, and a centre of excellence for pharmaceutical manufacturing."

But, seven years on, the key question of the evening was: Is the Value Proposition of the South East of Ireland still as strong for foreign companies?

The topic provoked a lively debate amongst the audience of industry and public sector managers and executives and Mr Carolan did not play down the significant challenges for Genzyme and for the South East Region in the immediate future.

He highlighted Ireland's soaring energy costs and the lack of toxic waste treatment facilities as threats to Ireland and the South East's competitiveness. The capital cost of factory build, which is significantly higher in Ireland than most other international locations, could also be a significant disincentive to foreign companies seeking to establish manufacturing bases in Ireland.

Nonetheless, he concluded the debate on a very positive note, citing the South East's pro-business environment and sectoral clusters of similar and supportive industries as combining to make a very compelling value proposition.

Mr Carolan highlighted Waterford's strong position in the current FDI magazine's ranking of European Cities and Regions of the future as encouragement for the future. Of the top 50 cities it came in at number 19, ahead of any other Irish city and was no 15 of the top 25 most attractive cities for FDI, the only Irish city to make the ranking.

With many established products and services used by patients in almost 90 countries, Genzyme is a leader in the effort to develop and apply the most advanced technologies in the life sciences.