

HANSON ANNOUNCES NORTHERN IRELAND'S INVESTMENT IN THE HEART OF EU

David Hanson, the recently appointed Minister for Europe, today visited the Louvain Institute in Belgium to see at first hand how Northern Ireland's contribution is being used to develop the historic college.

Mr Hanson said, *"Northern Ireland's investment in this Institute is helping to bring its facilities up to modern day standards and provide a superb building in the heart of Europe. It will be an invaluable resource for the people of Northern Ireland and others to learn about European issues"*.

The Minister commented, *"It exemplifies Northern Ireland's involvement in Europe on a practical level, and is a clear demonstration of the positive profile we are building. This investment contributes to the delivery of our strategic European objectives that include promoting our interests, and raising awareness and participation in European matters"*.

Northern Ireland's investment was part of a joint funding package with the Irish Government aimed at modernising the Louvain Institute's facilities to increase its capability to deliver Europe-related educational courses.

Mr Hanson went on to say, *"This investment is an example of how Northern Ireland has played a positive role in a North/South partnership to deliver a facility that will help everyone on the island of Ireland to prosper in Europe"*.

Notes for the Editor

1. Mr Hanson toured the first phase of an £8.9m development and refurbishment programme, which is scheduled for completion in 2007.
2. The Louvain Institute for Ireland in Europe was established in 1984 as a not-for-profit, non-denominational, non-government organisation to take responsibility for the historic Irish College in Louvain (originally founded in 1607) and to develop it as a resource for both parts of the island of Ireland to enable them to prosper in the European Union.
3. The Institute is housed in a building originally constructed in the 17th century as an Irish College within the University of Louvain/ Leuven and was founded by Irish Franciscans as a centre for scholarly research on Ireland.
4. Grant-aid from Northern Ireland (representing around 16% of the total cost) was made on the basis that it would position the Institute to become an active resource contributing to Northern Ireland's strategic European policy objectives and in raising the region's positive profile in Europe.
5. Of the total project cost of €12.8m (£8.9m), the Irish Government contributed €5.3m (£3.7m) - 41% - with the remaining €5.5m (£3.8m) - 43% - being raised from private sector sponsorship.
6. The Institute seeks to increase awareness of EU policies, programmes and practices through the provision of made to measure educational courses to all on the island of Ireland.