

THE LOUVAIN INSTITUTE

The Louvain Institute for Ireland in Europe was established in 1984. It is a non-profit, non-denominational, non-government organisation. It is responsible for the historic Irish College in Louvain (originally founded in 1607) and its development as a resource for both parts of Ireland to enable them to prosper in the European Union. The Institute's mission is:

'To help maximise the benefits, for both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, of EU membership, by increasing awareness of EU policies/programmes and developments as well as mainland European business practices, through the provision of high quality programmes for business, the public sector, higher education and the voluntary sector';
and

'To facilitate the promotion of all forms of cultural activity from both parts of Ireland, including the Arts, Theatre, Music, Dance and Literature'.

The Institute's Board consists of leading figures from business, public and cultural life in both parts of Ireland, as well as senior officials in the European Commission. Since its foundation, the Institute has enjoyed the patronage of the King of the Belgians and successive Presidents of Ireland.

The Institute is housed in a building originally constructed in the 17th century as an Irish College within the University of Louvain/ Leuven. It was founded by Irish Franciscans as a centre for scholarly research on Ireland. By the early 1980s, this role had dwindled and much of the College was under-used and in poor repair. The concept for the Institute arose from the need to find an appropriate new use for the building. The Institute recently acquired an adjoining chapel, which has been converted into a large conference/exhibition space.

The Institute has close relationships with the various European institutions and a range of other organisations working in Brussels, including the representations of the Member States and their regions. It seeks to increase awareness of EU policies, programmes and practices through the provision of made to measure educational courses that are delivered in partnership with universities, business organisations and public authorities. Its aim has been to provide a learning service to all on the island of Ireland.

During the past 20 years, the Institute has provided programmes for more than 30,000 individuals in keeping with its mission. In 2003, 72 residential programmes were provided for more than 2,100 participants from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Around half of the participants came from the higher education and youth sectors.

The Institute is now in the process of undergoing extensive refurbishment and development, scheduled to be completed by the end of 2007. The total cost of the refurbishment programme is €12.8m (approximately £8.9m).

The contribution from the Northern Ireland Administration to the refurbishment and development programme will enable the Institute to become an active resource contributing to this region's strategic European policy objectives and raising Northern Ireland's positive profile in Europe. The capital works are needed if the Institute is to achieve the modern standards expected of it.