

Deputy O'Donnell presents EIQA National Quality & Excellence Awards 2006

12th October 2006

Deputy O'Donnell said:

Thank you ladies and gentlemen, and to EIQA for inviting me to the National Quality and Excellence Awards. Mary Harney sends her warm regards to you all; I know she is a long-time supporter of the organisation. It's quite daunting to address those driving and delivering excellence across so many sectors in Irish life. There are a lot of perfectionists in this room!

That pursuit of excellence and high standards, which is the credo of EIQA, is central to successful organisations and indeed to a successful Ireland. Whether it's parenting a child, educating a student or motivating an employee, approval and recognition of hard work and a job well done is hugely important.

So, tonight is about recognising those people and organisations who achieve the highest standards of quality and excellence across a range of sectors - from retail to manufacturing; banking to the nursing home sector. It is by honouring those who deliver the best that standards improve.

For 35 years EIQA has been assisting business to improve their products and services by providing independent audit and certification. During that time our country has travelled an amazing path - from economic and social stagnation to unprecedented success and prosperity - from despair to confidence - from an acceptance of mediocrity to the pursuit of excellence that we are honouring here this evening.

Building and sustaining a strong, vibrant and competitive economy in Ireland is not an end in itself. The Government sees it as an instrument for social justice. A successful economy generates the revenue to improve public services and quality of life for all, but particularly the most vulnerable.

Ireland is a world leader in software, pharmaceuticals, electronics; we are one of the world's most globalised countries; a global leader in terms of our image abroad for encouraging business development. We are ranked number one in the EU for entrepreneurial activity and private capital investment. We are number one in the OECD for attracting new Foreign Direct Investment because of our focus on quality and excellence.

I applaud EIQA for perpetuating this crucial ethos, and for not standing still. The Government must also, in our work, facilitate and deliver continued excellence, as a basis of our competitiveness. And that is a challenge.

The most recent Forf's Report indicates that our competitiveness is under threat. Imports are growing faster than exports. Ireland's share of world trade has recently declined.

In response the Government will place excellence and competitiveness concerns at the centre of our day to day work. These will shape Government investment decisions for the

future. The forthcoming National Development Plan will, over the coming 7 years, address Ireland's acknowledged physical infrastructural deficit.

As to our knowledge infrastructure, the Government knows that this is the next phase of our economic development. To this end we have launched a Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation to ensure the highest standards in our knowledge economy.

Over 35 years, EIQA has not stood still, extending its remit across more areas of service delivery. And I welcome the new '*National Quality of Care for Nursing Homes*' category and commend the top five nursing homes competing tonight for the National title of the best of the best. Well done to you all.

When my colleague and Minister for Health Mary Harney launched the standard for nursing homes earlier this year, she emphasised that when care in the home or community is no longer possible, older people must have access to the highest quality of residential care. How we provide for our senior citizens in their twilight years when they need us most is a test of our commitment to civilised values.

The Government too is totally resolved to improve standards right across the health service. A forensic assessment of standards will soon get underway starting with the establishment of the Health Information and Quality Authority.

HIQA will be separate from the HSE and the Department of Health and its job will be to monitor health services and identify good and bad practice.

As you know, Mary Harney has an unrelenting focus on improving standards in hospitals particularly the critical front line of A & E Departments and I welcome the acknowledgement this week by front line staff such as nurses that reforms are making a difference and show significant improvements on this time last year.

On behalf of the Government, I acknowledge the role of EIQA and on you its clients in Ireland's overall success. By driving quality performance in each of your respective fields you drive Ireland's success. I am delighted to present the awards for the Overall National Title Winner's.