

AIRTO Annual Dinner 15 May 2017

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Speech by Professor Richard Brook OBE FREng, President, AIRTO

Ladies and Gentlemen, Guests and AIRTO members. Good evening and welcome to the AIRTO Annual Dinner 2017.

A lot has happened since I made the introductions at last year's Dinner. We woke up on June the 24th to a "well I wasn't expecting that when I went to bed last night" referendum result, and then deja vu on November 8th at the conclusion of the US Presidential elections. And now we're in the midst of a largely unexpected snap election!

We're very grateful therefore to our guest speaker Tim Dafforn for navigating the rules of purdah to be with us this evening, particularly as this event is, I'm pleased to say, completely sold out! You'll appreciate that purdah does constrain what we can talk about as the rules prevent discussion of policy matters with government officials in the run up to Polling Day. So, we'll navigate around policy matters and instead concentrate on what the rest of us can do to run with the new Industrial Strategy and to drive innovation into the economy.

But first back to Brexit for a moment. Our members have been lining up their proverbial ducks. Chief Executives met last summer after the referendum to highlight both the opportunities for trading beyond Europe and to identify risks arising from the changed relationship with the EU.

Recent economic impact surveys carried out by Oxford Economics had already shown that AIRTO members as a whole do twice as much business beyond Europe as with Europe itself and in a wide range of territories. This bodes well for the future and our CEOs were generally upbeat about the prospects. But there were, and still are, significant worries, not least over the availability of skilled staff post Brexit but also concerning continuity of engagement with key European partners and programmes; not just Horizon 2020 and its successors but also the major European procurements for operational infrastructure such as the Galileo and Copernicus space programmes for example.

And then we had the welcome announcement of a consultation on the new industrial strategy. We participated in round tables with the Secretary of State and senior government officials and also with fellow trade associations at the CBI, and of course we entered the '38 consultation question challenge'.

We'll pick up several of the key themes as we develop our priorities for the coming year, notably on how we address innovation across industry, our own sector and academia. After all, who is better placed than us to take on the challenges of innovation outlined in the strategy? Who is better placed to join up innovation across the various sectors that make up the economy and across the various components of the Industrial Strategy?

A few reminders then about our community of innovation practitioners: over £32 billion contributed to GDP; an innovation support network significantly larger than Germany's Fraunhofers; 60,000 skilled technical and business staff; significantly better than UK average productivity; and a super experiential training ground for the multidisciplinary and versatile skilled staff that we need for the future.

I won't go through all that AIRTO has been doing with Government over the past year, but all in all we have stepped up several gears in our engagement with the innovation agenda. And there is a lot more to come. I am pleased to say though that alongside this there has been a significant increase in our membership.

Our community is now more than 60 organisations (65 at the last count) and growing, from National Laboratories to fully private enterprises and many variations in between. A further twelve organisations have joined us since May last year – that's one a month, including:

- The Met Office
- British Geological Survey
- UKAEA
- The Oil and Gas Technology Centre
- Rothamsted Research
- Agrimetrix Ltd

And also amongst new members represented here this evening, The National Centre for Innovation in Ageing and TravelSpirit Foundation.

We shall be focusing in the coming year on several core elements of the industrial strategy: our community's part in underpinning innovation; closing gaps in the provision of practical skills and applications knowledge; mitigating risk and increasing confidence to invest in innovation; helping to drive investment in R&D towards the 3% of GDP target. So, we are in the process of putting together a Sector Deal proposition for Innovation.

We also note and support in particular the call to step up leadership and entrepreneurial capacity in the UK. Our guest speaker knows a bit about that! He is Professor of Biotechnology at Birmingham University, Chief Entrepreneurial Adviser at BEIS and founder of Linear Diagnostics Ltd and Dioptica Scientific Ltd.

Supporting us on the Top Table we have:

Ruth McKernan	CEO of Innovate UK
Ian Chapman	CEO of UKAEA
Andy Kirkman	Deputy Director, Met Office
Neville Salkeld	Strategy Director, QinetiQ
David Flanders	CEO of Agrimetrix
Julia Evans	CEO of BSRIA
Jeremy Watson	President of the IET
Felicity Burch	Head of innovation and digital, CBI
Steve Yianni	Non-executive Director of AIRTO

Along with myself; AIRTO's Chairman, Neil Sanderson, and, of course, Tim Dafforn.

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