Christmas came early at Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) on the 1st December when more than 200 students demonstrated their entrepreneurial skills to members of the local community, fellow students and staff from the College. The Christmas Market event at the Moylish Park Campus forms part of MarketLink Entrepreneur, a multidisciplinary careers, innovation and entrepreneurship programme for students at LIT.

According to LIT President, Dr. Maria Hinfelaar: “Now in its third year, MarketLink Entrepreneur is designed to engage with students on a structured basis allowing for entrepreneurial behaviours, skills and attitudes to be developed on a practical basis. The Christmas Market is the practical element of MarketLink Entrepreneur where students can put what they have learned to the test.”

27 teams of students were provided with seed capital of €150 to develop products which were presented for sale on their Christmas Market stalls. Products for sale included Christmas cards, calendars, toys and confectionery. All proceeds from the Christmas Market will go to charity, which include Cancer Research Ireland, Share A Dream Foundation and Down Syndrome Ireland.

The students participating in today’s event come from Limerick (96), Clare (34), Tipperary (22), Kerry (12), Cork (10), Mayo (10), Galway (6), Wexford (2), Laois (2), Roscommon (2), Westmeath (2), Leitrim (2).

Dr. Hinfelaar continued: “LIT’s Department of Business, through this programme, recognises that entrepreneurship and the growth and development of small Irish businesses is central to economic recovery in the current climate. Ireland has always possessed a strong entrepreneurial spirit, with an abundance of great ideas. By encouraging and harnessing such ideas and the people behind them, the country can be guided on a more sustainable path to economic recovery.”

Mr. Donnacha McNamara, Head of Business at LIT, explained that MarketLink Entrepreneur is an ideal starting point for students who may have an interest in establishing their own business or working in a family business at some stage in the future.

Mr. McNamara noted that the MarketLink Entrepreneur Programme stimulated the growth of an enterprising and innovative culture of entrepreneurship, which he described as “the essential seedbed for the growth of successful young businesses”.

“There is no substitute for a good business idea”, he added.“The MarketLink Entrepreneur Programme is a good example of getting young people to walk the walk instead of talking the talk. Putting theory and business ideas into practice will prove to be invaluable for these students as they look to progress their careers beyond third level education”.

“The MarketLink Entrepreneur Programme not only encourages students to develop business ideas, but it also instils valuable entrepreneurial attributes such as creativity and determination. This culture of enterprise and entrepreneurial thinking is central to the country’s future competitiveness”, Mr. McNamara concluded.

MarketLink Entrepreneur will continue in 2012, with an LIT Entrepreneur competition, which will include a programme of workshops in the Spring.

The MarketLink Entrepreneur programme is a Shannon Consortium initiative, and represents a collaboration between LIT’s Department of Business, Careers Office and the Hartnett Enterprise Acceleration Centre (HEAC). The programme is funded by the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) and the Enterprise Boards in the Midwest Region.

Further information on the MarketLink Entrepreneur programme is available on the L.I.T. website at www.LIT.ie/MarketLink .

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