



**Introduction by  
The Rt Hon Lord Hurd  
of Westwell CH CBE PC  
Chairman of the FIRST  
Advisory Council**

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this official FIRST report on Ireland to mark the State Visit of Michael D. Higgins, the President of Ireland. We at FIRST would particularly like to thank HE Dan Mulhall, Ireland's Ambassador, and his staff for all their help and guidance in the preparation of this publication. We are also very grateful to the Taoiseach for contributing such an important interview to this official report.

This first and historic State Visit by an Irish President to the United Kingdom is especially timely and follows Her Majesty The Queen's highly successful State Visit to Ireland in 2011 during which the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh received an extremely warm reception. The State Visit of the President will highlight the breadth and depth of the bilateral relationship as well as the important Irish contribution to British life.

The relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom is characterised by strength and complexity. The two countries are linked by geography, history, business, politics, culture, sport and technology. The two economies benefit significantly from the flow of people, goods, investment, capital and ideas. I look back with pleasure on my time in Northern Ireland in 1984-1985. I am glad that the work which we, with others, began then in negotiating the Anglo-Irish Agreement has borne fruit in a steady improvement of our relationship.

This State Visit will also underline the important trade and investment relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom. Two-way trade is estimated at over £1 billion per week and the United Kingdom accounts for over thirty per cent of imports

to Ireland. The UK and Ireland both enjoy open and globalised economies and share a commitment to boosting growth. Ireland is the UK's fifth largest export market and Ireland hosts nine of the top ten global pharmaceutical companies.

Irish direct inward investment into the UK is significant and stood at £12.1 billion in 2012. Between 2003 and 2012 Irish companies invested over £40 billion in capital expenditure and created over 180,000 new jobs in the UK. There are more than fifty Irish companies listed on the London Stock Exchange, a group which represents the highest number of any other country. This trade and investment relationship is vital to both countries and this State Visit will help underline the strength of these joint endeavours.

We warmly welcome President Higgins and his wife Sabina to this country. The State Visit to the United Kingdom while providing an opportunity for private discussions, will give us all the opportunity to study developments in the bilateral relationship and weigh carefully the many opportunities to work together ever more closely.

The State Visit will also provide an opportunity for the President to visit the Palace of Westminster and deliver a much anticipated address in the Royal Gallery. He will then attend a reception in the Royal Robing Room with members of the All Party Parliamentary Groups.

We at FIRST are delighted to have been asked to produce this official publication to mark the State Visit of President Higgins, and hope that it contributes, in a small way, to its success and the further development of the bilateral relationship, especially in the areas of trade and investment. **E**