

# THE IRISH TIMES

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## Business Today

**BEING SOCIABLE:** forum focuses on social entrepreneurs



Aisling Foundation and O<sub>2</sub> Ability Awards founder Caroline Casey, who is the first Irish and UK Ashoka fellow, with Bill Drayton, founder and chief executive of Ashoka, at the Mansion House, Dublin, yesterday. Photograph: Cyril Byrne

## Call to foster social entrepreneurship

**CAROLINE MADDEN**

Social entrepreneurship must be fostered at Irish universities for the sector to flourish, a gathering of business and social entrepreneurs heard yesterday.

Addressing the State's first social entrepreneurship forum at the Mansion House, Dublin, yesterday, Paul O'Hara, director of social entrepreneurship organisation Ashoka Ireland, said the resources and supports provided for social entrepreneurs must be

increased. "We need to ensure that social entrepreneurship is taught and fostered in universities," he said. "We need an influx of really high-quality people into the field."

The social entrepreneurship sector is dependent on Government funding, he added. "The sector has to be independent if it wants to effect systemic change."

Bill Drayton, founder of the international Ashoka organisation, said social entrepreneurship offered many opportunities for businesses in Ireland. "Ashoka hopes to be able

to demonstrate here some of the major ideas we have developed," he added.

Also speaking at the forum, businessman Denis O'Brien stressed the important role that social entrepreneurship has to play in Irish society, and said the sector was "alive and kicking". In particular he praised the work of Caroline Casey, founder of the Aisling Foundation and the O<sub>2</sub> Ability Awards.

Mr O'Brien added that the "new Irish" were playing an "incredible role" in the area of social entrepreneurship.