

Opening statement of the Teachers’ Union of Ireland to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on the General Scheme of the Research and Innovation Bill 2023.

5th May 2023

**1. Introduction**

1.1 The Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) welcomes the opportunity to make this presentation to you, as part of your pre-legislative scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Research and Innovation Bill 2023.

1.2 The TUI represents teachers, lecturers, researchers, education professionals and staff (20,000+) in Education and Training Boards (ETBs), voluntary secondary schools, Community and Comprehensive (C&C) schools, Youthreach, Institutes of Technology and Technological Universities and those working in school services. TUI is the only trade union representing academic and research staff in the Institutes of Technology, Technological Universities and St. Angela’s College Sligo.

The TUI is recommending suggested changes for your consideration to a number of Heads in the Bill including to Heads 1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 15, 27, 28, 29, 39, 45, 47, 51 and 56.

I will now briefly refer to some of these suggested amendments.

**2. Suggested amendments to the Bill**

**2.1 Head 1 - Long Title**

The proposal to form a single new agency to replace SFI and IRC is welcome, however significant additional funding is required for higher education. With reference to Education at a Glance 2020, it confirms that 0.9% of GDP is spent on tertiary education in Ireland compared to the OECD average of 1.4% and 1.2% in EU23.

Between 2011-2021 Ireland’s research intensity fell, coming third behind Estonia and Finland. Ireland was spending less on Research and Development in 2021 than it was in 2011.

(See: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php?title=R%26D_expenditure>)

Research and Development funding in 2021 in Ireland came mainly from the Business and Enterprise sector, with little funding from Government and a very small amount from the Higher Education sector.

Currently funding in Research and Development in Ireland falls well below the EU 27 average of 2.32% of GDP and is just above half of this at 1.23% of GDP.

A balanced and progressive system designed in consultation with the research community (including our members) and based on sound international best practice will ensure that the proposed agency can support research from the bottom up, support researchers from all disciplines and at all stages of their careers.

The current research landscape includes diverse research pathways, with various discipline approaches. Research cannot happen without researchers. However, in the IOT/TU sector, there is an unacceptable level of precarious contracts with inferior terms and conditions of employment for researchers. The long-standing claim for pensions for researchers which TUI lodged a number of years ago has not yet been approved by the official side. We remain hopeful that there will be good news from DFHERIS in respect of this claim soon.

The Bill does not appear to us to do anything to address the gap in capital funding in the TU/IOT sector.

**2.2 Head 3 – Interpretation**

We recommend an elaboration of the definition of research as follows:

*“research” means creative and systematic work undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge (including knowledge of humankind, culture and society), and to devise new applications of available knowledge, across the spectrum of Arts, Engineering, Humanities, Mathematics, Sciences, Social Sciences and Technology, having regard for the terms and conditions of employment, remuneration, superannuation and career path of those so engaged.”*

The list of disciplines in this proposed definition is replicated from Head 20(2)(b).

We recommend that definitions should be added in respect of *“basic research*” and “*fundamental research”* referred to in Head 8.

**2.3 Head 8- Objects**

TUI recommends the inclusion of additional objectives under Head 8 including:

*“to promote and support balanced regional development of research and innovation”*

and

*“to promote and support the value and necessity of research to society and the economy and the need for appropriate support and reward at all career stages of those engaged in research.”*

Under Head 8(b) we recommend the insertion of the term “*sustainability”* before “*development”* to emphasise the urgency of the need to address sustainability, and a reinforcement of the commitment to do so.

Under Head 8(e) we recommend the following amendment to comprehend the diverse range of research types, methods and research within the sector. The Proposed amend to read:

“*to promote parity of esteem, advance and facilitate equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion in research and innovation”.*

The use of the term “*oriented basic research”* in Head 8(f) is unnecessarily restrictive and reductive and we suggest that the term “*applied research”* be added or that both terms be replaced by the generic term “*research*.” We also recommend that the word “*sustainability”* be added to the phrase “*future development and competitiveness in the State.”*

In addition, we suggest that one further objective be added to cover the principle of academic freedom:

“*to protect and promote the principle of academic freedom.”*

**2.4 Head 9 – Functions**

TUI recommends a number of amendments to Head 9 which include a reference to developing an effective researcher (including academic staff) career development framework with the addition of the following to the end of Head 9(d):

“*having due regard to the employment rights and opportunities for lecturing staff.”*

We also recommended the additions of the following functions to Head 9:

*“promote the attractiveness of research as a valued and viable career having due regard to the security and continuity of employment, the terms and conditions, remuneration and superannuation of researchers;”*

“*for value in and of itself, as well as alignment with EU policy”, which is to promote the inclusion of citizens in research co-design and delivery.”*

*“minimise the bureaucratic and administrative burden attendant to applications for funding;”*

*“support balanced regional development of research and innovation;*

*“provide specific support to the development of the technological sector having due regard to the importance of research in the functions of a Technological University as laid out in the Technological Universities Act 2018 and the role of Institutes of Technology and Technological Universities in civic and cultural life and in the development of business and enterprise at a local, regional and national level;”*

In addition, we recommend amending 9(k) by adding “to *promote parity of esteem*” to the start of 9(k) to read:

*“promote parity of esteem and support equality, diversity and inclusion in research and innovation; design and delivery.”*

**2.5 Head 10 - Consideration in the performance of functions**

We recommend that 10(a) be amended to refer to both public and private research and innovation funders.

**2.6 Head 15 – Membership of the Board**

We recommend that there should be a transparent process in the selection of the Board. It is vital that this Board is representative of the sector – i.e. includes members from the research community. The governance arrangement must be independent, transparent and accountable and bound by international best practice in governance.

We also recommend that membership of the Board in section 15(3) should include provision for ICTU to have nominating rights for one of the 11 Board members. In accordance with other nomination processes the ICTU should be able to nominate one male and one female nominee.

**2.7 Head 27 – Grants to Research and Innovation Ireland**

The use of the term “*exceed”* is unclear. Does it mean spending by RII shall not exceed…?

**2.8 Head 28- Corporate Plan**

We recommend that Head 28(3)(c) be amended to read:

 *“shall consult with Enterprise Ireland”*

We also recommend that Head 28 (3)(d) be amended to read:

 *“shall consult with Industrial Development Authority Ireland”*

With reference to Head 28(3)(e) we recommended that it should specifically include a reference to consultation with HEIs, researchers and citizens. It should also explicitly have regard to EU Research policy and priorities.

**2.9 Head 29 – Annual Plan**

We recommend that a reference to the requirement for broader consultation with HEIs, researchers, citizens etc. be included here.

The Explanatory note for Head 29 states that:

*“In preparing the annual plan, Research and Innovation Ireland shall consult with the HEA on matters that have not been the subject of prior consultation under Head 28(3)(b), or on matters where further consultation would be beneficial. Head 56 includes a reciprocal amendment in the HEA Act providing for the HEA to consult with Research and Innovation Ireland in preparing its annual plan in the same circumstances. The intention is that matters where there is significant overlap between the two agencies should be consulted on in particular, such as researcher career frameworks, research infrastructures and research talent.”*

This is particularly important, and the legislation needs to put in place measures to ensure that Ireland has a research and innovation sector which supports researchers and puts to an end the precarious nature of employment for researchers in Ireland with inferior terms and conditions of employment, fixed term contracts, few prospects for promotion and no pension provision.

**2.10 Head 39 – Consultation and Advisors**

We recommend that Head 39 (1) be amended as follows:

*“Research and Innovation Ireland may appoint such consultants and advisors, as it considers necessary for the performance of its functions, having due regard to the qualifications and experience of its staff and the need to develop its staff.”*

**2.12 Head 45 - Preservation of Contracts made by Science Foundation Ireland**

We note that Head 45 is silent on subcontractors (including collaboration agreements) entered into by awardees of SFI which are still in force after the termination of SFI.

**2.13 Head 47 - Liability for loss occurring before the date of dissolution of Science Foundation Ireland**

We note that Head 47 is silent on subcontractors (including collaboration agreements) entered into by awardees of SFI which are still in force after the termination of SFI.

**2.14 Head 51 – 57**

We note that in Heads 51-57 the same issue arises as set out in Head 45 concerning the dissolution of IRC and sub-contracts relating to awards made which may continue for a period after the dissolution.

Heads 51-57 are also not explicit enough on the role of the IRC as an awarding body within the HEA, (it is in the explanatory note to Head 51 but not in the proposed text for the Bill.) The title should probably mention IRC rather than certain activities.

**2.15 Head 56 – Amendment of Higher Education Authority Act 2022**

 Head 56 (b) states:

*“in section 21(3), by the insertion of “and shall consult with Research and Innovation Ireland in respect of relevant matters arising that have not been the subject of prior consultation under section 28(3)(b) or where further consultation would be beneficial” after “by the Minister under subsection (4)”;*

Is this section 20(3)(b) of the Amended HEA Act or Head 28(3)(b)?

**3. Conclusion**

Chairperson and members of the Committee, I would be delighted to take any questions that you have in relation to what the TUI has proposed. The TUI is also willing to engage with you and assist further in the development of this Bill through the legislative process.

Annette Dolan

Deputy General Secretary

Teachers’ Union of Ireland