

Developing a New Strategy for Education and Skills 2016-2018

Input from University College Cork

Challenges for Higher Education in Ireland

- International competition to attract and retain the best staff and students is intensifying.
- Students have rising expectations relating to pedagogies, IT infrastructure and accommodation.
- Addressing the human resource, capital and maintenance infrastructure deficit while incentivising income streams and meeting increasing costs is of critical importance to sustain current activity and to meet increased demand
- There is a need to sustain and grow investment in research and innovation.

Key Actions Required:

Funding

1. Immediately engage with the report from the Expert Group on the Future Funding of the Higher Education Sector and make the necessary political choices to ensure the Higher Education sector is sufficiently resourced to meet its societal obligations. Prioritise measures to reverse increases in student-staff ratios.
2. World-class research delivered throughout our Higher Education Institutions is central to the student learning process and experience. The sustainability of the funding of both research teams and infrastructure is central to this provision. Research funding models should make provision for sustainability. Ensure research output remains competitive, of added value to learning and commercial, by ensuring that an appropriate economic level of overhead is made available.
3. Provide strategic funding to support the internationalisation agenda for the Higher Education sector thereby enabling Ireland's broader internationalisation agenda and ensuring that the multiplier value and national benefit of international education is maximised.
4. Introduce a tax regime, such as in the UK, to support greater philanthropic giving to Higher Education.
5. Commit to providing multiannual budgets to the sector.

Governance and Autonomy

6. Implement the restructuring of Governing Bodies of universities to ensure fitness for purpose.
7. The Higher Education sector has to compete globally for talented staff and students. Provide the necessary fit-for-purpose human resources and performance management tool kit to enable the appropriate incentivisation and management of staff resources in parallel with appropriate accountability mechanisms. Approve and implement the Corporations Framework which is a requirement of the Universities Act, 1997.
8. The economic downturn has seen the introduction of significant levels of bureaucratic oversight of Higher Education Institutions. The profusion of such regulatory burden, perhaps justified by the crisis in the past but introduced without any evidence of long-term efficacy, must now be reversed in the interests of improved efficiency and effectiveness in line with best western and northern European standards.

Education

9. Affirm that the benefits of Higher Education extend beyond a healthy economy. Incentivise the creation of a graduate pool of citizens that can sustain both a healthy economy and a highly functioning society through a balanced recognition of the Humanities and Social Sciences as well as the STEM disciplines.

10. Diversity of access models is central to the successful provision of Higher Education opportunities to all citizens, of all ages. The commitment to growing flexible, part-time and life-long learning opportunities should be matched by incentivisation and at least equal treatment of the traditional full-time provision. Introduce full recognition by the HEA of the University's flexible learning provision (online/part-time/blended). Currently such provision by the University is not recognised by the HEA in the annual 'returns' process and hence the University is not in receipt of state resources while delivering a critical priority for Government.
11. The Government should commit to encouraging increased diversity among institutions in their portfolios, in their pedagogical approaches and in student selection.
12. Address the STEM/ICT skills deficit through appropriate intervention at second level and increase the level of support necessary to feed a growing STEM-based knowledge economy. Develop ICT as a fully resourced subject at second level to allow students to gain an understanding of their aptitude and interest in ICT and to develop the requisite skills for study of the subject in Higher Education.
13. Reverse the cutbacks in guidance counselling at second level as it is increasingly evident that students do not have ease of access to information they need to make informed decisions about university course options.

Research and Innovation

14. Collaborate with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to simplify Technology Transfer and intellectual property procedures to optimise the commercialisation of research.
15. Review the governance of Research and the interface between it and the governance of the other functions of the University.
16. Facilitate critical mass building in Research through funding of specific Research Centres and Institutes in line with SFI strategy.

Internationalisation

17. Collaborate with other Government Departments to enable international student recruitment by reducing visa processing times to 4 weeks or less. The current visa application processing time is 13 weeks from the Dublin office.

Infrastructure

18. Provide capital funding to Higher Education Institutions to accommodate the rapidly growing student population and to reverse the 10 years of declining infrastructure. Re-introduce the capital investment programme for HEIs to include provision for addressing the maintenance backlog deficit. Provide capital investment for IT infrastructure.
19. Introduce incentives to provide greater encouragement to universities to construct Student Accommodation.