

National College of Ireland's Response to Reform of Higher Education Legislation

Executive Summary

National College of Ireland (NCI) welcomes the proposed legislative reform of the Higher Education Legislation. NCI welcomes the proposed legislative reform's intent to bring all degree awarding bodies under the Higher Education Authority (HEA) noting that this will enable NCI and other directly funded institutions to be recognised as designated HEA Institutions. This will bring clarity to the regulation and governance of the directly exchequer funded institutions which currently sit outside the HEA as an anomalous group and will more effectively recognise the essential contribution of this group to higher education. The establishment of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) combined with this legislative reform will serve to protect higher education, research and innovation and continue to develop Ireland's learners as key national assets and a source of competitive advantage.

NCI is a directly exchequer funded institution, a not-for-profit higher education institution (HEI) and a registered charity regulated by the Charities Regulator and for tax exemptions, the Revenue Commissioners. To date NCI, and a small number of similar HEIs that are directly funded by the Department or the HEA, have been anomalies in the HEI landscape and not designated as HEA institutions. This legislation offers an opportunity to align this group of directly exchequer funded institutions who share not-for-profit status, with the current designated HEA institutions.

NCI delivers to National Skills Development Strategy and DFHERIS Strategy through flexible 3rd level programming that is focussed on maximising access to higher education. The Governing Body of NCI believes our work to maximise access to Further Education students, to second-chance and part-time students, students seeking accelerated degree programmes, those seeking up-skilling through market activation programmes and through degree, masters and PhD qualifications in the key skill areas of ICT, Business and Learning and Teaching, is central to the College's mission, vision and values.

The proposed legislative reform of the Higher Education legislation outlines the Governance and Co-regulation processes between the HEA and designated institutions. NCI is already fulfilling the outlined governance arrangements and would welcome direct collaboration with the HEA. The new legislation will significantly address the anomalies of both NCI and the other directly exchequer funded institutions and facilitate greater collaboration across these institutions, a collegiate sharing of expertise that will enhance delivery for learners, research activity and innovation. The objective to advance equality, diversity and inclusion through the higher education sector will be progressed by the HEA designation of this group of directly exchequer funded HEIs.

NCI welcomes the legislation proposal that all degree awarding bodies become designated institutions of the HEA. However, NCI believes that there should be clarity in the legislation for the positioning within the HEA for not-for-profit institutions who already receive exchequer funding, whether from the Department or through the HEA. The essential contribution that directly funded institutions make to the higher education sector in the advancement of learning and teaching, research and enterprise innovation, with a clear commitment to access and flexibility for learners, must not be lost under the new legislation. Rather there is a real opportunity to accelerate educational strategy through collegiate collaboration with other directly funded and designated institutions.

We welcome and endorse the proposed reforms to the legislation and the look forward to participating in a much enhanced HE ecosystem. The proposed changes present a timely opportunity to regularise the anomalous situation for NCI and the other directly exchequer funded institutions.

The remainder of this document addresses the specific proposal of the legislative reform, commencing with a profile of NCI and using existing NCI Governance and regulation as example of the relevance of proposals within the legislation and the College's endorsement of the proposed legislative reform.

Proposed Legislative Reform: Profile of National College of Ireland

NCI was established in 1951 by the Jesuit Order as the Catholic Workers College with a view to educating adults who had left the educational system at an early age. In responding to the demand for second chance education, the College had a unique and revolutionary focus on the provision of education in Ireland, embracing training for workers, supervisors and managers and contributing to their effectiveness in their role in the workforce. NCI has evolved from the Workers College, the College of Industrial Relations, the National College of Industrial Relations, to the National College of Ireland in May 1998, as its programme scope expanded to include ICT, Business, Psychology and Teaching and Learning. The College currently delivers programmes for almost 6,000 students at Degree, Masters and PhD level from a staff of 350, a full-time Academic staff, 65% of whom are qualified to PhD level, and an Associate Faculty who bring both academic and industry qualifications to the NCI learner.

NCI's mission is 'to change lives through education' and while the Jesuit order no longer owns the College, the Jesuits, Ibec and ICTU all nominate senior members to the Governing Body (Appendix 1) bringing a unique perspective of social justice, economic activity and worker's rights to the College's core mission. These values are in total alignment with NCI's 70-year history of providing accessible pathways to higher education and learning and skills for sustainable employment.

Developing its academic profile, NCI has strategically focused its research agenda over the past decade on a vibrant, impactful and applied research agenda that generates ideas and discoveries, creates new fields of knowledge and makes a difference to the societal, cultural, environmental and economic development of local, national and global communities. In the last academic year alone, NCI participated in local and international research projects with a total value of €7 million.

For the past 12 years, aligned with its social mission and geographic positioning in the North East Inner City, NCI has delivered a service to disadvantaged families and community, focussing on literacy and numeracy through the Early Learning Initiative. The initiative, while focussed on pre-school children, also works with families and their children as they progress through Primary and Secondary education. Endorsed by academic research this programme has a core objective to increase educational achievement, to demystify pathways through education and create ambition in this disadvantaged group for higher education and achievement of sustainable employment.

NCI sits within an anomalous grouping of other directly exchequer funded institutions that share our not-for-profit charitable status, many founded by religious organisations for the purposes of educational endeavour. Within this grouping are Marino Institute of Education, Mary Immaculate College, the Pontifical University, Carlow College, Dublin Dental University Hospital, Royal Irish Academy of Music, Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies. The proposed Higher Education Act legislation presents an opportunity to address this anomaly and bring this group of institutions under HEA designation in line with other designated HEA institutions.

Proposed Legislative Reform: NCI's alignment with proposed Governance and Accountability

The majority of the proposed reforms to the legislation are already in place within the governance and accountability structures within NCI. NCI has robust internal governance structures with a uniquely constituted Governing Body that holds the President and the Executive Team to a very high level of

accountability. When the college was founded 70 years ago by the Jesuits the mission reflected the ambition of the college to improve social conditions through education. This represents the college's social justice values and focused interest in providing work ready graduates to the labour market. The Governing Body of the College comprises representation from the Jesuit Community, (although Jesuit ownership ceased in 1998), Ibec and ICTU, in addition to representatives of industry, the student body and academic and non-academic staff, ensuring a collaborative governance that is reflective of NCI's mission, 'To change lives through education'.

As an independent not-for-profit HEI with charitable status NCI is also regulated by the Charities Regulator and complies with the Charities Governance Code. It is recognised by the Revenue Commissioners as a body with charitable tax exemption status. NCI is governed by the relevant provisions in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance legislation in relation to quality assurance and corporate fitness provisions.

The College's founding principles of accessibility and inclusion position NCI as a higher education institution that is highly responsive to the needs of the labour market while providing access routes to higher education for a diverse range of learners. NCI is in receipt of 36% (18% direct recurrent government funding and 18% other direct and indirect government funding) of public funds annually and is fully accountable for the utilisation of these funds and is committed to providing value for money to the exchequer, the tax payer and NCI students.

NCI was awarded a capital grant from the Department of Education and Skills, receiving €8.9 million in 2002/03, towards the cost of the building at the Mayor Street Campus. In return for this the Department of Education & Skills holds a legal charge on the NCI Campus building.

Proposed Legislative Reform: NCI's response to Co-Regulation and Shared Governance

NCI welcome implementation of the co-regulation and shared governance proposals. As stated above NCI already has strong accountability, compliant with the regulations of QQI and the Charities Regulator and already has shared governance between its corporate, executive and academic strands.

NCI appreciates its autonomy and has a strong desire to preserve its flexibility in order to continue to be a responsive, nimble and innovative HEI delivering on many government skills objectives. In tandem with this NCI is also committed to transparent governance and accountability at the institutional level which discharges accountability to students, stakeholders and the public.

We agree with the proposal that there is a need across for a strengthened oversight role for the HEA, adopting a risk based regulatory approach across all HEIs.

Core to the proposed reforms is the proposal that more streamlined, competency based governing authorities should lead and support the chief officer/executive in continuing to develop a strong corporate governance culture within the HEI, linked to strong academic governance by the academic council. This is currently how NCI's governance structures work with clear roles and responsibilities for the proposed 'shared governance' strands.

| Key Provisions of the Legislation | NCI Alignment |
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| Setting out clearly the role of the HEA and the role of the Minister as it relates to the functional responsibilities of the HEA | This is welcomed particularly in light of the establishment of DFHERIS and the role of the Minister in relation to the HEA |
| Setting out clearly the roles and responsibilities of the HEIs | As stated previously NCI is an independent not-for-profit higher education institute and while not governed by specific sectoral legislation operates to a clear set of roles and responsibilities. In reviewing such roles and responsibilities against the key provisions of the proposed reform of the legislation we are happy that we are in full alignment |
| Setting out a clear performance and governance framework between the HEA and the HEIs including data collection | While NCI is currently in receipt of part of our funding directly from the DES we do make returns of information as and when required by the HEA. We fully expect for a higher level of data to be provided to the HEA under the reformed legislation. This will provide the HEA and DFHERIS with a clearer picture across the HE landscape. |
| Providing for an appropriate size, composition and appointment process for governing authorities of HEIs which is conducive to good governance | On reviewing the requirements for size, composition and appointment process for governing authorities the NCI Governing Body approach is in direct alignment with the exception of the role of the Nominating Bodies: the Jesuits, Ibec and ICTU. |
| Delineating the role of the governing authority and the Chief Officer of the HEIs - assigning the responsibility to the Chief Officer to conduct the business of the HEI, while being accountable to the governing authority | The Constitution of National College of Ireland clearly delineates the role of our Governing Body and that of the role of President. |
| Providing for a strong Academic Council in HEIs which is responsible for academic affairs of the HEI | The role of NCI's Academic Council is written into the Memorandum of Articles for the company and is described as follows: <i>The College shall appoint a body of persons to the Academic Council to assist the Governing Body of the College in the planning, co-ordination, development and overseeing of the educational work of the College.</i> |
| Providing a reserve power to the governing authority of the HEI to objectively conduct reviews and investigations to determine if policies have been complied with and to initiate action where they have not | There is provision for this reserve power within the NCI Constitution. |
| Providing a power to the HEA to conduct reviews and investigations if the governing authority has not addressed any issues arising and to implement appropriate remedial measures if necessary | This would be a new feature for NCI in its relationship with the HEA. We have every confidence in our Governing Body and in our governance structures yet understand the requirement for such powers to be provided to the HEA. |

Proposed Legislative Reform: Governing Authorities of HEIs

The proposed reform of the governing authorities of HEIs closely reflects the existing composition and governance of the NCI Governing Body. It is understood that the intention of the reform of governing authorities aims to provide more effective, independent, strategic, competency-based boards which will lead and direct the HEI. As proposed in the legislation consultation, the NCI Governing Body members have a fiduciary duty to NCI in the first instance. The reforms propose that the governing authorities of HEIs will have no more than 12 members (including the Chairperson) comprised of:

- an independent Chairperson,
- the Chief Officer,
- 4 independent external members.
- 2 students.
- no more than 4 members from academic staff, non-academic staff, ex-officio.

The NCI Governing Body constitutes the Board of Directors at National College of Ireland and is responsible for the overall management and direction of the college and compliance with company law. The Governing Body establishes and monitors the college’s strategic direction and policy, its financial planning, and compliance with best practice in all college activities. It consists of members drawn from the following bodies:

- IBEC - 2 nominees
- ICTU - 2 nominees
- The Jesuit Community - 2 nominees
- The Staff of the College - 2 elected staff members
- The Students Union of the College - 1 elected member
- The Nominations Committee – up to 5 nominees
- The President of the College – ex-officio
- The Chairperson

| Proposed Features of Governing Authorities | Aligned Features of NCI Governing Body |
|---|--|
| A majority of external members to ensure there is credibility in the accountability role (students included in external members for this purpose), | The majority of NCI Governing Body members are external. See Appendix 1 for list of current members. |
| All members appointed based on competency (experience or expertise in matters connected to the functions of the institution or organisational governance and management), | All of NCI Governing Body members have been selected based on competency including those from nominating bodies. |
| Internal members appointed by election | The NCI Governing Body internal members are appointed by election. |
| External members appointed by the Minister following the conduct of an open process (approved by the institution with the consent of the Minister) | As NCI is not a designated institute of the HEA there has been no need for approval by the Minister, but it is a process that we are willing to comply with in the future. |
| There will be a requirement to achieve balance in the gender composition of a governing authority. | The NCI Governing Body has already achieved balance in its gender composition. |

Proposed Legislative Reform: Role of Governing Authority

| Proposed Responsibilities of Governing Authorities | Current Responsibilities of NCI Governing Body |
|---|---|
| Appointing the Chief Officer and delegating functions to the Chief Officer and establishing and implementing arrangements for the management of the performance of the Chief Officer | This is provided for within the NCI Constitution |
| Ensuring appropriate systems, procedures and practices are in place to achieve the objectives as set out in statute and specified in its Strategic Plan and to enable compliance with the policies of the Government and the HEA which relate to the functions of the HEI | While NCI is not currently governed by specific, HE sectoral legislation it is confident that all governance structures and processes are in alignment with proposed reforms |
| Guiding and reviewing strategic directions and major plans of action including approving and overseeing the implementation of a 5-year strategic plan in consultation with the academic council | This is already part of NCI's strategic planning process |
| Approving and overseeing risk management policies and procedures | The Risk Management Sub-Committee of the NCI Governing Body approves and oversees risk management policies and procedures. This committee advises and assists the Governing Body in discharging its oversight responsibilities in the area of risk management, excluding internal financial control where oversight is provided by the Finance Audit and Organisation Committee |
| Approving and overseeing the implementation of internal quality assurance and improvement policies and procedures and reviewing the output of external quality assurance in consultation with the academic council | The Risk Sub-Committee periodically reviews the key risks identified in relation to quality assurance procedures and policies and the outputs from the external QA such as external examiners, validation panels and institutional reviews. |
| Approving and overseeing the implementation of policies and mechanisms for student engagement and feedback and for engaging with key external stakeholders | Finance, Audit, Organisation, Capital Projects Sub Committee: this committee reports directly to the Governing Body itself and oversees the financial planning and reporting compliance of the college as a Limited Company. |
| Approving and monitoring annual budgets, business plans, major capital expenditure and investment decisions | As above |
| Approving annual financial statements in the form specified by the HEA | As above |

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| <p>Establishing sub-committees (including a mandatory Audit and Risk sub-committee) to assist and advise in relation to the performance of its functions</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Finance, Audit, Organisation, Capital Projects Sub Committee: this committee reports directly to the Governing Body itself and oversees the financial planning and reporting compliance of the college as a Limited Company. ○ Nominations Sub Committee: this committee reports to Governing Body on the skills, knowledge, and composition of the Board and make recommendations for necessary changes. ○ Risk Sub Committee: this committee advises and assists the Governing Body in discharging its oversight responsibilities in the area of risk management, excluding internal financial control where oversight is provided by the Finance Audit and Organisation Committee ○ Remuneration Sub Committee: this committee reviews all relevant comparative information and makes recommendations to the Board in respect of remuneration, including performance related remuneration and pension of the President, Vice President and the Director of Finance. |
| <p>Initiating a review or investigation into issues of concern related to the HEI's functions or operations and initiating actions arising from such review or investigations (of its own volition or at the request of the HEA)</p> | <p>The power for the NCI Governing Body to review or investigate is provided for within the NCI Constitution. The NCI Constitution would need to be amended to make provision for a review or investigation to be carried out at the request of the HEA</p> |
| <p>The governing authority is supported in its work by the establishment of a number of sub-committees which carry out important work on key issues such as Finance, Audit, Risk, Human Resources, and Equality. The establishment of sub-committees of the governing authority are provided for in the sectoral legislation</p> | <p>NCI's Governing Body has a number of sub-committees as listed above</p> |

The report states that “The sectoral legislation will be amended to provide for a consistent representation of these functions across the university, institute of technology and technological university sector”. NCI recommends that the language is amended to become more inclusive and to take consideration of institutions such as NCI and other anomalous institutions as detailed above who are in receipt of direct exchequer funding.

Proposed Legislative Reform: Role of Academic Council

NCI's Academic Council is in alignment with the proposed sectoral legislation which includes provisions for a minimum number of students as members of the Academic Council. The regulations/statutes governing the membership of the Academic Council (including student membership) are made by the Governing Body. NCI Academic Council has recently been reviewed to ensure that students have an effective voice on the Council.

The role of NCI's Academic Council is written into the Memorandum of Articles for the company and is described as follows: *The College shall appoint a body of persons to the Academic Council to assist the Governing Body of the College in the planning, co-ordination, development and overseeing of the educational work of the College.* Under the direction of the Governing Body, the Academic Council may regulate its own procedures. The main duty of the Academic Council is to direct and inform effective decision making to ensure effectiveness and quality in NCI's teaching, learning, assessment, student support and research activities. It acts as the authoritative body for academic quality matters and drives effective decision making to ensuring the maintenance of academic standards and alignment with statutory and regulatory requirements. The Academic Council will oversee the quality, relevance and impact of academic strategies, policies and procedures for academic quality assurance, continuous quality improvement, and programme lifecycle management and encourage a culture of continuous quality improvement and across NCI.

NCI endorses and practices the proposed sectoral Legislation reforms through its current constitution and Academic Council.

Proposed Legislative Reform: Role of Chief Officer of the HEI

NCI's President is accountable to the NCI Governing Body for the effective and efficient management of the HEI and for the performance of his or her functions.

As proposed by the legislative reforms, NCI's governance structures provide for a clear division of responsibilities between leading and directing the governing authority and the executive responsibility for running the HEI. The division of responsibilities between NCI's Governing Body and the President are clearly established, set out in writing in the NCI Constitution and agreed by the Governing Body. NCI's President manages and control the academic, administrative, financial, staff and other matters as determined by the NCI Governing Body and has such necessary powers for these purposes, as proposed in the legislative reform.

Under the proposed reforms it is understood that the NCI President would become the Accountable Officer in respect of public funding with an obligation to attend at the Committee of Public Accounts in such capacity.

Proposed Legislative Reform: Voice of the Learner

NCI welcomes the emphasis the proposed reform of the legislation places on learners and ensuring that learners are inputting and considered the HEI. The voice of the NCI learner is evident across many processes and structures including:

- The class representative structure
- Student representation on the NCI Governing Body
- Student representation on NCI Academic Council
- Student representation on Disciplinary Committees
- Student representation on Examination Review Committees

- Participation in the National Student Engagement programme (NStEP)
- Participation in the national student survey – Student Survey.ie
- Individual module surveys

Proposed Legislative Reform: Research

It is proposed that under the new legislation that the HEA have a role in HEI's to promote, support and evaluate excellent research across all disciplines in accordance with national research policy and in partnership as appropriate with Departments of State, relevant Government agencies and any other body the HEA considers appropriate.

NCI's research agenda is well aligned with this objective and in particular has focused on fostering an impactful and applied research agenda that generates ideas and discoveries, creates new fields of knowledge and makes a difference to the societal, cultural, environmental and economic development of local, national and global communities

In line with the mission of widening access to education and developing knowledge economy skills the College has collaborated on many research partnerships. Under the Horizon 2020 programme funding has been secured in areas such as cloud computing, data analytics, technology enhanced learning and blockchain technologies. The College places a strong emphasis on applied research and development of commercialisation opportunities from that research. NCI is a member of the Dublin Regional Innovation Consortium (DRIC) and, working with commercial entities, has secured Enterprise Ireland support under the Innovation Partnership scheme.

Current research initiatives include:

- *CERI: Centre of Expertise, Research and Innovation (CERI)* incorporating the Early Learning Initiative services, establishing a National centre of excellence for parent and child learning support programmes. Working through a number of EU grants CERI intends to be a European Leader in the area of research in Early Learning and Home Visiting practices.
- *CELL: Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL)* is designed to deliver enhanced capacity in teaching, research and innovation, to support NCI's pedagogical philosophy, enhance the student experience, deliver accessibility and most importantly digital transformation. This initiative is working with Solas, the National Adult Literacy Agency and Aontas specifically in capacity building for educators in line with government's Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy.
- *CCC: The Cloud Competency Centre* at NCI was established in 2013 to promote excellence in teaching and research in cloud computing. CCC is actively collaborating with key educational and industrial partners through international research projects, to enhance instruction, research, and commercial portfolios beyond the traditional boundaries of academia.
- *Research Collaborations:* NCI's Psychology undergraduate programme has successfully collaborated with Trinity College Dublin and Maynooth University on collaborate research facilities for students for final year projects.
- Community Action Research (research defined, undertaken, analysed and evidenced by members of the community) continues to be at the core of ELI research to innovate in the process of research and continuous co-creation of ELI programmes.

In the last academic year NCI participated in research projects with a total value of €7 million. Some examples of ongoing research activities are:

- The NEWTON Project which develops, integrates and disseminates innovative technology-enhanced learning (TEL) methods and tools, for state-of-the-art teaching labs, through a pan-European learning network platform.
- Personalised m-Learning Environment for Mobile Devices with Multiple Wireless Connectivity IRCSET Embark Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme based on learner's profile and access network while taking into account user budget constraints.
- Text messaging and mobile learning as a means to lowering barriers to help-seeking in students with depression
- Structured parallelism approaches to heterogeneous computing systems such as multi/many-core CPU and GPU Clouds.
- Scalable data analytics for the solution of domain-specific problems
- Big Data and Process Modelling for Smart Industry, Smart Pharmaceutical Manufacturing
- Clinically validated Integrated Support for Assistive Care and Lifestyle Improvement: The Human Link

Proposed Legislative Reform: Involvement of External Stakeholders

NCI modus operandi clearly demonstrates the proposals in the legislation regarding external shareholders. Utilising the College's location in the IFSC close to Dublin's Silicon Docks, in the heart of Dublin's North East Inner City, an area of significant social disadvantage provides significant opportunity for collaboration. The college works closely with community, local Deis schools and neighbouring employers to design education to provide work ready graduates for an ever evolving local, regional, national and global economy, while focussing on access for learners.

NCI is an excellent example of an innovative HE institution that is close to employers within the economy, vested in community, working across the educational sectors, and committed to changing lives through education in partnership with Government. Current examples include:

- accelerated two-year degrees
- our Early Learning Initiative (ELI)
- professional apprenticeships in Financial Services Ireland and Recruitment
- our involvement in P-Tech with Dublin's North East Inner City (NEIC) secondary level schools
- accredited programmes for Solas instructors and employees in Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
- SFI funded delivery of Coding Clubs to primary schools in the NEIC in conjunction with ELI
- EU funded research into learning in ICT and computational thinking
- design and delivery of programmes delivering on industry needs funded by Skillnet Ireland, Springboard+ and a number of industry partnerships
- collaboration with Education and Training Boards on the provision of advanced standing arrangements for transitioning from Further Education to Higher Education
- partnership with NUI Maynooth on the delivery of PhD programmes

These examples of innovative programmes are delivered alongside and within the broader provision of programmes to c.6,000 students across levels 6-10 on the National Qualifications Framework, and a dynamic learner internship and graduate placement programme.

Proposed Legislative Reform: Equity of Participation

Within NCI equity of participation is a core philosophy focused on the provision of inclusive opportunities for life-long learning as detailed in the proposed legislation. To help overcome the traditional barriers, NCI delivers programmes in a flexible manner in the classroom, in the workplace and in the community. NCI provides life-long learning opportunities at a range of higher academic levels from capacity building community-based programmes to degree and postgraduate levels. NCI works with employers and state training agencies to design bespoke accredited programmes that are delivered in the workplace. Working with local community groups and other agencies NCI is also involved in educational initiatives at pre-school, primary and second level education, improving the chances of children from economic disadvantage communities to progress to third level.

The student profile of NCI is significantly different from other state funded third level institutions where the vast majority of students are full-time.

Throughout its history NCI's mission has focused on providing access to third level education for non-traditional learners. The mission is to:

- Provide access to education at a time place and pace that suits the learner
- Create opportunities for learners to succeed
- Create a centre of academic excellence in our programmes

The top 10 feeder schools to NCI over the past 5 years do not include any fee-paying schools. The median CAO points for NCI degree programmes are in the range 301-340 points, well below the level for comparable courses in the university sector. Despite the lower points on entry NCI graduates still have one of the highest employment rates as measured in the annual graduate first destination survey, and graduate with the same National level degree qualifications as Ireland's top Universities.

NCI participates in both DARE and HEAR admissions schemes for students with disabilities or from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. NCI also receives funding under HEA's Fund for Students with a Disability and the Student Assistance Fund.

The College is committed to delivering higher education aligned to the skills needs of the economy and the educational needs of NCI's immediate community, supported by best academic practice and research. Access is a core principle of NCI's programme provision, with flexible modes of delivery and supports, across c.6,000 full and part-time students. Since 2008, National College of Ireland has operated an innovative community education initiative, the Early Learning Initiative, focussed on addressing educational disadvantage in the inner city of Dublin among pre-school children and their families. This programme is focussed on raising educational ambition in the community, delivery numeracy and literacy skills so that children can access primary education and enabling their families to support their continuing educational journey.

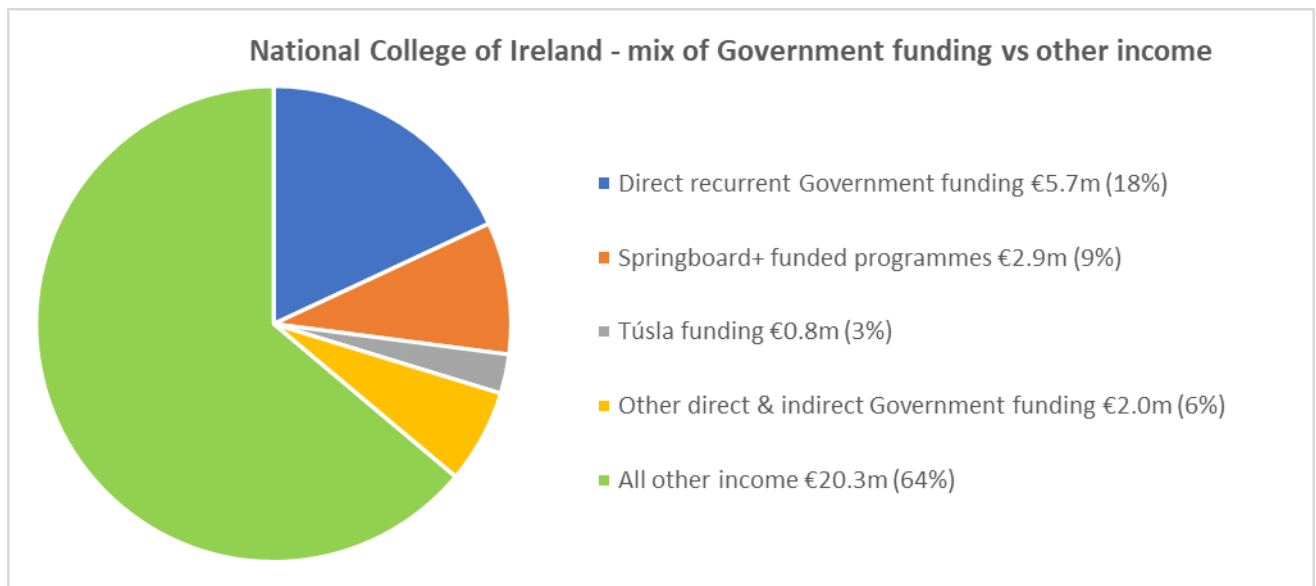
NCI's approach to access can provide a model for addressing equity in higher education.

The Early Learning Initiative (ELI) at National College of Ireland was developed, with support from private donors and the College's own resources, to address the problem of educational underachievement in marginalised communities which became immediately apparent when the College moved to the IFSC in the Norther East Inner City. Building upon tried and tested models of early years' intervention, ELI's mission to work with communities in areas of greatest need, to provide world-class parent and child learning support programmes. The programme is based on the knowledge that the first 5 years are critical for children's futures and that learning begins at birth.

Substantial research conducted in Ireland and internationally indicates that early learning is the foundation for all subsequent learning. At three years of age, there are already big differences in language and mathematical development between children from rich and poor backgrounds. This gap continues to widen, if not addressed before children start pre-school. The sad fact is that without early intervention through home visiting and parent support, generations of children’s life chances have been determined before they enter formal education. The ELI is unique in breaking that generational cycle through the provision, from birth, of an integrated programme of activities, training and support for children, parents, and educators. Participation has grown from 400 people to 14,500+. Along with Government and loyal corporate partners, and supported by robust academic research within NCI, ELI has supported the educational journeys of thousands of marginalised children and young people.

Proposed Legislative Reform: Outline of NCI’s direct exchequer funding

As a directly exchequer funded institution, NCI’s funding profile includes a mix of recurrent and other Government funding as illustrated in the following chart:



NCI has been an annual recipient of free fees and core grant for CAO students since 1994. Initially receiving funding for 925 students, the number of students funded is currently at 1,150 students.

NCI’s funding mix compared to HEA funded institutions as of 2017/18 (the most recent institutional profile data on HEA website) is as follows:

| Income Sources | HEA Funded Institutions | NCI |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|------|
| State Grants and HEA Fees | 39% | 36% |
| Other Fees | 34% | 58% |
| Research Grants & Contracts | 19% | 1% |
| Other Income | 8% | 5% |
| Total | 100% | 100% |

The Department of Education & Skills hold a legal charge on the NCI college building in the IFSC, arising from the capital grant received from the Department of Education and Skills of €8.9 million in 2002/03 towards the cost of the building at the Mayor Street Campus.

NCI students receive SUSI grants as the College is an approved institution under the 1999 Higher Education Grants Scheme.

NCI receives research grants from both EU and Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) for academic research in collaboration with HEI's (Ireland and EU) and corporations.

NCI's entrepreneurial approach to providing access to education is mirrored in our approach to funding. NCI generates over 60% of funding from outside the state sector through private student fees, commercial activities and philanthropic fundraising. The College funded the development of the new IFSC campus in 2002 with limited reliance on state funding.

Appendix 1 Current National College of Ireland Governing Body Members

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Appendix 2 National College of Ireland's Exchequer Funded Higher Education Positioning

1. NCI has been an annual recipient of free fees and core grant for CAO students since 1994. Initially receiving funding for 925 students, this number is currently at 1,150 increased to 1,000 in 2018/2019.
2. NCI was awarded a capital grant from the Department of Education and Skills, receiving €8.9 million in 2002/03 towards the cost of the building at the Mayor Street Campus. The Department of Education & Skills also holds a legal charge on the Campus building.
3. NCI is a registered company limited by guarantee with no share capital, and a registered charity.
4. NCI students receive SUSI grants as the College is an approved institution under the 1999 Higher Education Grants Scheme.
5. NCI participates in both DARE and HEAR admissions schemes for students with disabilities or from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. NCI also receives funding under HEA's Fund for Students with a Disability and the Student Assistance Fund.
6. NCI provides HEA with full statistical data on its educational activity annually.
7. NCI receives research grants from both EU and Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) for academic research in collaboration with HEI's (Ireland and EU) and corporations.
8. NCI administers the ISSI student survey annually participating with other designated HEI's, has achieved 4 Stars under the QS Stars HEI ranking, holds Athena SWAN Bronze level accreditation and is in final stages of designation as an Autism Friendly Campus.
9. NCI strongly aligned with DFHERIS Strategy for Higher Education:
 - a. NCI is largest School of Computing (2,300 students - undergraduate and postgraduate) and largest provider of Springboard Programmes in Ireland.
 - b. NCI achieves 97% placement of graduates into employment (Sunday Times survey) top of all HEA Institution's performance.
 - c. NCI is sole provider of professional apprenticeships in international financial services and recruitment practice.
 - d. NCI provides multiple access routes to higher education through flexible, part-time, blended and online delivery, accelerated (2-year) honours degrees and Advanced Standing arrangements with FE Colleges for Level 6 students progressing to Degrees.
 - e. Through the Early Learning Initiative NCI provides educational services to c.14,000 individuals, families and children in Dublin' Inner City, addressing educational disadvantage in literacy and numeracy.
10. NCI has a collaboration with Maynooth University to deliver PhD programmes, and has representatives on the National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, the Regional Skills Forum and the IUA Access Steering Group for HEI's.