



## **Submission from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education**

The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education is the national body responsible for leading and advising on the enhancement of teaching and learning in Irish higher education. The Board of the National Forum, including representatives of the HEA/DFHERIS, QQI, USI, IUA, THEA and HECA, welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation report on the reform of the Higher Education Authority Act.

On careful review of the Legislative Proposals in 2019 and the related consultation report published at that time, the National Forum Board spoke with those drafting the legislation and identified in our formal submission areas where we felt we were well placed to respond. This submission reiterates briefly key points raised by the National Forum during the 2019 consultation and provides updated context as appropriate.

### **The centrality of the students and their success**

The core priority of the National Forum Strategy 2019-21 is student success, which supports the realisation of related actions in the National Access Plan and complements ongoing work in the National Student Engagement Programme and StudentSurvey.ie. The work of the National Forum has always involved the active participation of, and partnership with, students. Our experience of the value meaningful student partnership and engagement can bring to the higher education sector underlines the importance of reinforcing the centrality of students and their success in the proposed legislation.

In collaboratively developing a national understanding of student success in 2019, students across the sector identified multiple indicators of success, including personal development, academic attainment, the development of skills and maximising employability. The National Forum will be guiding institutions in the formulation of whole-of-institution strategies for student success over the coming years. To this end, we strongly urge that the central concept of student success, around which various pillars of higher education converge, features prominently within the upcoming General Scheme.

### **Parity of esteem between teaching and learning, and research**

It is essential that the wording of the legislation, at every opportunity, articulates that our sector values and supports teaching and learning just as it values and supports research. Teaching, learning and research are not separate activities of higher education; they are mutually dependent. A legislatively reinforced equilibrium such as this would be helpful for institutions as they try to balance their commitments and resources across teaching and research.

The establishment of the National Forum in 2012 and the recent commitment to funding for teaching and learning through the Innovation and Transformation Fund, the Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund and the Human Capital Initiative demonstrate the value that successive governments place on the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher



education. This commitment requires a legislative underpinning to reinforce its intentions and ambitions.

In July 2020, the Board of the HEA agreed to begin the process to formally integrate the National Forum, as the national body responsible for leading and advising on the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education, under the auspices of HEA. Section 6.5 of the consultation report indicates that consideration of a request by the Irish Research Council to be placed on a statutory basis under the aegis of the HEA will inform the final legislative proposals in this area. We urge that the forthcoming establishment of the National Forum under the auspices of the HEA be given equal consideration in informing the final legislative proposals. Such a legislative foundation would underpin the strategic alignment and reinforce the coherence of teaching and learning enhancement at a national level. This would facilitate long-term thinking and planning, which is essential to greater efficiency and long-term impact.

### **Informing long-term strategies**

Finally, regarding section 6.1 of the consultation document, as mentioned in our recent submission to the Department on its upcoming Strategy, as new long-term strategies are being devised and decisions made within the Department, the National Forum is perfectly positioned to inform these developments, leveraging its wealth of expertise and evidence with respect to teaching and learning. In addition to the policy partners represented on our Board, we have networks of students, staff and topic-specific experts across the country, and globally, with whom we consult and an extensive evidence base, which we add to on a continual basis. The National Forum Board is keen to see policies and developments arise from the mentioned long-term strategies that have an explicit focus on teaching and learning and to be confident that such policies and developments have the credibility and reliability of being firmly based in the evidence of both research and practice wisdom.

Providing a statutory basis for the value placed on teaching and learning, lending parity of esteem to teaching and research, and keeping student success as the central focus, will enable many of the other objectives of the HEA legislation. Such commitments will maintain Ireland's excellent reputation internationally, advance equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education, promote and safeguard the interests of students, support the achievement of excellence in teaching, learning and research, maximise the contribution of higher education to national and regional social, economic and civic development, and have regard to its responsibility to the Exchequer to deliver value for money.

We would be happy to engage further on any aspect of this submission. Further detail on the work of the National Forum can be accessed at [www.teachingandlearning.ie](http://www.teachingandlearning.ie).