

## Consultation on the reform of the Higher Education Authority Act

The Trinity Research Staff Association (TRSA) represents all researchers, from research assistants to early stage postdoctoral researchers to long serving research staff working in Trinity College Dublin.

### *Governing Authority membership*

Across many HEIs research staff can constitute up to 25% of HEI employees; comparable in number to academic staff. Research staff have minimal or no representation on HEI decision making bodies, in particular the Governing Authority / Board. Academic staff currently dominate Board membership, followed by professional/support staff, student representatives and external members, while research staff have no representation. This review represents an ideal opportunity to address this glaring omission. **In the proposed revised Governance membership structure, the sizeable constituency of research staff is excluded from Board membership.**

If the Government and the HEA are planning to follow through on its 2006 commitment to the European Charter and Code<sup>1</sup> on equitable treatment and progression of researchers and for HEIs being awarded the “HR Excellence in Research” designation by the European Commission under the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) process, the HEA needs to address this Principle:

### Participation in decision-making bodies

Employers and/or funders of researchers should recognise it as wholly legitimate, and indeed desirable, that researchers be represented in the relevant information, consultation and decision-making bodies of the institutions for which they work, so as to protect and promote their individual and collective interests as professionals and to actively contribute to the workings of the institution.

### *Optimal Size and Composition of the Governing Authority / Board*

No adequate rationale is given for such a significant increase of external members, which would alter fundamentally the composition of the Board and dilute dramatically the representation of academic, administrative, support and research staff.

Collegiality and proportional representation of all staff in Board decision making is an important aspect of HEI governance. All staff should have a role in fulfilling the HEI’s vision and achieving its mission. This HEA HEI Governance review should represent an opportunity to strengthen these aspects of our common aim. However, greatly decreasing the cohort of internal members and increasing the number of external members are backward steps. This review could also be used by the HEA to demonstrate international leadership in the recognition of and integration of Research staff within HEIs.

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1 “IAU Cooperation Accord”. 13 September 2006. [https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/cc-declarations/ie\\_tcd.pdf](https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/cc-declarations/ie_tcd.pdf)

*Characteristics of a future Governing Authority / Board*

We agree that there should be an independent chairperson, but it's important that the chair should have a firm understanding of the unique structures underpinning and composition of the HEI. Depending on the outcome of internal membership voting, all academic staff could be senior level and there may be no union representation. This in essence would concentrate more decision-making authority under the control of a small cohort of powerful senior staff, increase the risk of "Group Think", without any guarantee of representation for the hundreds of research, junior academic, professional and support staff whose work contributes to the national and international reputation of our HEIs. These voices will no longer be heard when decisions are made directly affecting their workplace and this will propagate the belief that their perspective is less valued and less welcome than others.

Particularly in the context of national movements towards equality and fairness in treatment of all, we think this should also be reflected within the Governance structures of our HEIs. **We call for explicit representation of Research staff, indeed all staff cohorts, on HEI Governance Authorities and we cannot endorse the proposed membership changes.**

Yours sincerely,

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