



An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science

2021 Annual Report

Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

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Foreword

Minister Simon Harris

I am pleased to see the publication of the first annual report for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science for. Leading a newly established Department has been an exciting and incredibly rewarding undertaking. Reviewing the 2021 annual report it's clear that our work has had a transformative effect on the sector and real impact on the lives of learners of all ages and in all stages of life.



Our agenda as set out in the statement of strategy is an ambitious one. The change we envision is systemic and fundamental for society. One where learning is truly accessible to all and integrated at every stage of life. These ambitious goals will take time to deliver but this report demonstrates that an incredible amount has already been achieved and the scene is set for so much more over the coming years.

We can't forget that 2021 was another year dominated by COVID-19. And I must thank the staff and students in all the institutions touched by this Department for their agility and dedication in providing an essential service in a time of incredible turbulence. The great achievements detailed in this document would not have been possible without the fortitude demonstrated by the teachers, students, and administrators in these institutions and of course, the enormously dedicated staff in my own Department. This Department will continue to play a pivotal role in the country's recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and in preparing for the future world of work. Our leadership and support can ensure that people are equipped with the skills needed to adapt to living and working sustainably in an increasingly global, digital and automated world.

As the first full year in operation for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2021 was a landmark time and one where the direction for our agenda was set. I'm very proud to lead a Department of such importance, with dedicated staff of such a high caliber and I already look forward to what future years will bring.

Simon Harris, T.D.,

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Foreword

Minister of State Niall Collins

As Minister of State for Further Education and Skills, I welcome the 2021 annual report for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.



The establishment of the Department was a milestone in the recognition of the Government's commitment to the ongoing development of higher and further education and skills, and the achievements highlighted in this report have borne out that recognition.

This Report sets out the very significant work that was undertaken throughout 2021 by the Department, all of which took place against the backdrop of COVID-19. The pandemic had an extremely serious impact on all aspects of our lives; how we learn, how we work and indeed the employment status of many people in the country. The Department's work as described in this report and particularly as it relates to further education and skills was an essential part of the Government's overall response to addressing these challenges. Our efforts to continually focus on offering quality education, upskilling and reskilling opportunities to everyone throughout their lifecycle are intended to ensure that no one is left behind in the ever increasing pace of evolving needs and changes in the economy and the world of work

Engaging with our stakeholders and seeing first-hand the impact of the work of this Department has been incredibly rewarding. In 2021, for example, I was able to mark the milestone of the 1000th female apprentice. The focus on broadening of apprenticeships is a key pathway in opening up further education and training opportunities for all, providing a diverse and flexible range of pathways to support lifelong learning and ensuring we develop the skills needed for our country's economy.

Niall Collins, T.D.,

Minister of State for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Introduction

Secretary General Jim Breslin

2021 was the first full year of operation for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and as such this marks the Department's first annual report.



The report is underpinned by our 2021-23 Statement of Strategy. That Strategy outlines our goals as Talent, Innovation, Inclusion, International, Governance and Capacity and a guiding mission to *develop Ireland's further and higher education and research system to support people in reaching their full potential and to create value, prosperity, resilience and a cohesive, sustainable and vibrant society*. Each of the policies, initiatives and strategies described in this report were deployed in support of this mission and I am happy to note that we have been successful advancing this ambitious agenda.

There were considerable advancements in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector. The addition of FET options to the CAO meant the full range of options was visible to school leavers for the first time, and the record number of apprenticeship registrations in 2021 demonstrates the reach of the Action Plan for Apprenticeships. The development of the Technological Universities is a real priority for the Department and 2021 was a key year, with five Technological Universities now established and contributing regionally and nationally. We published the Higher Education Authority Bill which, when completed, will provide for the most significant governance reforms within the higher education sector in fifty years. 2021 also saw strong investments in Ireland's research landscape supporting not only our researchers and innovators but also adding to the evidence base on key issues such as climate change.

2021 was also a year of significant organisational change in the Department. Throughout those changes we have endeavoured to foster a culture of inclusivity and collaboration, both internally and with our external stakeholders. This was evident in our internal structures as well as our policy formation. Colleagues have been incredibly ambitious and have seized the opportunity of a new Department and a new Statement of Strategy to deliver improvements for learners, researchers and the country as a whole.

Jim Breslin

Secretary General

Our Mission

Develop Ireland's further and higher education and research systems to support people in reaching their full potential and to create value, prosperity, resilience and a cohesive, sustainable and vibrant society.

Our Strategic Goals

#talent – develop talent and skill

Collaborate with educational institutions, employers and others to identify the talents and skills required and provide education and training, growing potential and helping people engage in and contribute to our economy and society.

#innovation – promote research, knowledge, and innovation

Lead a whole of Government approach to agree the strategy, institutional framework, and investment needed to advance basic and applied research and innovation, grounded in collaboration between enterprise, educational institutions, and wider society, in Ireland and beyond.

#inclusion – support learning for all

Provide supports and opportunities for learning to all, recognizing the needs of vulnerable learners and the most marginalized, and assist people in access to and progression through higher and further education and training, so as to grow prosperity across communities and build social cohesion.

#international – succeed on world

Position Ireland globally as a leading knowledge economy with a skills and innovation focus and as a leader in higher education and research, deepening on an all island and East/West basis, within the EU and beyond, attracting talent from around the world to Ireland's international education system and equipping Ireland to compete on the world stage.

#governance – good governance to enhance quality

Promote the modernisation of the sector, implementing a sustainable funding model and enhancing governance, in order to drive quality and secure excellence in performance.

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#talent – develop talent and skill

Collaborate with educational institutions, employers and others to identify the talents and skills required and provide education and training, growing potential and helping people engage in and contribute to our economy and society.

Apprenticeship

The '**Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025**' was launched in April 2021, involving analysis of input from over 400 partners and 3,750 apprentices and ongoing consultation with multiple stakeholders. The Action Plan sets out a five-year strategy to deliver on the Programme for Government commitment to reach 10,000 new apprentice registrations per year by 2025. The plan provides a roadmap to a single apprenticeship system and new supports for employers and apprentices. A fuller overview on the production of the Action Plan can be found in the case study below.

There was a record number of **apprentice registrations in 2021, at 8,607** – an increase which exceeds expectations of a recovery of 2020 registrations which were badly impacted by COVID-19 and also shows an almost 40% increase on 2019 figures, the last pre-pandemic year. Three new apprenticeship programmes were launched in 2021: Scaffolding, Equipment Systems Engineer and Advanced Healthcare Assistant Practitioner.

To support these increases the **Apprenticeship Incentivisation Scheme** was extended to December 2021. The Scheme provided a grant of €3000 payable over two years to support employers who take on and retain apprentices, and has supported the recovery of the apprentice registration which had slowed during the COVID-19 response measures.

Further Education and Training

The **addition of further education and training options to the CAO website** meant the full range of options was open to school leavers and other applicants were visible together for the first time. The updated Central Applications Office (CAO) website for the 2022 application process went live on 5th November 2021. This initiative is designed to highlight FET options for school leavers and to support the development of greater balance between Higher Education and FET in building a unified tertiary system. There were over 7,000 site visits to fetchcourses.ie and some 14,000 site visits to apprenticeship.ie by early 2022

Funding was secured under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan for the €114m **SOLAS Recovery Skills Response** which includes Skills to Compete, the FET activation and skills response for those who have been impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic and the SOLAS Green Skills Action Programme. Skills to Compete is now the main provision in the FET sector for those who are not in employment who wish to upskill/reskill, with courses built around three key priorities: delivering the essential skills required for modern workplaces; building strong digital skills; and developing the specific vocational skills to secure opportunities in growing sectors and occupations. There were 13,400 enrolments in Skills to Compete courses in 2021.

The Right Course – a new online portal for anyone who wants to upskill or retrain, was launched in 2021. The Right Course is a one stop shop website for businesses, employees or unemployed people and outlines all the further and higher education and training options available to them. This can be a short part-time course, a course to help someone in employment learn new skills, a course to help someone re-enter the workforce, options to help your staff learn, or choices around returning to third

#talent – develop talent and skill

level. Information from the Department of Social Protection around entitlements and supports for learners is included.

Outputs		Target	Delivered	100%
1	Number of Skillnets Learners	76,000	77,863 ¹	102.5%
2	Number of Skillnets Learners being upskilled who are unemployed	5,000	5,620 ¹	112.4%
3	Number of Springboard places available	N/A	12,957	N/A
4	Persons enrolled on apprenticeship	21,000	24,212	115.3%

Impacts		2021	2020	2019
1	Number of SOLAS beneficiaries of training courses for those seeking employment	78,502	67,410	55,349
2	Number of Post Leaving Certificate students (PLC)	Not yet available	51,059	53,842
3	Number of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) registered active FET providers	251	267	319

Higher Education Sector

In order to absorb additional demand for college places as a response to COVID 19 pressures an **additional 4620 places were created for the academic year 2021/22** including 3,320 places on certain courses in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and 1300 additional places in key skills areas under Pillar 2 of the Human Capital Initiative.

Springboard+ 2021 and Human Capital Initiative's primary objective is to underpin the provision of additional capacity across the Higher Education Sector to meet priority skill needs for enterprise. The programmes offer free and heavily subsidised courses at certificate, degree, and masters level leading to qualifications in areas where there are employment opportunities in the economy. Springboard+ 2021 provided 12,743 places on 330 courses. **As a result of multi-annual funding of graduate conversion courses, this led to a combined total of 14,947 places in 408 courses available in the 2021/22 academic year under Springboard+ 2021 and HC Pillar I.**

Outputs		Target	Delivered	100%
1	Number of full-time higher education students	201,482	199,623	99.1%
2	Number of undergraduate students	174,710	172,730	98.9%
3	Number of postgraduate students	26,772	26,893	100.5%

Impacts		2021	2020	2019
1	Unemployment rate – Third level as highest level of education	4.3%	3.1%	2.8%
2	Number of students receiving supports in the form of grants (undergraduate, postgraduate and PLC)	74,873 ²	71,399 ³	74,588 ⁴
3	Number of Postgraduate researchers (full-time and part-time, Masters and PhD)	N/A	11,199	10,529
4	No. of Springboard enrolments	10,999 ¹	14,379	9,839

Action Plan for Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship crosses boundaries; providing a bridge between workplace learning and achieving internationally recognised qualifications, helping to break down distinctions between the further education and training and higher education systems for learners, paving a route to a true tertiary system that delivers a range of opportunities suited to differing learning styles and interests.

Apprenticeship is responsive to national development and skills priorities, and delivers talented work-ready people. Upskilling and reskilling are a Government priority to foster an inclusive recovery and to support the digital and green transitions, key commitments in the Programme for Government.

The *Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025* was launched in April 2021. It seeks to implement a system that will deliver greater balance in the apprentice population, through a governance and partnership structure that ensures that the apprentice voice is embedded in apprenticeship and that there are enhanced governance and funding structures, employer supports, and clear operational arrangements. Together, the changes are targeted to deliver 10,000 new apprentice registrations per annum by 2025 – representing an increase of 62% on 2019 figures. At least 750 of those positions will be in the public sector.

This Action Plan seeks to provide a single system for the future that builds on the well-established strengths of craft apprenticeship and the learnings from five years of consortia-led apprenticeship in this country. The timing of the Plan is also significant, having been developed during the period of the Covid-19 crisis that has impacted heavily on the delivery of craft apprenticeships, as well as apprentices in sectors such as hospitality.

The Plan is heavily informed by stakeholder input; over 60 written submissions, internal consultations, and a survey of all registered apprentices. In addition, a survey of 340 SMEs was undertaken to better understand the perspectives of small businesses on apprenticeship and how the particular challenges they face in engaging with apprenticeship might be addressed.

Already tangible progress has been made. Covid-related backlogs are being addressed and eight new apprenticeship programmes were launched over 2020 and 2021, bringing the total number of available programmes to 62 and helping address areas of severe skills shortage.

The Government is also ensuring the public service plays its part by delivering high-quality public service apprenticeship opportunities, underpinning the ongoing reform of our public service. Another key action from the Action Plan, a public service apprenticeship recruitment plan, will set out ways to deliver a commitment to have 750 annual public service-wide apprentice registrations per annum.

By 2025, regardless of the sector, apprenticeships will be a clear choice for people looking for new careers, qualifications, or return-to-work options across all areas of the economy. Apprenticeships will be at the heart of the conversation when employers look for ways to recruit staff.

– ***Apprenticeship and Public Policy Partnering Unit***

Skills

A new **Skills Pact** between businesses and the Department was agreed in order to address the needs of people with low or no qualifications, with the aim of ensuring they were not excluded from employment. The Pact considered how the government can support both enterprise and the workers in those enterprises in gaining new skills. The Pact continued to be developed through interactive and dynamic National Skills Council discussions.

2021 saw the continued development of the **Regional Skills fora structure**, with strengthened integration of regional insights and reports into national level policy and deepened coordination by Regional Skills fora Managers. To highlight these developments an advertising campaign was launched underscoring what Regional Skills for a can offer to business of all sizes.

To further support the needs of enterprise while developing those who want to upskill or retrain, 2021 saw the **development of new skills programmes to support the hospitality and tourism sector**. Programmes were developed in response to the sector's needs, and working in partnership with SOLAS, Education and Training Boards, the Irish Hotels Federation and Fáilte Ireland, the Developing Leaders for Hospitality and Tourism programmes upskill team leaders and supervisory staff across Ireland in critical areas including finance and people management. Employees were trained in customer care, digital skills, communications, strategic planning and management as well as green and sustainability skills.

Sustainable Development Goals

The Department of Further and Higher Education Research Innovation and Science is lead Department for **SDG Target 4.4** *“to substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship”* and co-lead

for **SDG Target 4.7** *“By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”*. A public consultation to inform the Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development was undertaken in 2021. The strategy will adopt a lifelong learning approach and support the achievement of SDG Target 4.7, ensuring that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development and take action for a sustainable future and planet.

These targets are being progressed through the measures set out above.

#innovation – promote research, knowledge, and innovation

Lead a whole of Government approach to agree the strategy, institutional framework, and investment needed to advance basic and applied research and innovation, grounded in collaboration between enterprise, educational institutions, and wider society, in Ireland and beyond.

Capital

As part of the **National Development Plan**, in 2021 the Department committed €2.9 billion to further and higher education infrastructure, research and innovation, over the five year period 2021-25. Progress towards energy efficiency and decarbonisation targets were a key focus on the overall investment approach.

In 2021 the initial elements of a FET capital programme were put in place, including the establishment of the Emergency Health and Safety Works (EHSW) Grant and the Apprenticeship Capital Grant. Funding of €11.3m was provided for 41 capital projects, €4.4 million was provided for 51 Apprenticeship funding applications and the largest ever Devolved/Minor works Grant of €8million was awarded across 16 ETBs. In order to assist in delivery of the new FET programmes a 'FET College of the Future' design working group and a 'SOLAS and ETBI Capital' working group were established.

Construction was completed on the **Grangegorman Public Private Partnership**, facilitating the move of 10,000 students to the new campus. The delivery of the TU Dublin Grangegorman campus provided approximately 52,000 square meters of academic space which accommodates 10,000 students and 600 staff. In addition, €12 million in Exchequer funding was approved to support the Grangegorman Academic Hub.



#innovation – promote research, knowledge, and innovation

Works on Block K at Atlantic TU (Sligo campus) commenced on site on 8 July 2019 and were completed in early 2021. This development is an integral part of the master plan for the Atlantic TU (Sligo campus) and the completion of Block K is the first phase of a significant upgrade of the last remaining section of the existing campus buildings which have been there since the 1970s. Funding is being provided by DFHERIS under the Infrastructure Upgrade and Refurbishment Fund.

This capital investment is facilitating the consolidation on campus of the recently established Yeats Academy of Arts, Design and Architecture to form a North Campus Creative Hub.



Climate

A new phase of the **Energy Efficiency and Decarbonisation Pathfinder Programme (EEDPP)** for the higher education sector was agreed, with the number of projects increased from 8 to 16. In addition, a decarbonisation pathways analysis was completed for the higher education sector. DFHERIS funding under the programme increased to €11 million in 2021 from €3 million in 2020. This is an important climate action measure, which will help higher education institutions progress to 2030 targets of a 50% improvement in energy efficiency and a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The programme will continue to test different building retrofit approaches and will build evidence and capability in the sector and inform decisions for future larger-scale programmes.

#innovation – promote research, knowledge, and innovation

In April 2021 Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris, and Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan launched **Climate Ready**, a 5-year national climate initiative devised by Skillnet and designed to equip businesses with the skills they need to respond to climate change. Climate Ready includes: training on how to reduce energy waste, deliver cost savings and protect the environment; expansion of the Water Stewardship programme, which helps businesses reduce water consumption; online courses designed to assist staff at all levels to understand how their sustainable actions will play a vital role in Ireland's collective response to climate action and a series of educational engagements with experts, who will share best practice on sustainability-related topics.

Higher Education Sector

2021 saw significant progress made on reforming the higher education landscape and advancing the **Technological Universities** agenda, as key anchors for sustainable regions. TUs provide an opportunity for a step change in higher education reform for the delivery of national strategic priorities for higher education, research and regional development. Two Technological Universities were established in 2021; Munster Technological University and the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands, Midwest. Further information on their establishment can be found in the case study below.

Research

In 2021 DFHERIS laid the groundwork for its future **Research and Innovation Strategy**. The Department carried out a comprehensive consultation process which included both public consultations and engagement with stakeholders.

Creating our Future was a national conversation on research and science; its aim was to build on the success of research and science in the battle against COVID-19, and ask the public how we can shape a better Ireland through research. A series of successful public engagement events were held across the country from July, with citizens invited to share their opinions on current research being carried out, their thoughts on the direction those studies should take, and offer ideas for other research opportunities yet to be explored. More than 18,000 submissions were received and support from civic society for the campaign was considerable.

Significant investment was also made in Research and Innovation in 2021. A €225 million investment in further and higher education and research was secured through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. This investment included:

- A significant skills package for upskilling and reskilling, aimed at equipping workers whose jobs are unlikely to return, including a focus on digital skills transition and a new Green Skills Action programme.
- €40 million investment in the Transformation fund for Technological Universities to drive reforms in regional skills development and enterprise engagement, digital infrastructure and support staff development.
- €71.6 million investment in a research and innovation National Grand Challenges Programme which focused on the need for a transition to a climate neutral and clean economy as well as the challenges of digital transition.

Technological University Agenda

Advancement of the technological universities (TU) agenda is a priority commitment in the Programme for Government 2020 and is aligned with Project Ireland 2040 and the National Planning Framework. TUs will significantly assist in the delivery of national priorities in the areas of higher education access and research-informed teaching and learning, skills and employment retention and creation, supporting local enterprise and enhancing regional development right across the country. Uniquely TUs provide higher education programmes at all levels of the National Framework of Qualifications, from traditional full time undergraduate courses to doctoral degrees, work based learning including apprenticeship, placement and internships as well as part-time, online, blended and distance learning pathways.

TUs, acting as catalysts for knowledge creation, innovation and regional development, bring a range of benefits to their regions and hinterlands including increased Foreign Direct Investment and capital investment, research funding, international recognition and enable students, staff, enterprise, business and the wider community to avail of increased opportunities in their own locales with a regional imperative driving accelerated socio-economic progress.

TU establishment follows a legislatively-prescribed process involving rigorous assessment by an international advisory panel and the Higher Education Authority of two or more applicant institutes' ability to meet stringent pedagogic, research and engagement eligibility criteria before the Minister seeks Oireachtas approval for a new TU.

The first TU in the state, TU Dublin, was established on 1 January 2019 with this year seeing two new TUs come on stream. On 1 January Cork and Tralee Institutes of Technology were dissolved and in their place Munster Technological University was established across six campuses in the South and South West.

Subsequently, on 1 October the Athlone and Limerick Institutes of Technology closed their doors and in their place the first cross-regional Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TÚS) was established stretching across six campuses in four counties.

-Higher Education, Policy and Reform

#innovation – promote research, knowledge, and innovation

There was significant progress made on the **Open Research (OR)** policy agenda, including the preparation of an award of €1.725m through the HEA to support delivery of key OR projects in 2022.

The Department secured an increase in the Tyndall National Institute's funding to €10 million by 2024, which will allow it to draw down the enabling €75 million EIB loan to fund its expansion project.

There was a €28m investment in research to support researchers and build capacity. This investment included the Frontiers for Partnership Awards programme, which will increase research capacity within Technological Universities (TUs) and Institutes of Technology (IoTs). The programme is open to research proposals that are led by TUs or IoTs, with partners from the University sector, and will increase geographical involvement and research engagement across the country, building on the unique strengths of both sectors.

In January 2021 it was announced the **Irish Research Council's postgraduate stipend increased from €16,000 to €18,500** per annum and funding for its postdoctoral researchers also increased. The increases ensure that Irish Research Council-funded researchers are not at a disadvantage compared to researchers elsewhere in the research system. **€3.2m was provided for the Irish Research Council to benefit early-career researchers** - this funding will better support postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers in Ireland across all disciplines, and directly benefits almost 1,300 early-career researchers across the higher education and research system.

€193 million investment in five world-leading SFI Research Centres for six years was announced in February 2021. The five centres will carry out research into smart medical devices, e-health, telecommunications networks, cybersecurity, smart cities, artificial intelligence, ethics and data privacy, as well as

applied geosciences, energy security and marine resources. The five centres will also work to promote STEM to the wider public through extensive education and public engagement outreach. This includes summer computer camps, developing secondary school education modules, and residency programmes for filmmakers, artists and teachers to forge collaborations between researchers and the community.

On March 25th 2021, Minister Harris together with European Commissioner Mariya Gabriel officially launched Horizon Europe, the 9th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. DFHERIS was heavily engaged with the European Commission in drafting the Work Programmes that oversee how the total funding of €95.5 billion will be spent. Ireland finished strongly in the previous programme, Horizon 2020, and will continue to build on this success. As of December 2021, Irish-based researchers secured a combined €1.18 billion in competitive EU funding under Horizon 2020 since 2014. This places Ireland on track to achieve the target of €1.25 billion first set out in the Innovation 2020 national strategy, once the final figures are tallied. Irish Higher Education Institutes were key to this accomplishment, securing €681 million or 57.2% of the total. Another €306 million was allocated to Irish SMEs.

In July 2021 the Taoiseach and Minister Harris announced the **€40 million + North- South Research Programme**. The investment, provided through the Shared Island Fund and administered by the Higher Education Authority of Ireland supports the deepening of links between higher education institutions, researchers and research communities on the island of Ireland.

#innovation – promote research, knowledge, and innovation

				100%
Outputs		Target	Delivered	
1	Number of companies formally collaborating with SFI researchers	540	665	123.1%
2	Percentage SFI-funded postgrads and postdocs departing to positions outside of academia after 6 years	57%	N/A	N/A
3	PhDs funded by SFI (in year)	140	198	141.4%
4	Postdocs funded by SFI (in year)	120	227	189.2%
5	Schools with SFI Discover Primary Science and Maths Awards	450	335	74.4%
6	SFI/RTE Joint Initiative – Average Audience Reach per hour of programming	280,000	238,000	85.0%
Impacts		2021	2020	2019
1	Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) -as a percentage of GNP	€4,969m (est)	€4,027m (est.) 1.63% (est.)	€4,373m(est) 1.59%(est)
2	Business expenditure on Research and Development (BERD)	€3,747m (est)	€3,391m (est)	€3,256m
3	Higher Education Research and Development (HERD)	€1,046m (est)	€1,039m (est)	€952 (est)
4	Licence agreements between public research organisations	Not yet available	197	210
5	Invention disclosures from public research organisation	Not yet available	449	459
6	a. Research institutions prominence (Global Competitiveness Report, World Economic Forum 142 countries) b. Scientific Citations per publications/Global ranking (Clarivate InCities)	Not yet available	a. n/a b.12	a. 46 b.12

Sustainable Development Goals

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science is the lead Department for SDG Target 9.5 to ‘Enhance scientific research, upgrade the technological capabilities of industrial sectors in all countries, in particular developing countries, including, by 2030, encouraging innovation and substantially increasing the number of research and development workers per 1 million people and public and private research and development spending.’

This target is being progressed through the measures set out above.

#inclusion – support learning for all

Provide supports and opportunities for learning to all, recognizing the needs of vulnerable learners and the most marginalized, and assist people in access to and progression through higher and further education and training, so as to grow prosperity across communities and build social cohesion.

Equity of Access

A public consultation to inform the next National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education was opened in April 2021. Equity of access to higher education, and the development of the next National Access Plan to support this principle, is a key policy priority for the Department.

High Level Goal: The vision of the National Access Plan is to ensure that the student body entering into, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population.

Key High Level Metrics

	2019 Output Outturn (2019 Output Target)	2020 Output Outturn (2020 Output Target)	2021 Output Outturn (2021 Output Target)
Students with disabilities as a % of all new entrants to higher education	11% (8%)	11% (11.5%)	N/A (12%)
Number of new entrants entering higher education who are Travellers	N/A (N/A)	48 (N/A)	N/A (N/A)

Improvements for students living in direct provision accessing Tertiary Education were announced in March 2021. In partnership with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, and in support of the goal of ending direct provision, international protection applicants who have permission to work and are seeking to access Post Leaving Cert (PLC) courses no longer have to pay international fees of €3,600. Building on the initial success of these changes, the scheme was subsequently expanded to fund postgraduate courses. This provides a valuable opportunity for students in difficult situations to access further and higher education, resulting in more inclusive campuses and ultimately a more diverse workforce for our economy.

In April 2021 changes to Student Grant Scheme, including extra supports for postgraduates were announced. An independent review of the Student Grant Scheme and a public consultation on the scheme were also undertaken. Changes already made to benefit SUSI recipients include:

- no longer losing the entitlement to your SUSI grant if you received an improved offer after sitting the Leaving Cert this year,
- exclusion of several Department of Social Protection and other payments from your calculated income,
- an increase in the postgraduate fee grant,
- increase in the maximum income allowed for postgraduates,
- inclusion of the social welfare payment for 65-year-olds as a qualifying payment for the special rate of maintenance grant.

Student rental protections were agreed in June 2021. The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in partnership with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage announced protections to restrict upfront payments required by students to secure accommodation, allow for monthly payments and provide a 28-day notice period for students vacating their accommodation. In addition, a circular was issued to chief

#inclusion – support learning for all

executives of all local authorities to confirm that purpose-built student accommodation should not be used for short-term residential accommodation indefinitely, and that it should be safeguarded for use by students and other people engaged with higher education institutes during the academic year.

2021 saw the expansion of access to online services for further and higher education students across Ireland. Many further and higher education institutions' online services were only accessible on-campus via the institution's secure network. The expansion of the Eduroam programme extended virtual campuses and offered students new ways to access their institution's online services, including connections in municipal locations such as libraries, museums and public offices, and commercial locations like coffee shops and shopping centres. The initial 140 locations include some of those communities in the country where access to broadband is a major challenge.

As part of a €38 million devolved capital grant for higher education institutions under Project Ireland 2040, the Department supported procurement of additional ICT devices – including laptops – to support disadvantaged students who have difficulty in accessing a suitable device for their studies. The grant also included investments in equipment and infrastructure required to support the creation of additional student places; general ICT and equipment-related upgrades; health and safety works, and other building upgrades; investments to support universal access and energy efficiency and decarbonisation-related upgrades. The laptop scheme was primarily aimed at first year students but it was open to anyone to seek support via their institution's access office. Last year, over 8,000 laptops were distributed to higher education students.

Consent in Higher Education Institutions

DFHERIS supported NUIG, the USI and Galway Rape Crisis centre in the '**Start Here**' campaign. The eight week social media campaign was launched in March 2021 and focused on the concrete tips and tools on how to respond if you learn of harassment or sexual violence taking place. These tools are of practical benefit in preparing people to respond supportively and positively to survivors of this criminal activity.

Building on Minister Harris's contact with University Presidents of Higher Education Institutions requiring specific institutional action plans on tackling sexual violence and harassment in third level institutions, in April and May 2021 over 30,000 staff and 235,000 students in Higher Education were surveyed by their HEIs. They were asked to detail any experience of sexual harassment or sexual violence. Staff were asked about their knowledge of policies, the availability of training and whether they feel safe in reporting allegations. A total of 11,417 responses were analysed (7,901 students and 3,516 staff) and informed the findings of the subsequent report.

The Department funded the rollout, in October 2021, of the "**Speak Out**" - **Anonymous Violence and Harassment Reporting Tool** in 18 higher education institutions in the academic year. This allowed HEIs to understand staff and student experiences of harassment and violence, and assisted the HEA in making evidence-based policy decisions in this area. Most importantly, it raised awareness of the supports available to students and staff and encouraged them to seek help if they need it. Speak Out is an online and anonymous reporting platform for incidents of:

- bullying
- cyberbullying

#inclusion – support learning for all

- harassment
- discrimination
- hate crime
- coercive behaviour or control
- stalking
- assault
- sexual harassment
- sexual assault
- rape

Further Education and Training

The Adult Literacy for Life ['ALL']

Strategy was launched by Minister Simon Harris on 8th of September 2021. The Strategy sets-out a cross-government, cross-economy and cross-society approach to addressing this vital issue. It describes the detailed pathway to achieve the vision of an Ireland in which each adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital ability to engage in society and to realise their full potential. A number of commitments under the Strategy were delivered successfully in 2021, including the establishment of a one-stop-shop which provides over 210 local contact points and access to a national Freephone line for anyone who wishes to avail of one of the 100,000 places currently available through Further Education and Training (FET) providers across the country. €3 million has been allocated for the implementation of the ALL Strategy in 2022, and work is underway in establishing the necessary support structures, including a Programme Office, an innovation for collaboration fund, as well as the appointment of 16 Regional Literacy Coordinators.

The €3m Debenhams Training Fund, supported from the National Training Fund, was established to support the former Debenhams employees' access career guidance, training, education and business start-up supports. Administered by SOLAS, it will operate for 2 years from 1st November 2021 or until fully expended, if earlier.

Gender Equality

2021 saw a €23 million investment in Ireland's top post-doctoral researchers.

The focus was on the promotion of women researchers in academia, in support of improving equality, diversity and inclusion across the higher education sector. The investment was funded by DFHERIS and was a joint initiative between Science Foundation Ireland and the Irish Research Council. It saw some 40 early career researchers, across all disciplines, supported to develop cutting-edge projects through awards of up to €50,000 over a four year period.

The Senior Academic Leadership

Initiative (SALI) was launched in 2019 and supports the creation of new and gender-specific posts at appropriate levels. It creates rapid and sustainable change in the representation of women in the senior professor grade. In 2021 seven institutions were successful under the SALI call, securing an additional 10 senior academic posts.

The **Athena SWAN** charter is a framework that is used across the globe to support and transform gender equality in higher education and research. In 2021 there were 87 award holders of Athena Swan in Ireland (86 Bronze; 1 Silver), while 19 Institutions (universities, institutes of technology and colleges) hold awards, as well as 68 departments. This data reflects awards made up to and including the April 2021 assessment round.

Recognising the increasing emphasis on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, in 2021 DFHERIS established a dedicated unit to lead work in this policy area within the Department.

Sustainable Development Goals

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science is the lead Department for SDG Target 4.3, 'By 2030, ensure equal access

#inclusion – support learning for all

for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.’

The department also contributes to SDG Target 4.5, “By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable,

including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations” and SDG Target 4.6 “By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy”

These targets are being progressed through the measures set out above.

Public Engagement in 2021

6 Public Policy Consultations

- Creating Our Future
- Review of Student Grant Scheme
- National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development to 2030
- National Research and Innovation Strategy
- National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education
- Reform of Higher Education Authority Legislation

18,803

Individual Submissions



New Social Media Followers



4,175



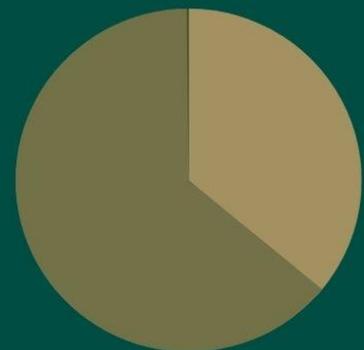
1,098



594

2,020 Parliamentary Questions Answered

3,587 Correspondence with the Minister



Creating Our Future

Creating our Future was a unique initiative launched in July 2021 by An Taoiseach and the Minister to ask the people of Ireland for their ideas and opinions on the future direction of research and innovation in Ireland. Community and special interest groups and members of the public were invited to submit ideas either online through a dedicated website, creatingourfuture.ie, by posting in a specially created Creating Our Future postcard, taking part in the online and in-person workshops and events, or by attending one of the many roadshow events that took place in every county in Ireland. Particular emphasis was placed on reaching all sectors of society.

The campaign was supported by a large scale media campaign including television, radio and social media advertising.

The campaign was an opportunity to stimulate discussion and debate on what is important to people and communities, to invite researchers to take part in those discussions with the public and together, to curate new ideas that could inspire future research.

This focus on conversation between researchers and the public was what set Creating Our Future apart from other public consultations. The campaign was designed to facilitate the collection of ideas but importantly, it was done so with an emphasis on dialogue, inclusion, and shared perspectives.

The Steering Committee was led by DFHERIS, directing the trajectory of the campaign. There was an Advisory Forum of almost 80 organisations from a broad section of public sector and civic society representatives, a number of Campaign Ambassadors, including Professor Luke O'Neill and Professor Emilie Pine, and an Expert Committee comprised of subject matter experts in research and innovation areas who analysed the responses.

In total over the course of the 5 months of the campaign, over 18, 000 ideas were received from members of the public in the campaign.

These data gathered was analysed by the Expert Committee and its Working Groups, chaired by Prof Linda Hogan Trinity College Dublin, and a report prepared showing 16 different themes which emerged from the responses received.

-Communications Team

#international– succeed on world stage

Position Ireland globally as a leading knowledge economy with a skills and innovation focus and as a leader in higher education and research, deepening collaboration on an all island and East West basis, within the EU and beyond, attracting talent from around the world to Ireland's international education system and equipping Ireland to compete on the world stage.

EU

The Bologna Process and European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is a process of engagement and reform to make higher education systems more compatible and strengthen quality assurance mechanisms. In 2021 DFHERIS led Ireland's engagement in this area and oversaw the appointment of 5 Irish representatives to Bologna Working Groups.

Erasmus+ is the EU Programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport. Education, training, youth and sport can make a major contribution to help tackle socio-economic changes and to support the implementation of the European policy agenda for growth, jobs, equity and social inclusion. In 2021 a record number of people applied to take part in the **Erasmus+** Programme, up to 7,000 people applied, compared to 5,100 who applied in February 2020. The Erasmus+ Programme was also expanded to include adult learners and early childhood organisations for the first time.

The Department, as the National Authority, discharged its formal responsibilities for ensuring the quality implementation and management of the Erasmus programme, including appointing the Independent Audit body, assessing recommendations, engaging in the programme committees, and supervising the performance of the National Agency. Ireland has two National Agencies, Leargas and the Higher Education Authority. These bodies are responsible for providing information on, and promoting the programme, reviewing applications and supporting people and organisations taking part in Erasmus+.

The Erasmus + Programme 2014-2020 concluded in 2021. The seven-year programme had a budget of €14.7 billion under key actions on Mobility, Co-Operation and Policy Reform. In 2021 the Department finalised a Performance Delivery Agreement between the National Authority and the National Agency which form part of the ongoing key dialogue in terms of ensuring adequate resources and effective governance in the context of national policy in existing and future Erasmus + Programmes.

The Peace Programmes (2021 – 2027) represents the European Union's commitment to supporting the peace process across the region, with the first PEACE Programme launched in 1995. The Peace Plus Programme is the cross-border structural funds programme aimed at reinforcing progress towards a peaceful, stable and prosperous society in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. The Department is strongly committed to the promotion of collaboration between further and higher education institutions, North and South, and this forms a major agenda on the Department's strategic work programme. The Department has met with counterparts in the Northern Ireland Department of the Economy to discuss the full range of issues of shared interest, including skills, sharing best practice, and enhancing the delivery of education in the North-west. This is complemented by regular engagement through other cross-border Interdepartmental Senior Official Groups working within the North-South infrastructure and commitments under '*New Decade, New Approach*', which comprises officials from both jurisdictions. The Department

#international– succeed on world stage

submitted a proposal on Skills to the programme authorities in May 2020, where it was brought under the overall theme of 'Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation. This is the first time skills initiatives have featured as part of the PEACE Programme. Initial scoping work commenced with officials North and South, with the objective of comparing models of delivery for apprenticeships. It is planned that this will enable the development of options to see how a cross-border model can be delivered.

Ireland's 2021 tranche of €88.3 million **REACT EU** funding was programmed under the 2014-20 European Social Fund's (ESF) Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL). REACT EU (Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe) is additional EU funding made available to 2014-20 Cohesion Policy programmes to respond to the impact of COVID-19 and to prepare a green, digital and resilient recovery of the economy. In November 2021, the European Commission approved the creation of a new priority within the ESF PEIL to support the continuation of safe and inclusive education and training in a COVID-19 context. The support focused on measures introduced to support the reopening of schools and the provision of laptops to disadvantaged students in further and higher education.

EU Receipts of €43.4m were lodged to the DFHERIS Vote in respect of PEIL expenditure declarations during 2021. In addition, €82m was lodged to the National Training Fund in respect of PEIL expenditure declarations during the year.

North/South- East/West

In July 2021, Minister Harris, along with Minister Foley welcomed the UK Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, to sign a **Memorandum of Understanding on the Education Principles associated with the Common Travel Area**. This MoU documented and codified many of the

exchanges which have been exercised by Irish and UK citizens since before both countries joined the European Union to ensure that Irish and British citizens are afforded the right of access to all levels of education and training, and associated support in each other's State on terms no less favourable than those for citizens of that State.

Research

In May 2021, the IReL initiative, funded by the Department struck transformative agreements with 11 major international academic publishers. As a result, researchers in participating member institutions can ensure that the articles they write are made available openly, immediately and at no cost to researchers, learners and citizens nationally and internationally by the publishers involved. Until this agreement such research, although funded by tax payers, was frequently behind paywalls and only accessible to those with expensive subscriptions. Global issues such as climate change, sustainability and disease control require international collaboration and this new level of access to Irish research is both significant and essential.

The Indecon international economic consultants review of the International Education Strategy 2016-2020 was completed during 2021. The Report shows that admirable progress had been made in achieving the strategic goals set out in the strategy, particularly with regard to the number of international students choosing to study in Ireland. The Review set the stage for the launch of the consultation process on the next **International Education, Research and Innovation Strategy** in early 2022, with publication due by the end of that year.

#COVID

Throughout 2021, the Department built on its efforts to ensure continuity across further and higher education and research. Collaboration and close engagement between the Department and all stakeholders was key in overcoming very tight restrictions and a high degree of unpredictability with the trajectory of the virus. The Minister led this work through the COVID19 Tertiary Education Sector Steering Group, a weekly meeting of stakeholder, sectoral, agency and Departmental representatives, supported by satellite working groups, working together to support and guide the sector to address the challenges arising from the pandemic. In addition, the Department also provided representation, support and guidance to the FET Stakeholder and Partnership of Stakeholders In The Technological Sector (POSIT) Groups, working alongside institutions and staff representatives for optimum and safe continuity of provision. More widely, the Department, with the support of the Steering Group, represented and advocated for the needs of the sector in cross-Departmental and governmental decision making throughout the pandemic.

The agenda of work created by the pandemic was unpredictable and fast-moving. The challenges and opportunities presented during this period related to a wide variety of issues such as student placements, apprenticeship backlogs, research delays, mental health and wellbeing, connectivity and the needs of international students, all requiring efficient coordination and a swift response.

One of the most pressing issues was the matter of preparing for and ensuring the safe return of students and learners to onsite activity in the autumn of 2021. A process of co-creation with the entire sector saw the development of The Safe Return Plan over an intensive 3 week period between April and May 2021. The plan provided a comprehensive framework for institutions to safely return to significant on-campus learning, teaching, and research in September 2021 providing a broader student experience fully supported by public health authorities and enabled by comprehensive precautionary measures. Through strong advocacy for the sector and interdepartmental collaboration, the Department successfully secured the direct support of the Chief Medical Office for the Safe Return Plan and the approval of Government, underpinning this with clear and engaged communications and a promotion campaign to socialise the framework across the sector. To support its implementation, the Department received approval for a funding package of €105m to mitigate against the additional costs incurred by the sector as a result of COVID19. As a result of the successful implementation of the Safe return Plan, approximately 400,000 further and higher education students and learners returned and remained onsite from autumn 2021.

During 2021 the evidence-based role of rapid antigen testing as a measure to combat the spread of COVID 19 became clearer. The Department worked with the Expert Advisory Group on Rapid Testing to clarify the evidence basis for the use of testing and the parameters around its usage in further and higher education and research settings. To empirically test the approach, support was also provided to the SFI-backed UniCoV study in four universities, trialing rapid antigen testing through various methods and the use of wastewater surveillance. The Department also joined the HSE-led Pilot Project Working Group to pilot approaches for the operation of rapid testing in education settings with a number of further and higher education sites participating in the pilot. In December 2021, recognising the role of this measure, the Department created a funding initiative of €9m to make rapid antigen test kits available for free to students in further and higher education so that they could become accustomed to their use.

The Department also collaborated with the Department of Health and public health authorities to assist in efforts to protect public health and safety and to promote and support the national vaccination programme. Working with the Department of Health, the Department developed sectoral initiatives to promote safety and health resulting in the distribution of 18.5 million face masks to over 200 further and higher education institutions nationwide. The Department engaged with the HSE and institutions to offer an expanded range of walk-in vaccination clinics in existing locations and in temporary “pop-up” vaccination clinics in a range of higher education settings. This initiative saw the administration of 6,316 vaccine doses in total.

-Strategic Policy Unit

#governance– good governance to enhance quality

Promote the modernisation of the sector, implementing a sustainable funding model and enhancing governance, in order to drive quality and secure excellence in performance.

Higher Education Sector

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is responsible for the funding and oversight of the higher education sector. The legislation governing the HEA is 50 years old and in 2021 DFHERIS began work on reforming the **Higher Education Authority (HEA) Act, 1971** to ensure that the higher education sector is enabled to meet the vision for an excellent higher education and a system which is innovative, adaptive and inclusive and which contributes to social, economic and cultural development. *A full overview of this work can be found in the case study below.*

Other sector governance reforms were also initiated in 2021, including the finalisation of the DG Reform funded report on **Sustainable Future Funding for Higher Education**. This included an economic assessment of the funding options presented in the Expert Group Report. Following the finalisation of the report a memo was brought to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery in December 2021. The Committee recommended the removal of Income Contingent Loans from consideration and the presentation of the Report and a considered Departmental response to Government in 2022.

A Reform Action Plan for the Higher Education sector was agreed with 6 unions and with representatives of Higher Education and was published in Q2 2021. Reforms were successfully implemented across the Higher Education sector in line with that Reform Action Plan and industrial peace was maintained throughout the year. Many elements of the new practices adopted since March 2020, including blended learning and remote delivery, were continued in 2021 in order to optimise the student experience and the workplace environment. There was also

continued cooperation in the technological sector with the progression towards establishment of the new Technological Universities.

Key Department-led recruitment campaigns were undertaken in 2021 including in respect of the first governing board members appointed to Munster Technological University, TU of the Shannon: Midlands, Midwest, Atlantic Technological University and Technological University of the South East. Ministerial appointments/nominations to the governing boards of TU Dublin, NUI Galway, DCU, NCAD and DIAS were also managed during 2021. There were over 80 ministerial appointments / nominations (including c.25 reappointments) made in 2021 to Governing Boards in the Higher Education sector.

Higher Education Authority Bill

The Higher Education Authority Bill, 2022 will repeal the Higher Education Authority Act, 1971 and will replace it with legislation that reforms the legislative framework for the higher education system enabling improved policy development and planning in the sector, a focus on the needs of the learner and improved oversight and regulation of higher education institutions.

The overall aim is to provide a high quality, student focused system with appropriate oversight and accountability to underpin public confidence of stakeholders, students and the public.

The HEA has oversight of an extensive and diverse sector, including universities, new technological universities and institutes of technology. There are also a wide range of not-for-profit and private higher education institutions operating in the higher education sector, some of which receive ongoing or competitive funding.

The reforms provided for in the legislation are aligned to the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030. The reforms are also aligned to the Programme for Government by enhancing performance, financial management, governance and transparency in the higher education sector.

The reform of this legislation has been enriched by a constructive, cooperative approach by the key stakeholders. This includes formal consultations in 2018, 2019 and again in February 2021. This most recent consultation included the publication of the consultation paper *'Update on the Reform of the Higher Education Authority Act, 1971 – A Shared Approach*. Forty-six submissions were received from stakeholders in response to this consultation process.

Following consideration of the views expressed by stakeholders in the consultation process, the General Scheme of a Bill to reform the HEA Act, 1971 was drafted and approved by Government on 4 May.

Pre-legislative Scrutiny of the Bill commenced in July and the report of the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science was received on 28 September.

The Department then engaged with the Office of the Attorney General and the Office of Parliamentary Counsel to draft the Bill. Many of the recommendations from the Pre-legislative Scrutiny report were incorporated into the Bill.

There has been ongoing engagement with the key stakeholders throughout the development of the Bill, including with the Higher Education Authority, Irish Universities Association, Technological Higher Education Association, Union of Students in Ireland, Trinity College, private and not-for-profit Higher Education Institutions and Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Teachers Union of Ireland. Many of the issues raised by the key stakeholders were addressed in the drafting of the Bill and subsequently through Government amendments in the Dáil.

The Minister received Government approval for the Bill on 14 December, 2021. The Bill was published and presented to the Dáil on 7 January 2022. It is envisaged that the Higher Education Authority Bill will be enacted by Summer 2022.

-Higher Education, Governance and Quality

#capacity– Department ‘fit-for-purpose’

Ensure critical Departmental resources and expertise needed to enable delivery of our Mission and Goals and in place, supporting our staff to further enhance individual and collective capacity and underpinning excellence in performance.

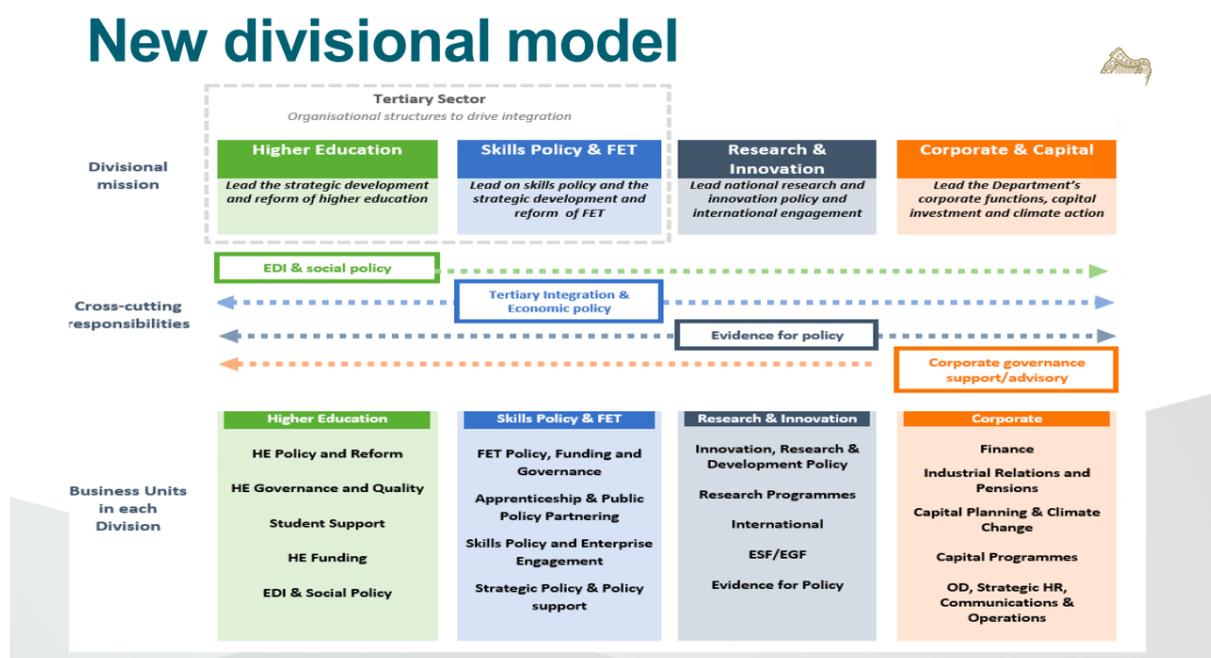
In 2021 we continued to build the essential functions and structures in the Department. This included continued work on ensuring the Minister and Minister of State’s offices were fully staffed and able to fulfil the necessary functions of their office (full case study below).

Our Finance and Corporate Service sections continued to embed the governance structures of the new Department. To drive the performance of each business unit, a yearly process was been put in place to develop business plans and review them. To ensure the oversight of the Department’s risks and promote their effective mitigation, a Risk Committee was established. The Committee developed the Department’s Risk Management Policy and the Risk Appetite Statement. An internal audit function was also established, including an Audit Committee which subsequently approved an Internal Audit Unit Charter, setting out the relevant responsibilities of the Committee and the Unit.

The Department undertook a review of the organisation’s design and implemented the key findings. This saw the Department transition from three distinct divisions, to four divisions and five cross cutting sections.

This review also drove an inclusive approach to the development of the organisation. A working group structure was established with participation across all grades and locations. These groups investigated the Department's needs across:

1. People and Skills.
2. Values and Behaviours
3. ICT strategy
4. Governance



#Capacity – A View from the Minister's Office

I joined the Minister's diary team in August 2020, an exciting time with a new Department and Minister's office being established from the ground up, in the midst of a pandemic.

I joined a small team of Private Secretary, Diary Secretary and 2 other COs in our temporary HQ in the Department of Transport Dublin 2, which was empty apart from Minister Eamon Ryan's office and the odd Coastguard in the corridors.

The function of the Minister's office is to provide an administrative and supportive service to the Minister in his Department and Constituency office. This includes ensuring E-Correspondence, E-Submissions, FOIs, LQs and speech & briefing material are processed in good timeframes. It also involves the preparation of Government Cabinet Papers and providing support to the Minister's parliamentary Dáil obligations.

It was an intense time, and it would be disingenuous to say it was without its challenges especially with Covid-19 and the ever-changing restrictions on socialising, holidays, haircuts and all the small things that balance work. However it was a time of great achievements for the section. Some highlights include:

The E-Corr system was not in place and all correspondence to the Minister had to be logged on Excel and transferred by email. Huge work went into the setting up of E-Corr in the first months of the Department's establishment.

The Minister's virtual tour of Youthreach and youth training centres around the country was kicked off with a visit to Donegal FET Centre in March 2021. The tour was a great boost to the staff and learners and the Minister has since visited a number of Youthreach centres in person around the country.

On Friday 27 September 2021 we packed up everything (even the Christmas trees) and came over to 52 St. Stephen's Green.

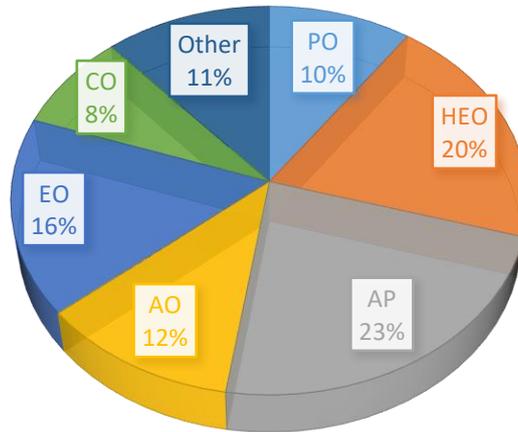
It is very rewarding to play a part on the diary team supporting the ambitious work the Minister is doing for his Department and its students and stakeholders.

-Minister's Office Team

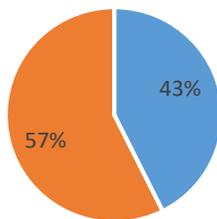
#capacity – Department ‘fit-for-purpose’

We facilitated the rapid and expansive onboarding of new staff and continued to provide the structures necessary for the growth of the Department, including through instituting a new Learning and Development function.

NEW STARTERS BY GRADE

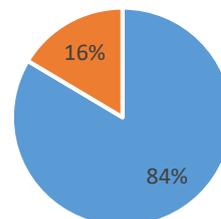


New Starters by Gender

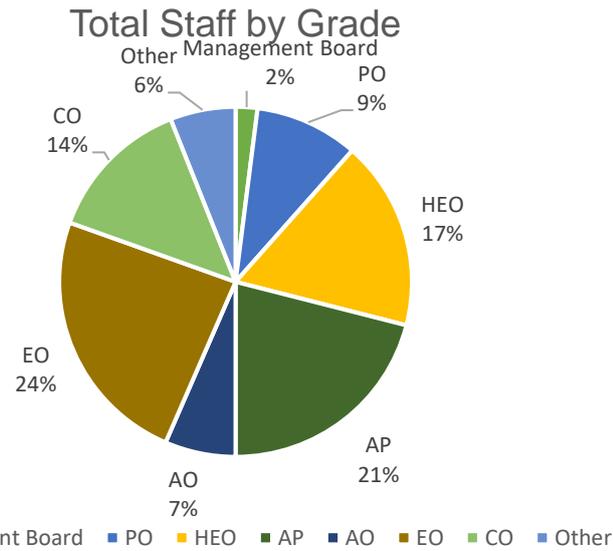


■ Male ■ Female

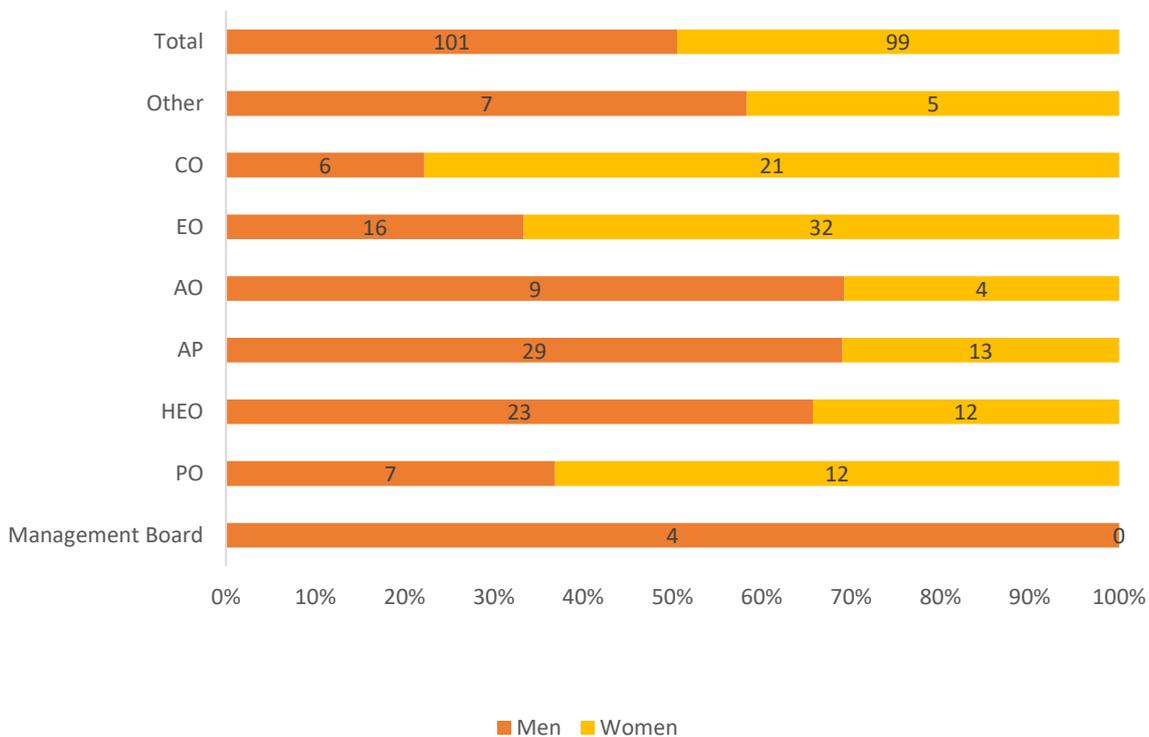
New staff by location



■ Dublin ■ Tullamore



Total Staff by Gender



Cross government working

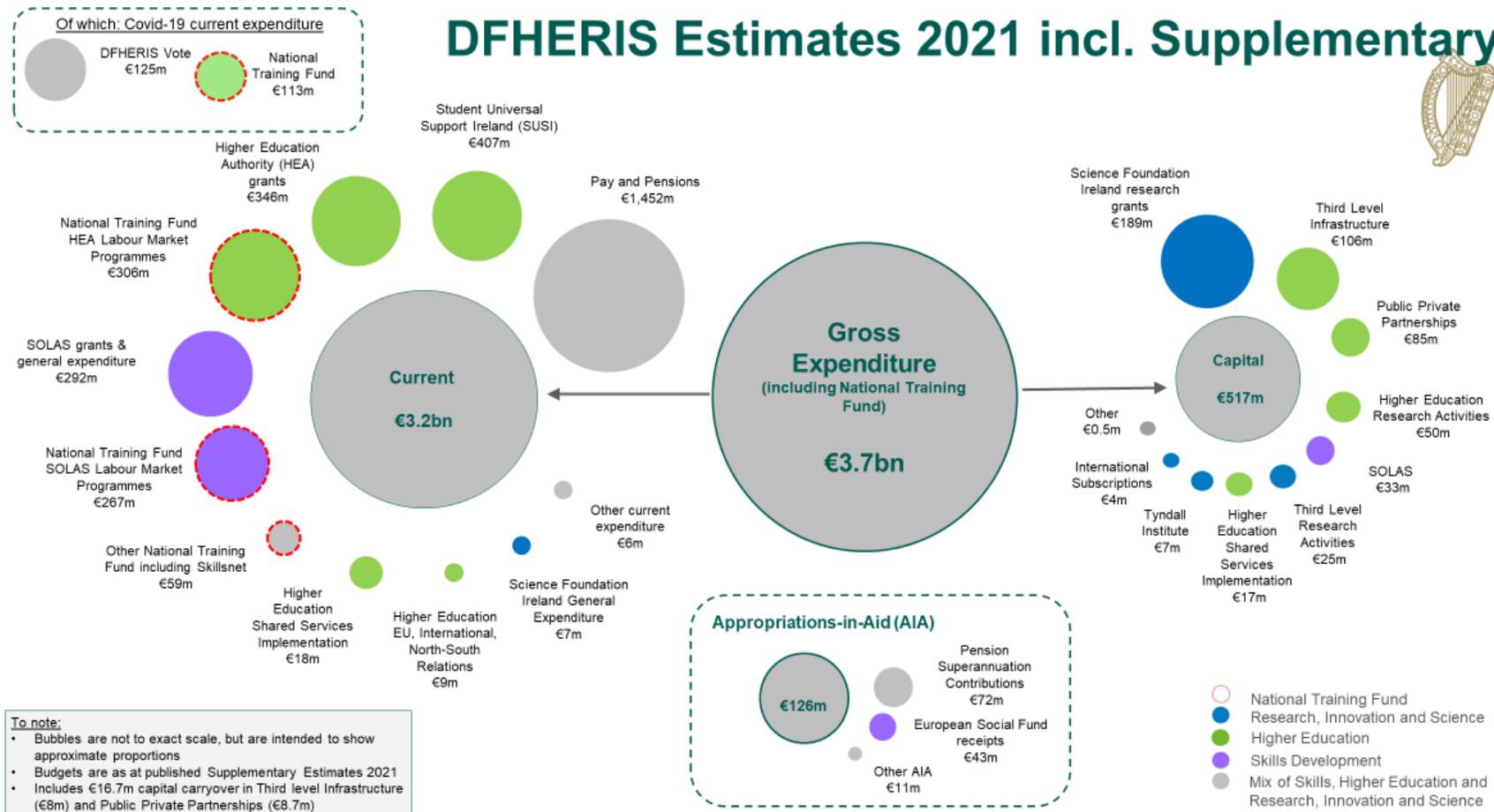
Achieving the 2030 goals and targets set out by the United Nations in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a key aim in the Programme for Government and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science mission and strategy are aligned with and support this intent. The Department actively engaged in the SDGs Inter-departmental working group, led by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, contributing to the development of the Second National Implementation Plan during the year, as well as supporting the work of the SDGs Data Governance Board, led by the Central Statistics Office.

Public Sector Duty

Under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014, all public bodies are statutorily obliged to have regard to human rights and equality issues in the performance of their functions. Goals three and five of the Department's strategy address our legal obligations in this regard. The reporting in this document provides an overview of the Department's developments and achievements in addressing these issues.

The Department's Finance Unit successfully negotiated a core funding uplift of 8% (€204 million) for Vote 45 and 2% (€11 million) for the National Training Fund. This uplift facilitated the Department's ability to support students, address critical skills needs in digital and climate and increased the Department and Agency capabilities while funding pension pressures.

DFHERIS Estimates 2021 incl. Supplementary



An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais, Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta | Department Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

ANNEX

Annex A : Non-Commercial Bodies Under the Aegis of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

1. An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS)
2. Grangegorman Development Agency
3. Higher Education Authority (HEA)
4. Irish Research Council
5. Léargas
6. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
7. Science Foundation Ireland
8. Skillnet Ireland CLG

Annex B : Gender Balance on State Boards

Name of Board	Total Places on Board	Men	Women	Total	Women as % of Total
An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS)	13	5	6	11 (2 vacancies)	55%
Grangegorman Development Agency	15	9	6	15	40%
Higher Education Authority (HEA)	15	7	8	15	53%
Irish Research Council	12	6	4	10 (2 vacancies)	40%
Léargas	9	2	5	7 (2 vacancies)	71%
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)	10	3	7	10	70%
Science Foundation Ireland	12	6	4	10 (2 vacancies)	40%
Skillnet Ireland CLG	13	7	6	13	46%

Annex C: Green Public Procurement Reporting

*A number Priority Sectors below are provided to DFHERIS by DoE on a shared services basis.

Reference year 2021	A. Total number of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector	B. Total value of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector	C. Total number of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector which have incorporated GPP	D. Total value of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector which have incorporated GPP
Priority Sector				
Energy-related Products				
Food & Catering Services				
Heating Equipment				
ICT Products & Services				
Indoor Cleaning Services				
Indoor & Outdoor Lighting				
Office Building Design, Construction & Management				
Paper Products & Printing Services				
Textiles Products & Services				
Transport				
Other Review/Consultation	4	€465,128	1	€127,150
Totals	4	€465,128	1	€127,150