

# Research and Innovation in Ireland: A New Era

## Impact 2030

When Simon Harris, the then Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation, launched *Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy* in 2022, he declared that it marked a significant inflection point in the development of research and innovation in Ireland.

According to the plan, 'Impact 2030 positions research and innovation at the heart of addressing Ireland's societal, economic and environmental challenges.' The Minister promised to bring 'a landmark research bill to government' to create a new competitive research and innovation funding agency. He delivered on that promise.

Ireland's research and innovation system made a significant pivot in 2024 with the enactment of the Research and Innovation Bill. This legislation represents a major shift towards a more integrated research ecosystem, bridging previously distinct streams of scientific enquiry and knowledge generation.

The Act provided for the amalgamation of two research funding bodies, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) and the Irish Research Council (IRC), into a newly formed body, Taighde Éireann – Research Ireland. Established on 1 August 2024, Research Ireland now holds a mandate to oversee competitive research funding across all disciplines, ranging from science and engineering to the arts, humanities, and social sciences, and also across the full spectrum from curiosity-driven to applied research.

Initial priorities for Research Ireland have been embedding the new organisation internally and within the research system, supporting staff from the two previous agencies through the transition, and – critically – ensuring continuity of funding to the research community.



**Michael Horgan**

Chairperson, Taighde Éireann  
Research Ireland

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**With the amalgamation of Science Foundation Ireland and the Irish Research Council into a new research funding body, Taighde Éireann – Research Ireland, the country's research and innovation sector enters a new era. This article provides an overview of Research Ireland's priorities, aims, opportunities, and challenges at this critical juncture.**

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## Fusion

The merger of SFI and IRC into Research Ireland reflects an awareness of the growing importance of interdisciplinary research in addressing complex societal challenges, such as climate change, healthcare, and technological ethics. Many of these challenges require knowledge and insights that cut across traditional academic boundaries.

By creating a single entity responsible for funding all areas of research, the government aims to encourage cross-sectoral collaboration, streamline administrative processes, and ensure more equitable access to funding by all. As the Minister put it at the time: 'This is an exciting opportunity to place all research on an equal and statutory footing and to drive a step-change in interdisciplinary research activity.'

This fusion of research bodies encourages collaborative projects that leverage the strengths of different fields, fostering innovation that might not arise from single-discipline efforts.

For example, a research project addressing climate change could involve not only scientists and engineers but also economists, sociologists, and historians. Such a comprehensive approach can generate more nuanced solutions to complex problems and ensure these solutions are ethically grounded and socially responsive, while also enhancing Ireland's overall innovation potential.

With a unified funding body, Ireland can project a more cohesive identity on the global research stage, making the country a more attractive destination for international researchers and collaborative projects.

## Challenges

Yet, as with any major reform, there are challenges and uncertainties that must be carefully managed. Balancing the needs of various research fields, evaluating interdisciplinary projects equitably, and maintaining Ireland's competitive edge in science and technology are all complex tasks that will require strategic oversight and thoughtful planning.

Also, we are, today, at an early stage in our cross-sectoral collaboration journey, and there remains some distance to travel to reach a point where collaboration potential, efficiencies, and outputs are maximised.

A key challenge for Research Ireland will be to fairly and appropriately allocate funding across the agency's broad remit and to meet the diverse needs of the research community, enterprise, government, and other stakeholders, while also delivering sustainable impact for Ireland.

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The primary determinant in how our budget is dispersed is the level of funding received annually by government. For our newly established agency, the many dynamic factors that consequently stem from that annual allocation include the spread across research disciplines, geographical areas and career stage, award scale and duration, national strategies and priorities, programme objectives, predictability, and flexibility.

Research Ireland's more inclusive mandate offers opportunities to enhance research-led teaching and provide students with exposure to diverse perspectives across disciplines. This may encourage students to pursue interdisciplinary studies, preparing them to tackle complex real-world issues and enhancing their employability in a rapidly evolving job market.

### Integration

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A particularly intriguing avenue for Research Ireland's future lies in fostering public engagement with research. Initiatives that bring citizens into the research process – whether through citizen science projects, public discussions on ethical questions, or community-based participatory research – could democratise the benefits of research, fostering a society that both understands and actively shapes scientific and social progress.

The challenge for Research Ireland is to position our nation as a leader in research and innovation, fostering a knowledge-driven society that values not only technological progress but also the cultural and ethical insights offered by the arts and humanities.

This new era of integration invites researchers, educators, policymakers, and society as a whole to envision a future where knowledge flows freely across disciplines, uniting efforts to address the multifaceted challenges of our time. With Research Ireland, we have an opportunity to become not just a participant but a leader in the global research community, increasingly focused on interconnected, interdisciplinary solutions. The world of research is evolving, and Ireland is poised to be at the forefront of this transformation.



**Taighde Éireann**  
**Research Ireland**