

# IRELAND'S FUTURE TALENT

## A CHARTER FOR IRISH UNIVERSITIES



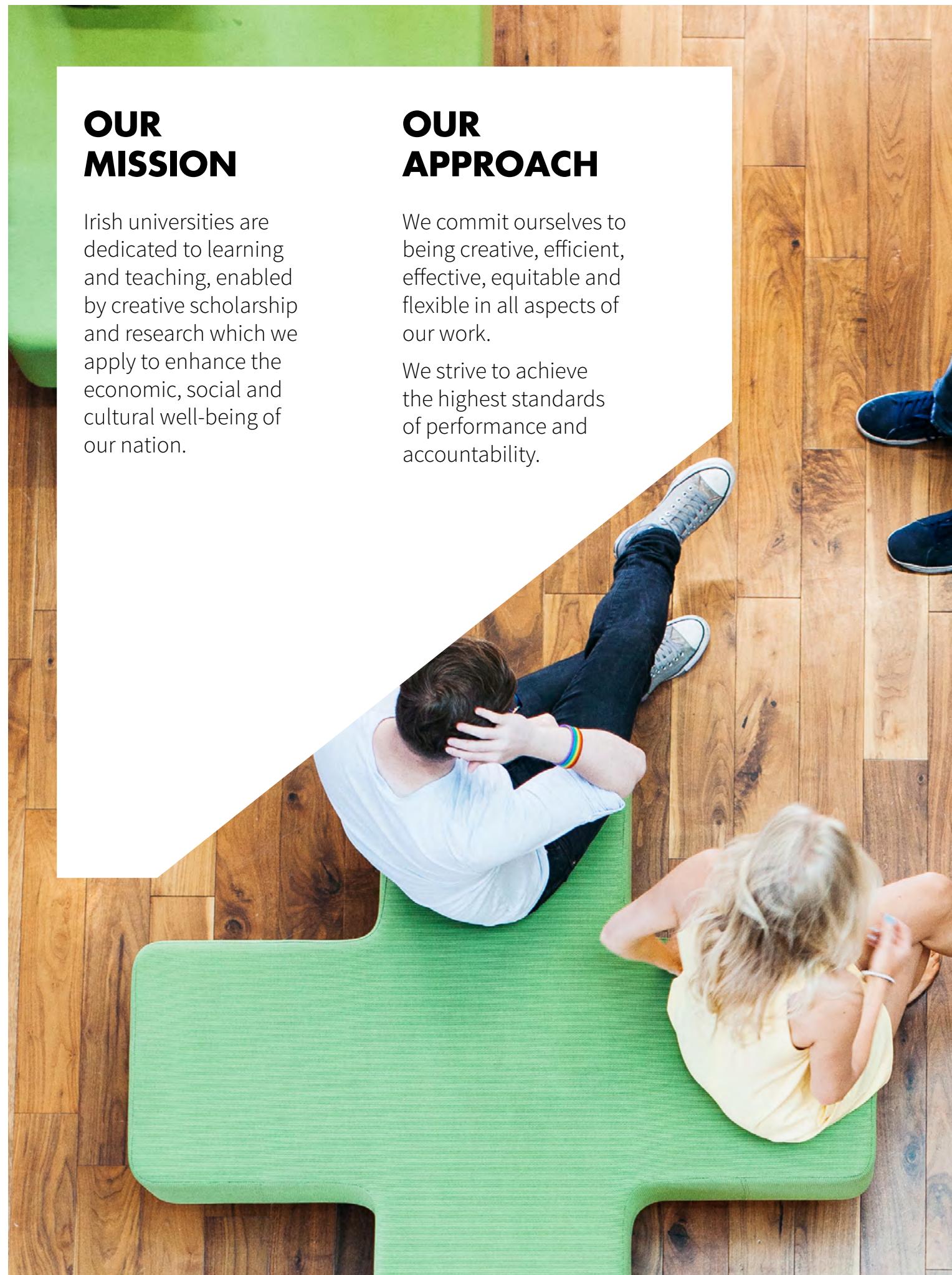
## **OUR MISSION**

Irish universities are dedicated to learning and teaching, enabled by creative scholarship and research which we apply to enhance the economic, social and cultural well-being of our nation.

## **OUR APPROACH**

We commit ourselves to being creative, efficient, effective, equitable and flexible in all aspects of our work.

We strive to achieve the highest standards of performance and accountability.



A photograph showing a person from behind, sitting on a bright green upholstered chair. The person is wearing a pink t-shirt with a small bird print and blue jeans. They are leaning forward with their head down. The background consists of vertical wooden planks.

## **OUR CHARTER FOR A SUSTAINABLE IRISH UNIVERSITY SYSTEM**

**1**  
**BUILD ON THE QUALITY OF THE  
STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN A  
DIGITAL AGE.**

**2**  
**INCREASE THE SCALE, SCOPE  
AND IMPACT OF INVESTMENT IN  
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION.**

**3**  
**EXPAND STUDENT ACCESS AND  
INCREASE ENGAGEMENT WITH  
COMMUNITIES AND INDUSTRY.**

**4**  
**SUPPORT A PROGRAMME OF  
STAFF DEVELOPMENT, INCREASED  
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY.**

**5**  
**CREATE MORE FLEXIBLE  
AND ACCOUNTABLE  
STRUCTURES.**

**6**  
**SECURE THE INVESTMENT AND  
RESOURCES TO ACHIEVE OUR  
AMBICTIONS.**



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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABLE IRISH UNIVERSITY SYSTEM**

The Government has set a target to make the Irish education system the "best in Europe" by 2026. Irish universities share that ambition. Making that target a reality will, however, require substantial change. High quality third level education is a cornerstone of international competitiveness. Maintaining and enhancing the quality of Irish graduates across all disciplines requires substantial ongoing change and a significant increase in funding for Ireland's universities. Without such investment, there is a clear and growing risk to the country's competitiveness.

We will need to create a more flexible, autonomous and nimble structure to enable universities to deliver on their full potential as centres of creativity, learning and research and as key producers of top talent for the workforce. We need to remove unnecessary barriers that hinder universities' capacity to grow and compete internationally. We need to support and incentivise universities to respond to the rapid changes in how education is delivered and to build a fit-for-purpose university system for the next generation.

These changes must be coupled with the necessary level of investment if the goals set by Government are to be realistically achieved. There is an urgency about those investment decisions given the decade-long legacy of under-funding and the surge in student numbers that is now underway.

Our six-point Charter sets out what universities, working in partnership with Government and other stakeholders, need to do to deliver on the "best in Europe" ambition.





# 1

## BUILD ON THE QUALITY OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN A DIGITAL AGE

The third level student population is likely to grow by 40,000 by 2030. On current trends, approximately 25,000 of these will arrive at the doors of our seven universities. This surge in numbers, arising from the demographic bulge, will place huge strain on a system already struggling to cope, having absorbed 30% more students while funding was cut over the past decade.

The growth surge coincides with a change in how education is delivered with rapid advances in digital learning and a need to expand lifelong learning opportunities.

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### TO MEET THESE CHALLENGES, UNIVERSITIES COMMIT TO:

- Developing a coherent national programme **in digital learning** in partnership with Government.
  - **Expanding capacity** for growing numbers and to drive adult (25-64) **lifelong learning** in Ireland from the current 6.5% to the EU average of 10.7% by 2030.
  - **Increasing international student numbers to 15%** of the overall student population and enabling 20% of students to undertake study or placement abroad by 2025.
- 

#### To deliver these commitments we need...

**A planned and sustained programme of investment** to refurbish decaying existing infrastructure and build capacity for the known future growth in numbers. We need to provide the necessary systems and infrastructure for the increasingly digital and flexible learning environment.





## **2**

# **INCREASE THE SCALE, SCOPE AND IMPACT OF INVESTMENT IN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION**

Ireland's advanced research programme, centred to a large extent in universities, has made great strides in recent years. Sustained public investment in research, even in years of recession, has contributed to economic recovery with a network of top-class research facilities now in place.

But, we still lag behind many of our key competitors. Latest figures show Irish R&D investment, both public and private, at 1.2% of GDP against an OECD average of 2.4% with top performers like Denmark investing 2.9%. We also need to ensure that a balanced approach to research investment is maintained between basic and applied research.

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### **TO BUILD A TRULY WORLD-CLASS RESEARCH CAPACITY, UNIVERSITIES ARE COMMITTED TO:**

- **Significantly expanding research capacity** with a **balanced research programme** so that basic, foundational research is prioritised alongside applied research.
- **Increasing the output of PhD graduates by at least 30%** over the next 10 years.
- Expanding **engagement between universities and industry** in relation to knowledge transfer and innovation.

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#### **To deliver these commitments we need...**

**An increase in R&D investment to at least 2.0% of GDP.** This will require an additional exchequer (national and EU) investment of €680 million per annum. Securing additional EU funds from the Horizon Europe (2021-2027) EU Research programme should be a core Government priority.

### 3

## EXPAND STUDENT ACCESS AND INCREASE ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITIES AND INDUSTRY

The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) and Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) programmes have been central to a 70% increase in new entrants with a disability to universities and a 31% increase from priority socio-economic target groups. Universities now want to further increase those numbers and to address progression rates for those who enter.

Universities also commit to building on the success of Campus Engage, a programme to support civic and community engagement in higher education. Deepening links with industry in relation to research, skills development and regional growth are also core priorities.

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### UNIVERSITIES, WORKING WITH PARTNERS AND GOVERNMENT, WILL:

- Increase access numbers by a further 30% by 2025 with a well-targeted strategy.
  - Provide better opportunities for students to work with civic society organisations through accredited learning, growth in engaged research and promotion of studentvolunteer.ie.
  - Deepen and strengthen industry links to align with workforce demands and build more partnerships.
- 

#### To deliver these commitments we need...

Access and student engagement programmes appropriately resourced in a revised funding model.





## 4

# SUPPORT A PROGRAMME OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND INCREASED EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

University staff have delivered more with less over the last decade. Staff numbers and pay scales are now controlled by central Government with little or no flexibility for universities to make decisions appropriate to their own needs and plans.

This inherently limits the capacity of universities to respond flexibly to the rapidly changing needs of the country and society.

All seven Irish universities have now been awarded Athena Swan Bronze status, a key indicator of progress on equality and diversity. It is recognised that the system needs to push ahead with further advances in this area in accordance with the Taskforce on Equality plans that are appropriately resourced.

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### UNIVERSITIES COMMIT TO A SUSTAINED PROGRAMME OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT TO BUILD CAPACITY FOR FUTURE HIGHER EDUCATION NEEDS. THIS WILL INCLUDE:

- **Prioritising the implementation of a Professional Development Framework** for university staff as part of the next phase of work of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.
- **Implementing the recommendations of the Gender Equality Taskforce on Higher Education** in order to advance diversity, inclusion and equality more broadly.
- **Securing agreement on a Researcher Career Development and Employment Framework** with Government.

**To deliver these commitments we need...**

**The rigid, centralised control on staffing in universities needs to be loosened** to allow greater flexibility for individual universities to develop human resource plans appropriate to their needs and growth levels. The Employment Control Framework, introduced as a recession control measure, is no longer fit for purpose for the Irish university system.

## 5

# CREATE MORE FLEXIBLE AND ACCOUNTABLE STRUCTURES

We need to build a more flexible and nimble structure to run our universities to enable them to compete with the best in Europe. All of the international evidence points to the fact that the most successful universities are those with the greatest levels of independence coupled with strong governance and accountability.

Greater flexibility on organisational and financial management, in addition to academic freedom, will foster a more innovative and dynamic culture within universities. This, supported by an effective governance model, will enable Irish universities to compete more effectively in an increasingly globalised third level education system.

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## A MORE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM CAN BE DELIVERED BY:

- **Universities working with Government on legislative reform** to deliver a more flexible operating structure with a better capacity to respond to the needs of the economy and society generally.
- **Improving accountability through better governance** structures in accordance with best international practice.
- **Re-balancing the overlycentralised control of universities** in line with the principles laid down in the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 by removing restrictive measures in relation to employment and otherwise.





## 6

# SECURE THE INVESTMENT AND RESOURCES TO ACHIEVE OUR AMBITIONS

The gap in funding for Irish higher education is well recognised by all. The scale of the funding deficit will increase year by year as the number of students entering the system grows.

While the Government has made a start on reversing the funding decline, long-awaited policy decisions on revamping the overall structure of funding have been delayed despite clear options proposed by Government-appointed Expert Groups.

Further delays in making a decision on closing the funding gap could, according to the National Competitiveness Council, pose “a significant threat to our competitiveness rankings and FDI”. The Government should make a definitive decision on a sustainable funding model for higher education based on the clear advice from its own Expert Groups if it is to prevent the risks to our economic competitiveness.

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## A MORE SUSTAINABLE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM CAN BE DELIVERED BY:

- Increasing State investment for core funding of Higher Education **in each of the next three budgets by €150m, €180m and €230m** respectively. This will begin the process of investing in national ambition. This is exclusive of any increases in the National Training Fund and national pay award costs.
- **Prioritising a revised, sustainable funding model** for higher education. This is urgently required from Government. Without it there is a real risk that permanent damage will be done to the quality of the Irish university system.
- **A more detailed plan for capital investment in higher education**, referenced in Project Ireland 2040, is required with specific commitments for the university sector which currently handles in excess of 60% of higher level students. This should include a dedicated refurbishment programme for the large stock of out-dated buildings and infrastructure in order to create facilities appropriate to the needs of students in the 2020s and beyond.

# KEY CHALLENGES FACING IRISH UNIVERSITIES



# **COMPETING WITH THE BEST IN EUROPE**

Universities have a pivotal role to play in the economic, social and cultural development of the country. The education and research activities in universities drive creativity and innovation. They are key to our citizens realising their full potential and dynamically contributing to their communities, economy and society. They are the primary generators of the talent pipeline for the workforce and they are also pioneers of thought leadership and creativity for the country and society.

The Government has set an ambitious target for the Irish education system to be the "best in Europe" by 2026. Realising this ambition for the Irish university sector will require a considerable level of change and investment. We share a common goal of having universities that are efficient, effective, creative, flexible, responsive and accountable.

The current environment combines formidable challenges and great opportunities. To take advantage of the opportunities we must first address the challenges. Opportunities such as the rise in companies moving to Ireland and the emergence of indigenous Irish companies of global reach, as well as increased interest in Irish universities from international students and staff, all require investment in people, programmes and infrastructure.

We must address the significant structural deficits arising from a decade of under-investment as well as a sharp rise in volume demand over the next decade due to demographic trends. Moreover, universities must invest heavily in digital learning and lead other innovations in how third level education is delivered in the years ahead. Likewise, the demand for university-led research and the number of PhD places continues to grow in line with national priorities. The additional resource demands arising from the growth in lifelong learning and continuous professional development must also be provided for.

This Universities Charter provides the basis for addressing those challenges in the form of a six-point action agenda. The Charter sets out the basis on which the universities themselves plan to adapt to the changing needs in higher education and the supporting investment required to achieve the goal of competing with the best in Europe and beyond.

The universities are committed to working in partnership with Government and the private sector to achieve our common objectives.

# MAINTAINING QUALITY OUTPUT OF TALENT AND CREATIVITY

Universities have a key role, alongside other third level institutions, in producing and nurturing the talent bank of the future for Irish society and the economy. The defining competitive advantage that our top talent provides for the Irish economy has long been recognised.

Our well-educated workforce is our greatest national resource and is the foundation of economic growth. This advantage can only be maintained if the standards of excellence in university education are supported by the required levels of investment.

But, our universities are more than talent pipelines that produce well-rounded, employable graduates. With 30% of students entering through access programmes, Ireland's universities provide opportunity for every person no matter what their background to develop their minds and skills. They are centres of creativity and learning. They are generators of cutting-edge research and innovation. They encourage and provoke critical thinking and intellectual discourse across all aspects of society. They nurture culture, heritage and sports. They support communities and are essential for regional development. And beyond these shores, our universities position Ireland to engage in some of the greatest challenges facing humanity through their global partnerships.

This Charter for the future of Irish universities is based on a set of core principles to underpin the highest possible standards in education and research while enabling the sector to be responsive and adaptable to the needs of the country and society. It is consistent with the Key System Objectives for the Higher Education System Performance Framework 2018-2020 as laid down by the Government (see Appendix 1). These principles are rooted in the ambition to be best in Europe and set a basis for a programme of development and investment to realise that ambition. Irish universities of the future will:

- Maintain a standard and reputation of excellence in learning and teaching and lead transformation, for example through innovation in digital learning;
- Continue the development of world-class centres of excellence in research and innovation;
- Produce high quality, well-rounded, employable graduates and post-graduates in line with the future skills needs of the country;

- Provide the best possible student experience in terms of academic, social and personal development;
- Provide an environment of equal opportunity for staff and students;
- Strive to achieve the highest standards of governance and accountability and deliver best value for money;
- Provide opportunity for all by ensuring access and participation from across all sections of society;
- Be centres of community and regional engagement and development, while playing a key role in developing Ireland's global engagement;
- Nurture critical thinking and thought leadership and be at the forefront of solutions to regional and national challenges.

**"The availability of talent will be the key differentiator for locations to win foreign direct investment in the future."**

IDA Strategy 2015-2019

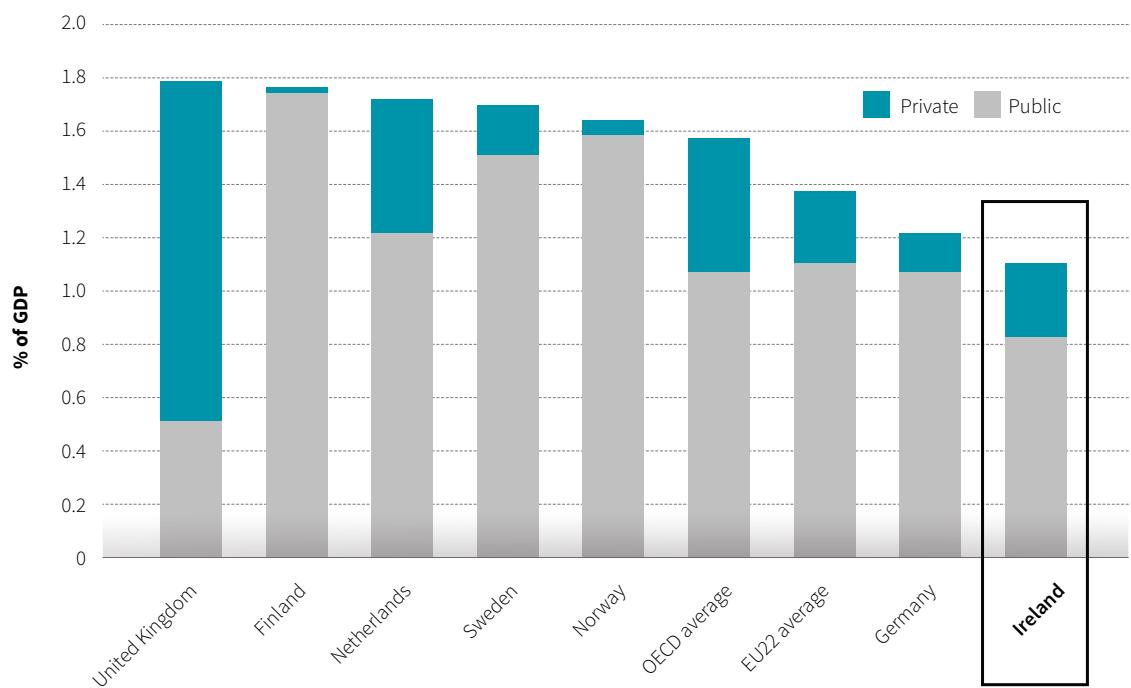
# A DECADE OF UNDER-INVESTMENT

The best universities compete in a global market. They must demonstrate the impact of their teaching and research work in order to attract students and staff. Unless Ireland can compete on an even international playing field, the goal to be the "best in Europe" will be seriously hampered. The university system in Ireland has, like many other sectors of the economy, endured very substantial cutbacks over the recession-driven decade just past.

Nevertheless, the number of full-time undergraduate university students continued to grow with new entrants in 2016/17 at 23,026, 16.5% higher than in 2008/09 despite a 33% cut in funding for the university sector.

Funding for the Irish third-level system lags well behind other countries in Europe and around the world. At 1.1% of GDP (ref Fig. 1 below), Irish investment in third level education is well below the OECD and EU averages and that of countries having the best third level education systems.

Figure 1. Public and private expenditure on tertiary education as percentage of GDP.

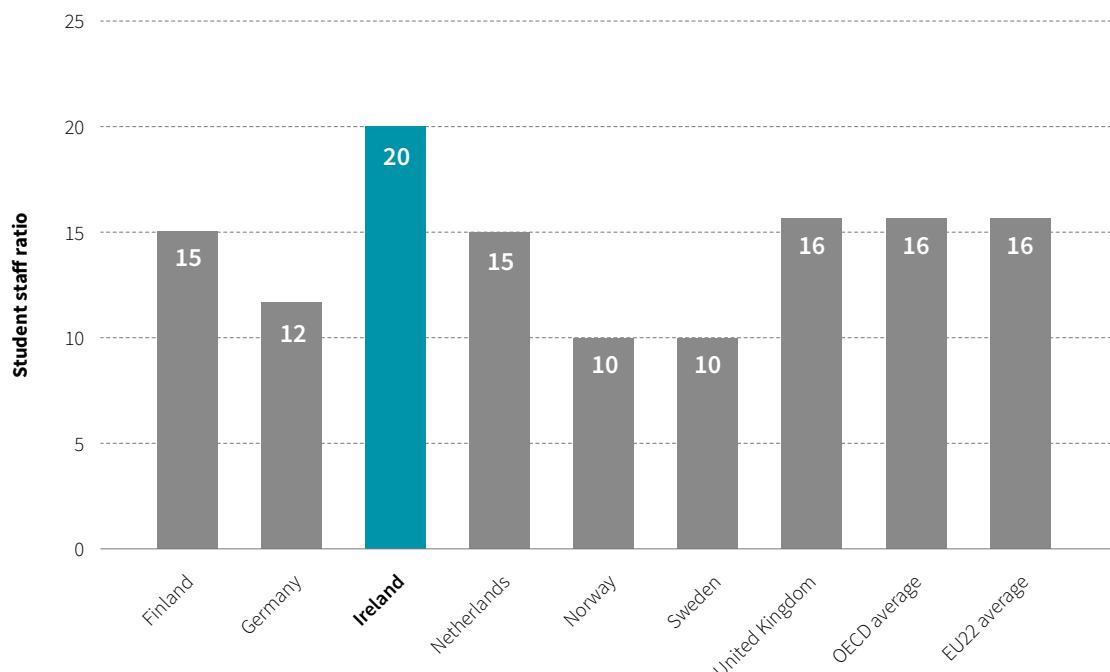


(EU22 = EU member states that are also members of the OECD) | Source: OECD Education at a Glance 2017 – Table B2.2

Cost-cutting measures implemented by universities have enabled the system to survive the recession years but there is now a legacy of under-investment, resulting in

staff-student ratios in Ireland of 1:20 that are well behind the best in class levels of 1:10 and an OECD and EU average of 1:16. (Ref Figure 2)

Figure 2. Ratio of students to teaching staff in tertiary educational institutions.



| Source: OECD Education at a Glance 2017 – Table D2.2.

While standards have been maintained in the short-term, the quality of our universities has shown signs of slippage, as reflected in worrying drops in international university rankings. Staffing ratios are a key measure in international university rankings. They are also important factors considered by international students when choosing a country or a college to study in.

Ireland fares fourth worst after England, Wales and Greece in terms of the decline in public funding to higher education in the eight years to 2016 (Fig. 3: EUA Public Funding Observatory 2017). The decline in public funding in England and Wales however was a direct result of the introduction of student fees which in effect increased overall funding for higher education in those

countries. Ireland also shows the second highest growth in student numbers, only marginally behind Croatia (HR).

So, Ireland spends significantly less on higher level education when measured against GDP and is also close to the bottom of the league when measured on spend per student. Over a decade, the overall spend has been reduced by close to 40% during a period when student numbers grew by close to 30%. It is not surprising therefore that the EUA Funding Observatory has now classified the Irish university system as being "in aggravating decline" or a "system in danger".

Figure 3. Trends in public funding of higher education.



| Source: EUA Public Funding Observatory 2017.

The consequences of this funding gap are also manifested in out-dated buildings and infrastructure. The situation would be far worse had it not been for private investment and the borrowing programme by universities from the European Investment Bank. Loans to fund campus buildings and student accommodation across the seven universities now stand at more than €650m.

While private borrowing is allowing the universities to make progress on infrastructure development, continued growth in borrowing is far from ideal, and should not be viewed as a long-term substitute for Government investment.

The proposed investment in capital spending in the Government's Project Ireland 2040 gives little reassurance of re-balancing this capital investment

deficit in universities. Project Ireland 2040 assumes a continued high level of borrowing by universities rather than the necessary Government support. This is not sustainable as some universities are reaching their maximum gearing capacity and are facing very substantial borrowing repayments on an annual basis.

Borrowings as a percentage of total net assets for the sector at September 2017 are in the region of 25%. For some individual universities, gearing is considerably higher at 40-45%. This level of gearing will curtail borrowing capacity and, as a result, investment in the future. Moreover, for all universities borrowing is limited by legislation and by covenants and some universities have reached their limit.

By any measure, there is serious cause for concern from a sustainability perspective and accordingly in their analysis the EUA has identified Ireland as one of three "systems in danger" as indicated in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. Analysis of European University Systems.

**AT** – Austria  
**BE** – Belgium  
**CZ** – Czech Republic  
**DE** – Germany

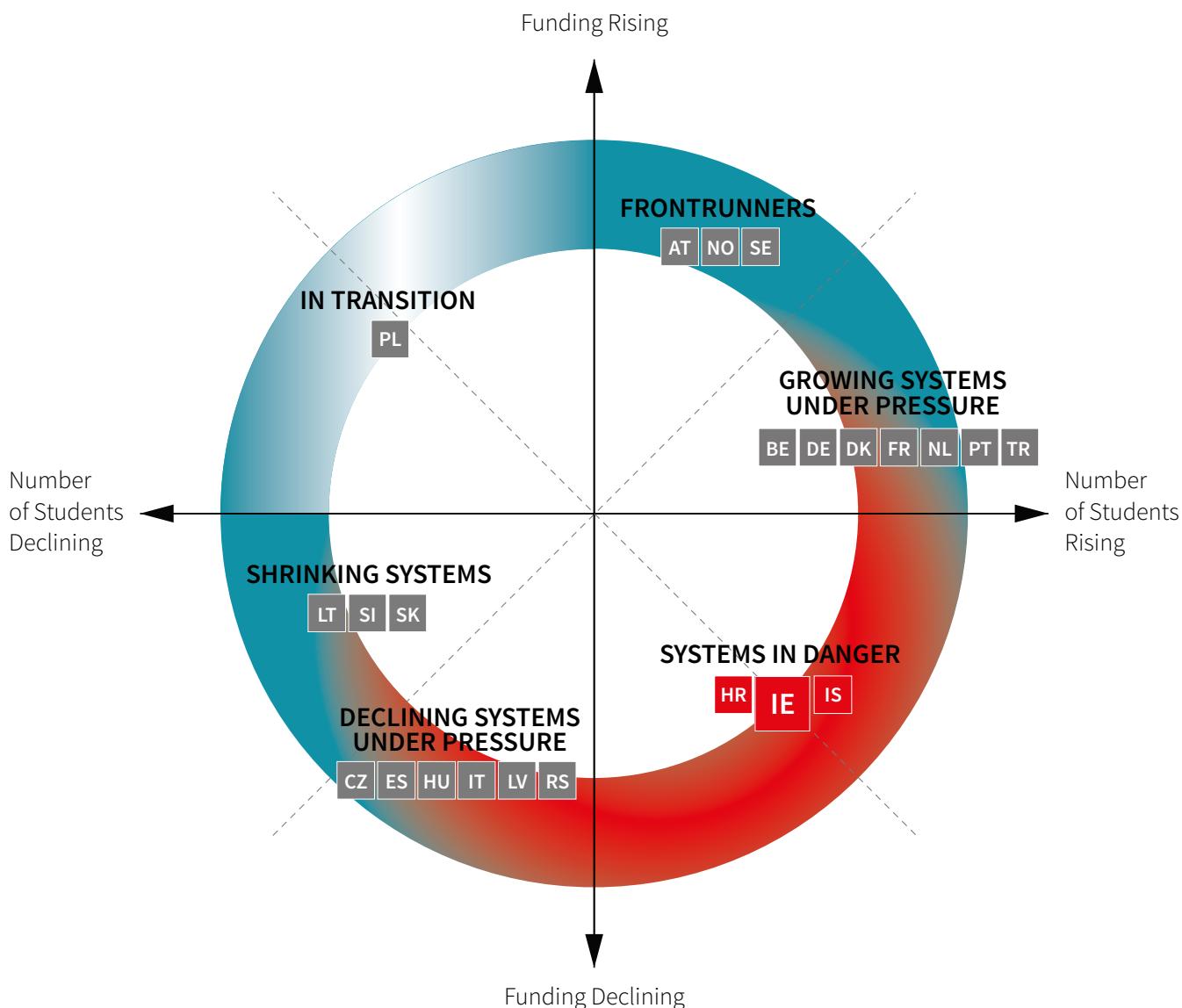
**DK** – Denmark  
**ES** – Spain  
**FR** – France  
**HR** – Croatia

**HU** – Hungary  
**IE** – Ireland  
**IT** – Italy  
**IS** – Iceland

**LT** – Lithuania  
**LV** – Latvia  
**NL** – Netherlands  
**NO** – Norway

**PL** – Poland  
**PR** – Portugal  
**RS** – Serbia  
**SI** – Slovenia

**SK** – Slovakia  
**SE** – Sweden  
**TR** – Turkey



| Source: European University Association - Public Funding Observatory Report 2017.

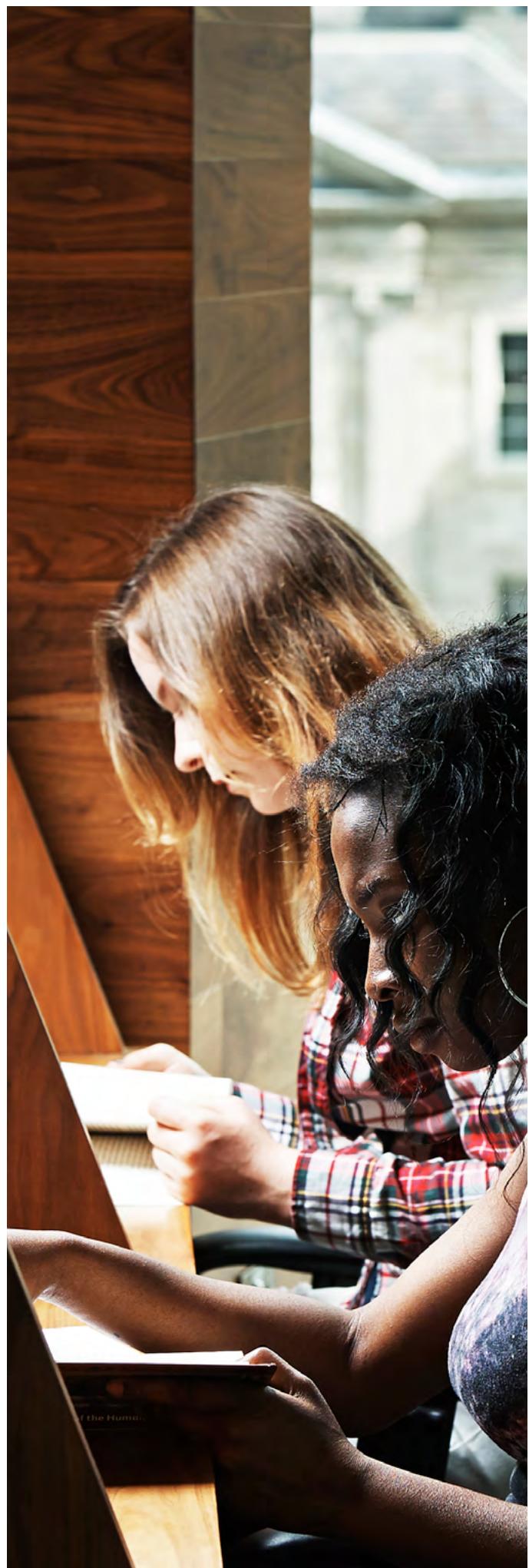
# A GROWING CRISIS AS DEMAND SURGES

Universities, while dealing with the legacy of under-funding over recent years, are also facing a rapid growth in student numbers over the coming years. There are significant pressures on the future demand of university places arising from:

- Population growth - an expected one million or more additional people in the country by 2040 with extra pressures in particular regions;
- A broadening of access through Government sponsored socio-economic and disability access programmes;
- A significant increase in post-graduate places in line with national policy priorities;
- A rise in lifelong learning numbers to international norms and a substantial increase in Continuing Professional Development;
- Increasing demand from international students.

By 2029, the number of students in higher education is projected to be in the range of 207,544 to 227,244 depending on the most likely growth scenarios (Department of Education & Skills, Projections of demand for full time third level education 2015-2029). This represents an increase of more than 38,000 on 2014 levels based on conservative growth forecasts, or nearly 58,000 based on a high growth scenario. The majority of this increase will have to be absorbed by the seven universities in line with current trends.

This huge growth in numbers will place even further stress on an already over-burdened system of university education.



The challenge of this has been well recognised in successive Government expert reports. The final report to Government of the Independent Expert

Panel on "The Review of the Allocation Model for Funding Higher Education Institutions" (December 2017) was clear in its analysis:

**"Ireland cannot continue, as we have been, increasing student numbers without a commensurate increase in investment. Increased investment is essential to align our higher education system with our national ambition for growth and employment and with the wider needs of society. We are convinced that increased investment supported by a reformed approach to allocating funding will deliver real and sustainable benefits for our students, our society and our economy."**

In addition, there is an urgent need to greatly increase the capacity for lifelong learning. Adult participation in lifelong learning (age 25 to 64) is 6.5% in Ireland while the EU average is 10.7% (Eurostat, 2015). This requires substantial structural adjustment and resources right across the university system.

Dealing with these multiple challenges of neglect over the recession years, the growth bubble in student numbers and the capacity required for life-long learning presents the Irish university system with its greatest challenge of recent times. It is, in a real sense a crisis which, if not addressed, will result in long-term damage.

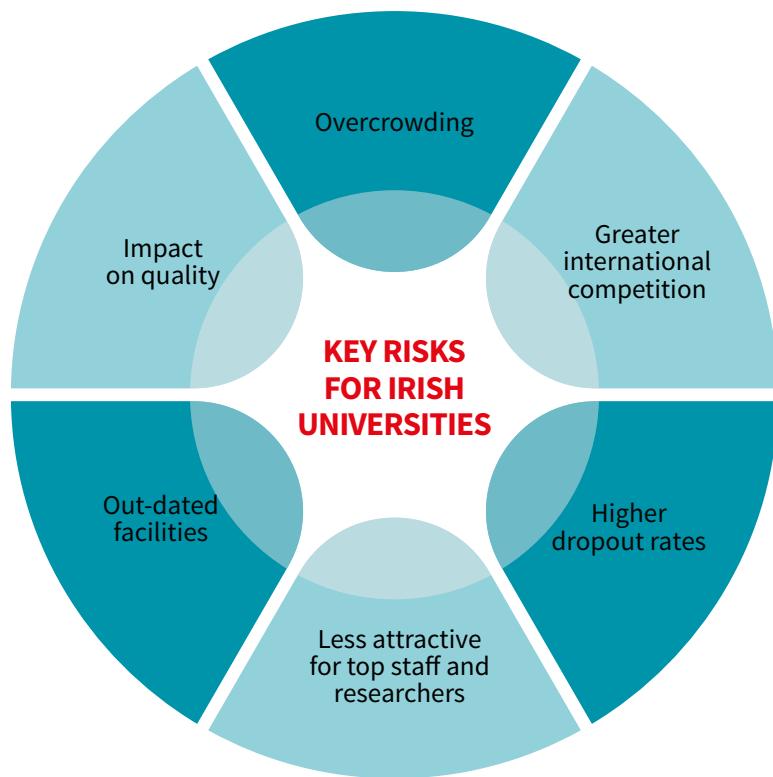
Failure to deal with this crisis will result in a loss of competitiveness in the Irish economy. If robust measures are not taken now, there will be a gradual but inevitable erosion in the quality of our graduates in the years ahead. Out-dated and over-crowded facilities are already impacting on quality.

The quality standards built up over a century, once lost, could take decades to rebuild. We cannot expect Irish universities to be the "best in Europe" if their primary indicators – staffing levels, funding per student, funding relative to GDP and research funding – are all well below the top performers that we must compete with internationally. If we continue as we are, universities may be forced to curtail entry for certain courses due to over-crowding and lack of staff and facilities. The risk of Ireland becoming less attractive to the choice-rich international students is also very real.

In summary, the risks outlined in Fig 5 below are now very real and their impact is already being seen across the university system.

- Overcrowding, if not addressed, will lead directly to a reduction in quality.
- An under-funded system will become increasingly unattractive to international staff and students.
- Universities cannot innovate and develop their teaching and learning capacity with out-dated facilities and equipment.

**Figure 5. Key risks for Irish Universities.**



Dealing with this urgent challenge in Irish universities is, therefore, a clear national priority. This Charter identifies the key measures that need to be taken to halt the

slide and to provide a solid basis for Irish universities to genuinely compete with the best in Europe and to underpin our economic competitiveness.

# **CHARTER FOR A SUSTAINABLE IRISH UNIVERSITY SYSTEM**



# CHARTER 1

## EXCELLENCE IN LEARNING, TEACHING AND THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

### BUILDING ON SUCCESS

It is essential that the reputation and standards of excellence built up by Irish universities over many decades is maintained and developed. Irish university graduates command respect and are in strong demand at home and abroad. The quality assurance system in Irish universities, overseen by the national quality agency, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is widely respected as both progressive and demanding.

Excellent teaching is a core pillar in the Irish universities' mission, providing the mainstay through which students can develop their knowledge, skills and competences to the highest level. The universities, in collaboration with the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and QQI, have invested heavily in learning and teaching over the last two decades. They will work closely with and contribute to the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning as a national resource to assist with further innovation in teaching and learning methods and practices.

The universities' ambition is to stimulate and support active, engaged and enquiry-based student learning. This will be done through enhanced teaching methods and practices, ensuring that teaching remains informed by the latest relevant research, and through increased small group and project-based activities. The universities will also ensure students have a broad range of cultural and social development opportunities, with appropriate services and structures in place to support these.

To achieve this, investment is needed to increase physical capacity, ensure sustainable staff-student ratios, support more engaged learning opportunities, and provide attractive and suitable learning and working facilities. In this way, the universities commit to delivering a quality student learning experience on a par with the best in Europe.

### DIGITAL LEARNING

The rapidly changing methods of learning and teaching will accelerate further in the coming decade. Universities recognise the need to embrace the new learning environment and to act as leaders in the digital transformation of the learning process. Universities must also play a key role as facilitators of positive digital disruption in the knowledge economy.

Individual universities or departments within them have already developed their digital capacity and implemented a range of innovative digital programmes. However, if Ireland wants to compete with the best in Europe, there is a need for a system-wide programme to drive digital transformation in learning and teaching across all activities in universities. The essential resources must be put in place to unlock the potential for students and staff to access new digital technologies and to build digital fluency.

Universities are committed to working with Government to advance flexible learning through digital platforms. It is essential that this is appropriately incentivised and that any structural barriers are removed. Digital learning should be prioritised in the next phase of work by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning with the appropriate investment funding put in place to enable rapid progress over the coming years.

**"Improving learning and teaching through digital capacity is a collective endeavour."**

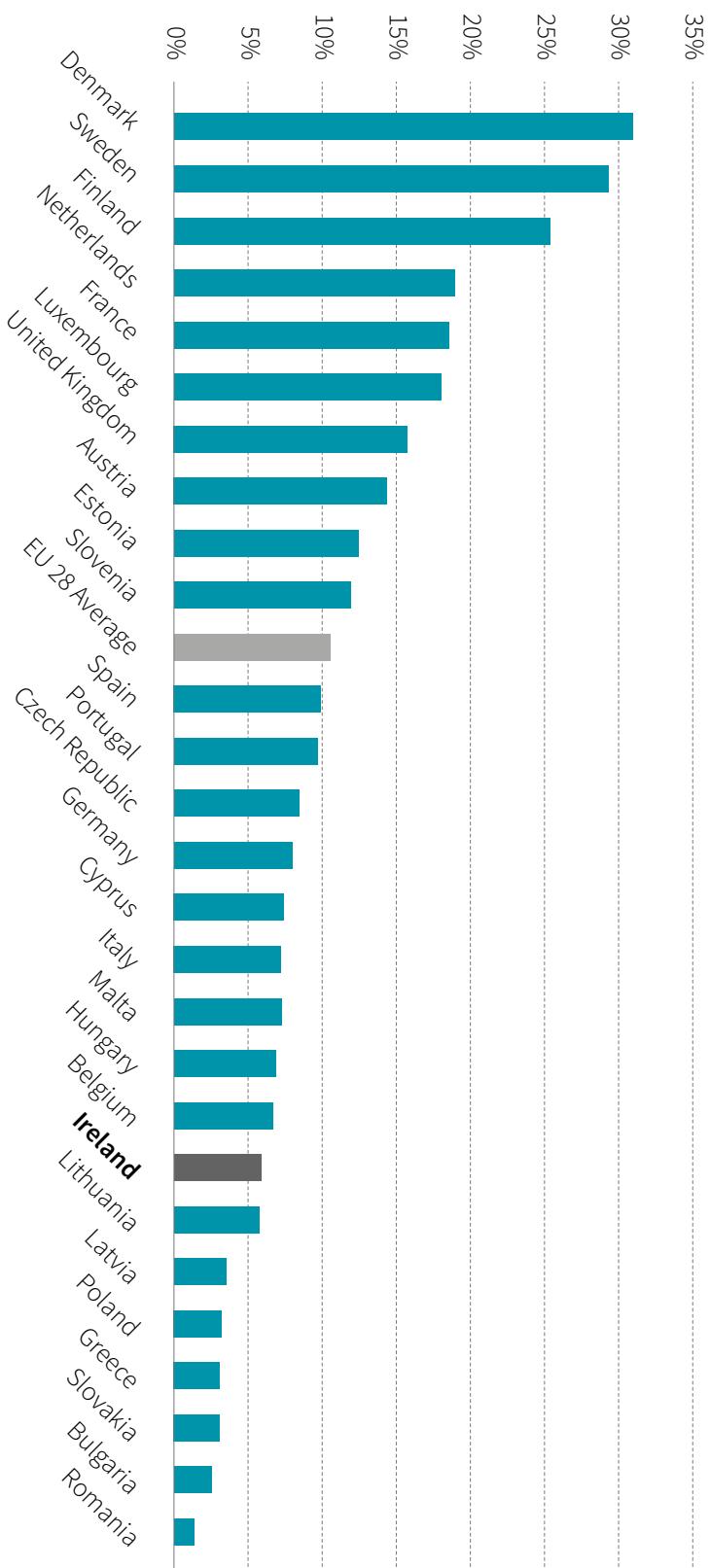
A Roadmap for Enhancement in a Digital World 2015 – 2017, National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

## FLEXIBLE AND LIFELONG LEARNING

The universities are committed to ensuring that learning and teaching takes place in diverse classrooms, with students from different social, cultural and international backgrounds working together and learning from each other. The universities will also make their courses and facilities available in flexible ways to facilitate lifelong learning to meet the needs of a broad range of non-traditional students, including through greater use of digital and blended learning opportunities.

Participation in lifelong learning in Ireland is significantly below the EU average, and considerably further behind that of relevant benchmark countries (see Figure 6). The lifelong learning participation rate for those in employment in Ireland is even lower at 5.3%. The National Skills Strategy (2015) has set a target of 15% participation in lifelong learning by 2025.

Figure 6. Lifelong learning participation rates EU28.



| Source: Eurostat, 2015.

## EXPANDING OUR INTERNATIONAL REACH

The international demand for higher education represents a significant opportunity for Irish universities to attract overseas talented individuals and companies to Ireland. International student numbers have grown to over 33,000 in the higher education sector bringing in more than €1.5bn in export earnings (International Education Strategy for Ireland 2016-2020). Irish universities consistently outperform competitor countries such as the US, Canada and the UK in global student satisfaction surveys such as the International Student Barometer, achieving an overall satisfaction rate of 91% in 2017.

Targets for growth in Ireland's internationalisation strategy include a 33% increase in international student numbers by 2020. Irish universities are committed to achieving this in collaboration with Education in Ireland. We need to address the key internal and external barriers to progress, such as accommodation supply, pressure on student services, immigration policy and the agility to develop programmes aligned to international student demand.

Irish universities are also committed to ensuring their students experience the broader benefits of internationalisation. These include outward student mobility and exchange, internationalisation of the curriculum and the classroom and nurturing international alumni and student ambassadors.

Achieving the targets and realising the benefits of internationalisation requires a whole-of-system approach between the relevant state agencies, Government departments and universities. The universities are committed to working with the Department of Education and Skills to complete a cost-benefit analysis of internationalisation of higher education during 2018.

## OUR CHARTER COMMITMENT “BUILD ON THE QUALITY OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN A DIGITAL AGE” BY....

- Developing a coherent national programme **in digital learning** in partnership with Government.
- **Expanding** capacity for growing numbers and to drive adult (25 – 64) **lifelong learning** in Ireland from the current 6.5% to the EU average of 10.7% by 2030.
- **Increasing international student numbers to 15%** of the overall student population and employing strategies to achieve the Bologna target **for outward mobility of 20% of the student population** undertaking a study or internship placement abroad by 2025.

In order to deliver these commitments, a planned and sustained programme of investment is required to refurbish decaying existing infrastructure, to build capacity for the known future growth in numbers and to provide the necessary systems and infrastructure for the increasingly digital learning environment.

## CHARTER 2

# BUILDING CAPACITY FOR WORLD-CLASS RESEARCH

There has been a very substantial increase in investment in research and innovation over the past decade and a half. Irish universities are key centres of excellence in research working closely with partners such as Science Foundation Ireland and the Irish Research Council, and with industry. This investment is bearing fruit for the Irish economy.

Our objective now is to build on existing capacity to match international competitors. The ambition of Innovation 2020 to develop a network of world-class, large scale research centres is achievable but must be supported by vital investment in both basic and applied research if it is to be realised.

Latest OECD data shows that investment in R&D in Ireland from combined public and private sources was 1.2% of GDP, or approximately €3.24bn, in 2016. This lags well behind the OECD average of 2.4% and EU comparator countries of a similar size to Ireland, such as Denmark at 2.9%. Ireland's share of world research papers, a key metric in university rankings, stands at 0.55% while Denmark's is 1.12% (National Bibliometric Report for Ireland 2017, Report for the HEA).

Sustained investment in research spending is required if Ireland aims to compete with the best in Europe and globally in the next decade.

Under Innovation 2020, the target is to increase combined public and private research spending to 2% of GDP by 2020. This would necessitate an increase of approximately €2.27bn over and above the current level of R&D spend. Based on the 30:70 split in recent years of public and private R&D spend this would amount to an exchequer commitment of an additional €680m including both national and EU funding.

Securing this level of increased funding must be a top Government priority. Industry must also be prepared to provide the requisite level of support funding to match the best international models. It is essential that such increased funding would be applied to address the deficit in basic, foundational research in addition to applied research.

As a result of the universities' collaboration with Enterprise Ireland (EI) and the creation of Knowledge Transfer Ireland (KTI), the culture of commercialisation of research outputs among researchers in Irish universities has been radically enhanced. KTI has become a key driver of change for the business and university sectors working together to enhance knowledge transfer, creating value for businesses and the Irish economy.

Through this support, combined with KTI's management of the EI Technology Transfer Strengthening Initiative which co-funds the university Technology Transfer Offices, Ireland now has the infrastructure on which to build further success in innovation and knowledge transfer.

Building on their success to date, universities undertake to significantly increase their breadth and depth of engagement with business and industry, adding value through a broad range of knowledge transfer and innovation activities. This requires sustained investment.

# **OUR CHARTER COMMITMENT**

## **"INCREASE THE SCALE AND SCOPE OF INVESTMENT IN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION" BY...**

- **Significantly expanding research capacity** and providing a **balanced research programme** so that basic, foundational research is prioritised alongside applied research.
- **Increasing the output of PhD graduates by at least 30%** over the next 10 years.
- Expanding **engagement between universities and industry** in relation to knowledge transfer and innovation.

**An increase in R&D investment to at least 2.0% of GDP** will require an additional exchequer (national and EU) investment of €680 million per annum. Securing additional EU funds from the Horizon Europe (2021-2027) EU Research programme should be a core Government priority.



# CHARTER 3

## ENHANCING STUDENT ACCESS AND ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITIES AND INDUSTRY

### ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

Successful participation in higher education has a transformative effect on individuals' lives. It opens more sustainable and better remunerated employment opportunities. It brings greater levels of personal satisfaction and societal engagement. It enables long-term social and health benefits to families and communities. By European standards, Ireland has performed well in access and participation. The most recent European Higher Education Area Scorecard shows Ireland among the top five countries in Europe on measures to support the participation of disadvantaged students.

The Irish universities have made significant progress in broadening access across all strata of Irish society, leading the higher education sector with innovative programmes such as DARE (Disability Access Route to Education) and HEAR (Higher Education Access Route), which are regarded internationally as best practice. These programmes are available through a designated CAO application process and are coordinated by the Irish Universities Association with the support of the majority of third-level institutions.

The DARE and HEAR programmes have contributed substantially to the 70% increase in universities in the numbers of new entrants with a disability and the 31% increase in the numbers of new entrants from the National Access Plan priority socio-economic target groups (2013-2017 HEA System Performance Framework reports).

We now need to take this commitment to another level. The core objective should not just be about getting a defined percentage of the population into university education, but rather about ensuring equity of opportunity for all those who are capable of participating in higher education and wish to do so.

Improving progression rates is also a key objective. In order to meet this commitment, the universities need to be able to expand capacity in a sustainable

manner. They also must ensure a high quality student experience for all, in particular through providing the necessary academic, pastoral and social supports for disadvantaged students so that they can make the most of their higher education opportunities. This requires financial support including investment in student accommodation.

### ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES

Universities have developed networks of effective partnerships with the aim of maximising their impact and return on investment. Central to this is the partnership with Government and with civil society to ensure the delivery of a functioning and effective educational ecosystem. Universities are committed to building on this partnership model and to enhance key aspects in line with public policy.

The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 endorses the civic mission of higher education and states that "engaging with wider society" is "one of the three interconnected core roles of higher education". In acknowledgement of this, the Presidents of the Irish Universities signed the ten-point Campus Engage Charter for Civic and Community Engagement in 2014. Thereby they are committing their institutions to the enhancement and co-ordination of engaged research, teaching and learning, public engagement and student volunteering.

Irish engaged researchers, across all disciplines, have a long history of working with external partners including public services, policy makers and civil and civic society organisations, to provide collaborative solutions to societal challenges. Such collaboration has intensified and deepened as the sector has grown and our research and innovation capacity has matured. Through Campus Engage, the universities have created national guidelines for engaged research, and an associated university staff training programme offered to all higher education staff to help achieve EU engaged research investment targets.

The Campus Engage staff training programme includes guidelines for teaching staff how to accredit students within the curriculum for working in partnership with civic and civil society organisations addressing local societal challenges. This approach delivers graduate "work ready skills", including leadership, entrepreneurship, global citizenship, problem solving and team-work, as set out in the National Skills Strategy, 2025.

Communities are also supported through the endeavours of student volunteers. **Studentvolunteer.ie** was launched in 2016 to facilitate students to volunteer in local, national or international communities. To date over 78,000 hours of volunteering have been recorded.

## PARTNERING WITH INDUSTRY

Strong collaborative links between universities and industry have been developed and expanded over recent years. There are a wide variety of such partnership programmes in all universities and across all economic sectors. Universities are active partners in national initiatives driven by the National Skills Council and the Regional Skills Fora.

Industry and university collaboration produces research and innovation that solves complex problems, drives growth and creates a more skilled workforce. Such collaboration requires strong mechanisms for engagement to ensure successful partnerships that benefit all participants.

The research and development programmes run by universities with industry partners are critical to attracting foreign direct investment as well as supporting indigenous industry. Universities are committed to deepening the partnership relationship with industry. In addition to research collaboration, universities will continue to work with industry to understand and meet the skill needs of industry and the economy including expanding work placement opportunities for students and graduates, informing curriculum development and delivering industry-aware graduates.

## OUR CHARTER COMMITMENT “EXPAND STUDENT ACCESS AND INCREASE ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITIES AND INDUSTRY” BY...

- **Increasing access numbers by a further 30% by 2025** with a well-targeted strategy.
- Through Campus Engage, providing **better opportunities for students to work with civic society** organisations through accredited learning, growth in engaged research and promotion of studentvolunteer.ie.
- **Deepening and strengthening industry links** to align with workforce demands, expand research partnerships and support regional development through our network.

It is essential that the access and student engagement programmes are **appropriately resourced in a revised funding model** if these commitments are to be delivered.

# CHARTER 4

## DEVELOPING THE POTENTIAL OF OUR STAFF AND IMPROVING EQUALITY

University staff have a diverse range of experience, skills and talents and consistently demonstrate their drive for quality through teaching, research, community engagement, and unparalleled commitment to student success.

During the past decade university academic and administrative staff have, despite the effects of under-investment, succeeded in maintaining quality teaching and research standards. The extent of the achievement by university staff in this period is borne out by the fact that student numbers have risen by 30% between 2007/08 and 2016/17 while staff numbers have only risen by 14.5% over the same period.

Over the next decade, universities commit to a renewed focus on attracting, developing and engaging talent across the full spectrum of university activity. This includes mentoring and supporting the next generation of academic leaders across the universities to identify and nurture talent. One strand of this is the successful pilot Mentoring Programme for Academic Leaders.

While there has been a rapid growth in research capacity, there is a deficit in HR policy in relation to the management of research talent. There is a lack of structured career progression within institutions, unclear pathways to exiting research employment, and varying levels of learning and development opportunities and career advisory services across the sector. The Irish universities are committed to creating an environment that supports and facilitates researchers in progressing their own professional and career development as part of a structured continuum of development post PhD. This will be achieved through an effective Career Development and Employment Framework.

It is also recognised that universities must play a leadership role in the equality and diversity agenda in society. The Irish universities are committed to ensuring that equality of opportunity and professional development is afforded to all staff and potential staff of a university in line with the principles and recommendations set out in the HEA Review of Gender Equality in Higher Education (2016).

Securing Athena SWAN accreditation, the internationally recognised quality mark for gender equality, is an important enabling process for universities to progress the equality agenda. All seven universities have now achieved bronze status, the only third level institutions to do so, and are committed to continued engagement with the Athena SWAN process.

## OUR CHARTER COMMITMENT “SUPPORT A PROGRAMME OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND INCREASED EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY” BY...

- **Prioritising the implementation of a Professional Development Framework for university staff as part of the next phase of work of the National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching & Learning.**
- **Implementing the recommendations of the Gender Equality Taskforce on Higher Education in order to advance diversity, inclusion and equality more broadly.**
- **Securing agreement on a Researcher Career Development and Employment Framework with Government.**

Key changes are required to enable universities to deliver on these commitments and to be able to respond more nimbly to the changing needs in higher education. **The rigid, centralised control on staffing in universities should be loosened** to allow greater flexibility for individual universities to develop human resource plans appropriate to their needs and growth levels. The **Employment Control Framework**, introduced as a recession control measure **is no longer fit for purpose** for the Irish university system.

## CHARTER 5

# FLEXIBLE AND ACCOUNTABLE STRUCTURES AND GOVERNANCE

Irish universities can only compete with the best in Europe if they are able to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the country and employers.

Universities must also play a role as innovators and enablers in enhancing the cultural, social and economic life of the nation. Therefore, over the coming decade, the university sector needs to have the capacity to both adapt to evolving needs and to act as creative agents of disruptive change in the modern economy. This requires a flexible and nimble structure.

The best universities in Europe and globally are those that have the maximum possible level of flexibility. In other words, they are empowered to take their own decisions and implement them while remaining accountable. In Ireland, the autonomy of universities has been eroded in recent years. A detailed 2016 study on autonomy across 29 university systems in Europe shows that Ireland scores poorly on a number of key rankings.

Ireland is joint second last when it comes to staffing autonomy (a university's ability to recruit and manage its human resources) as the rules for the hiring and payment of staff are centrally controlled by Government (Figure 7 overleaf). We score well on academic autonomy (a university's capacity to manage its internal academic affairs independently). However, we are only in the mid-range for financial autonomy (a university's ability to manage its funds and allocate its budget independently) and organisational autonomy (a university's capacity to determine its internal organisation and decision-making processes).

By contrast, the UK which has a high number of the top-ranking universities in the world, scores in the top three across all autonomy ratings and is first on organisational autonomy.

**"We need to drive the higher education sector forward, give it autonomy and resource it adequately."**

An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar TD,  
Dáil Éireann, 14 June 2017



Figure 7. EUA university autonomy rankings



| European Universities Association 2016 [www.university-autonomy.eu](http://www.university-autonomy.eu)

The current weak rankings on staffing autonomy in Irish universities runs directly counter to the Government's National Strategy on Higher Education to 2030 which states that:

**“Over the lifetime of this strategy ... individual higher education institutions will progressively take on greater responsibility for key human resource functions.”**

The Independent Expert Panel on Funding which reported to Government in December 2017 also recognised the need for greater autonomy, especially in relation to human resource flexibility:

**“Finding a means to offer greater autonomy to institutions in this and other areas is essential in facilitating the agile and responsive system we will need to underpin future social and economic progress.”**

There is, therefore, an urgent need to rebalance the autonomy of universities in line with Government policy, especially in relation to staffing. Autonomy in staffing is critical to recruiting the best in the global market place for academic talent.

It is equally acknowledged that there is a need for the highest standards of accountability and transparency in relation to governance and university finances. It is recognised that there has been some breakdown in trust arising from shortcomings in accountability which has undermined confidence in the governance system. However, it should also be noted that these shortcomings are relatively rare and any reforms of the governance system should reflect that.

**“Ireland’s autonomous institutions should be held accountable for their performance to the State on behalf of Irish citizens.”**

National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030.

Good governance is particularly important in the case of universities given their pivotal role in society and in national economic and social development, together with their reliance on public as well as private investment.

The principle of good governance in Irish universities is well established, initially enshrined in the Universities Act, 1997 and subsequently detailed in the Code of Governance for Irish universities, last updated in 2012. A revised university governance code is being implemented in 2018 in line with the Government’s “Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies”.

Governing Authorities should, in accordance with the Universities Act, be responsible for resource allocation and oversight and the necessary supports and structures must be put in place to enable this. It is essential that governance procedures recognise the diverse funding

base of universities. It is also important that the procedures are appropriate to the status of universities as autonomous institutions.

The universities are committed to operating to the highest standards of governance and in compliance with the principles laid down in the Government’s Governance Framework for the Higher Education System.

## **OUR CHARTER COMMITMENT “CREATE MORE FLEXIBLE AND ACCOUNTABLE STRUCTURES” BY...**

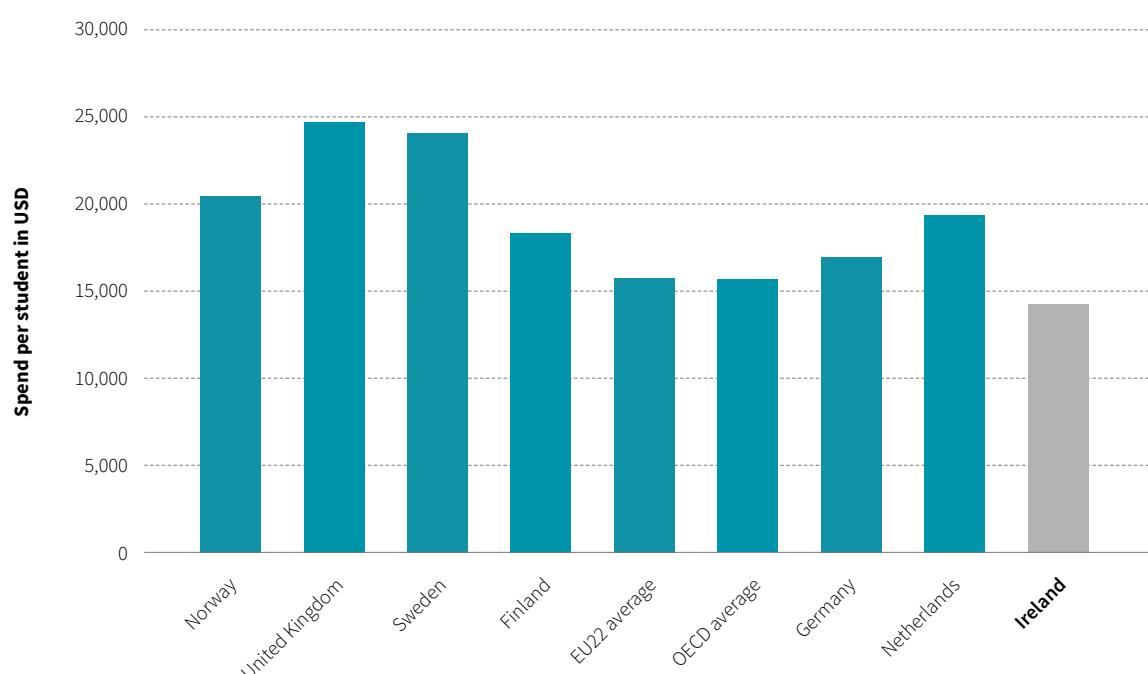
- **Universities working with Government on legislative reform** to deliver a more flexible operating structure with a better capacity to respond to the needs of the economy and society generally.
- **Improving accountability through better governance structures** in accordance with best international practice.
- **Re-balancing the overly-centralised control structure of universities** in line with the principles laid down in the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 by removing restrictive measures in relation to employment and otherwise.

# CHARTER 6

## **SECURING INVESTMENT AND RESOURCES TO ACHIEVE OUR AMBITIONS**

Ireland has fallen behind its international competitors when it comes to investing in third level education. The annual expenditure per student in Ireland lags behind the OECD average and is well below other similar sized countries in Europe such as The Netherlands, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Clearly, this investment deficit must be addressed if Ireland is to have a realistic prospect of achieving its "best in Europe" status. The problem will be exacerbated by the projected growth in student numbers.

Figure 8. Annual expenditure per student by tertiary educational institutions for all services.



| Source: OECD Education at a Glance 2017 – Table B1.

The figures above refer to the total funding per student, private and public, in Irish universities including research income. When we look at core public funding only, there has been a calamitous drop over the last decade.

State funding per student in universities was halved between 2008 and 2017 as shown in Figure 9 below. These figures include the seven universities as well as the teacher training colleges, NCAD and RCSI but do not include the Institutes of Technology. The funding figures refer to the total recurrent core funding direct to the institutions as per the annual Estimates process.

Figure 9. State funding per university student 2008-2017



| Source: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; Higher Education Authority.

Despite the significant decline in public funding for universities during the past decade the sector has managed to largely maintain overall income levels. This has been achieved by expanding non-Exchequer income sources. While universities commit to continuing to expand all income sources, particularly from non-Exchequer sources, it must be acknowledged that the capacity to continue to expand such income sources is limited.

The OECD Education at a Glance Report 2017 shows that the public benefits of education for those in third level far exceed the public costs. Indeed, Ireland tops the OECD league on such public benefits with a return of over \$520,500 for a male and \$278,200 for a female in Ireland

compared to \$232,500 for a male and \$125,600 for a female in the 22 EU countries that are OECD members.

This underlines the value to be gained by Ireland Inc from increasing its investment in third level education. It also clearly demonstrates that there is a significant public as well as private return on higher education.

The National Competitiveness Council, in its report "Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge", published in December 2017 has warned that the continued lack of investment in higher education funding poses a serious risk to Ireland's competitiveness and foreign direct investment:



**"The adequacy and sustainability of education funding remains a significant challenge and it is time to stop long-fingered a decision to close the funding gap in the higher-education sector which poses a significant threat to our competitiveness rankings and FDI."**

The Cassells Report to Government on "Investing in National Ambition" published in 2016 provided a comprehensive analysis of the future investment needs for higher education. It identified an additional core funding requirement of €1bn per annum by 2030 as well as a further €0.36bn per annum in capital funding. Universities support and endorse the funding requirements set out

in the comprehensive analysis undertaken by the Expert Group on the Future Funding of Higher Education. The Cassells Report also outlined a number of costed options for future funding up to 2030. The impact of each of these options on State funding for higher education is summarised below in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Funding options for higher education.

| Option   | Total cost to state per year by 2030 €m | Additional cost to state per year by 2030 €m (2015 baseline) | % State funding by 2030 (64% in 2015) |
|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Enhanced State funding – no fees                            | 2,550                                   | 1,260  | 80%                                   |
| 2. Increase State funding but retain student registration fees | 2,287                                   | 997  | 72%                                   |
| 3. Deferred student fees with income contingent loans          | 1,853                                   | 563  | 55%                                   |

| Source: "Investing in National Ambition" – Report from Expert Group on Future Funding of Higher Education, 2016.

It is clear that the trends in student number increases outlined in the Cassells Report are as expected to date. Indeed, it is possible that the volume growth anticipated up to 2030 may even be greater than that outlined in the Cassells analysis given the most recent census data and population trends. This could mean that the overall cost will be higher than that projected in the report. The projected extra cost to the State of between €563m and €1.26bn, depending on which option is chosen, could therefore be even higher.

The Government has yet to decide which of the options it will adopt. What is clear is that all of the recommended options will require a substantial increase in State funding due to the demographic bulge in student numbers. There is an urgent need for the Government to address the structural funding system in third level. The universities support a system that has a fair balance of funding between students, the State and employers. The higher levels of funding requirements are unlikely to be viable

under current spending budget provisions by Government in the short to medium term. That further heightens the need for a reformed funding model.

It is a matter for Government to decide on its preferred option and to put the required investment in place in accordance with that preference. The continued protracted delay in addressing the funding issue will seriously jeopardise the standards of quality in university education and will certainly result in failure to meet the Government's own "best in Europe" target by 2026. In the first instance, the existing structural deficit must be addressed followed by a sustainable revised funding model which caters for the known demand increases and the priorities laid down by Government as outlined earlier.

The State must commence with immediate effect the process of reinvesting in higher education in a significant and impactful way in the upcoming budgets.

## "The current funding model for higher education is unsustainable."

Ibec, Budget 2019 Submission

# **OUR CHARTER COMMITMENT**

## **“SECURE THE INVESTMENT NEEDED TO ACHIEVE OUR AMBITIONS”**

**BY...**

- **Increasing state investment for core funding\*** in Higher Education in each of the next three budgets by €150m, €180m and €230m respectively. This will begin the process of investing in national ambition. This is exclusive of any increases in the National Training Fund allocation and national pay awards costs;
- **Prioritising a revised, sustainable funding model** for higher education. This is urgently required from Government. Without it there is a real risk that permanent damage will be done to the quality of the Irish university system.
- **Developing a more detailed plan for the capital investment in Higher Education**, referenced in Project Ireland 2040, is required with specific commitments for the university sector which currently handles in excess of 60% of higher level students. This should include a dedicated refurbishment programme for the large stock of out-dated buildings and infrastructure in order to create facilities appropriate to the needs of students in the 2020s and beyond.

\*Note: Funding requirements based on analysis in "Investing in National Ambition", Department of Education and Skills, 2016.



# APPENDIX 1

## KEY SYSTEM OBJECTIVES FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM 2018-2020

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>Objective 1</b> | Providing a strong talent pipeline combining knowledge, skills & employability which responds effectively to the needs of our enterprise, public service and community sectors, both nationally and regionally, and maintains Irish leadership in Europe for skill availability. |
| <b>Objective 2</b> | Creating rich opportunities for national and international engagement which enhances the learning environment and delivers a strong bridge to enterprise and the wider community.  |
| <b>Objective 3</b> | Excellent research, development and innovation that has relevance, growing engagement with external partners and impact for the economy and society and strengthens our standing to become an Innovation Leader in Europe.   |
| <b>Objective 4</b> | Significantly improves the equality of opportunity through Education and Training and recruits a student body that reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population.  |
| <b>Objective 5</b> | Demonstrates consistent improvement in the quality of the learning environment with a close eye to international best practice through a strong focus on quality & academic excellence.  |
| <b>Objective 6</b> | Demonstrates consistent improvement in governance, leadership and operation excellence.  |

Source: Higher Education System Performance Framework 2018 -2020





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