



Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann
Royal Irish Academy

Higher education on the island of Ireland in 2035:

a values-based vision of institutions
advancing society, culture and the economy

A discussion paper by the Royal Irish
Academy Higher Education Futures Taskforce



PREAMBLE

In an era of rapidly changing and unprecedented global challenges, the landscape of higher education continues to evolve. The benefits of higher education are many, for the individual, for society and for the economy: from advancing knowledge and critical-thinking skills and improving health and life expectancy, to enhancing social cohesion and diversity and increasing the quality of civic life. However, the intensifying climate crisis and extreme environmental disruption; the displacement of millions of people and mass migration; demographic change and geopolitical instability; economic and social inequality and cyber-attacks on democracy, pose unprecedented global challenges requiring holistic and creative responses. Mastering these challenges will also galvanise the modernisation of the landscape of higher education on the island of Ireland, in Europe and globally.

The Royal Irish Academy Higher Education Futures Taskforce was established in September 2020 to debate, identify and present a bold but viable vision for the higher education sector on the island of Ireland in the years ahead. The Taskforce paid special attention to the development of the higher education ecosystem over the longer term and how its development may affect and change the policy and structural framework for higher education on the island of Ireland. How must we reshape higher education to meet changing societal needs and urgent global challenges?

Existing higher education policies date from 2009 (in Northern Ireland) and 2011 (in Ireland) but the landscape has changed substantially since that time. Recent drivers of change include: the development of technological universities; enhanced emphasis on linkages with the further education sector; commitment to greater north–south collaboration in higher education provision and research; the UK's departure from the European Union; new modes of delivery in the higher education sector, accelerated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; and a growing awareness of the value of a strong science–policy dialogue.

The establishment of the new Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) in Ireland offers an exciting opportunity to refresh strategic priorities for higher education and research, and to develop further the immense reservoir of expertise and talent housed and nurtured within higher education on the island. These ambitions are bolstered by the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland)'s long-term vision of a higher education sector that is vibrant and of international calibre; pursues excellence in teaching and research; plays a pivotal role in the development of a modern, sustainable knowledge-based economy; supports a confident, shared society; and recognises and values diversity.

Informed by recommendations and analysis provided by over 100 organisations, stakeholders, interested parties and individuals in response to an extensive consultation exercise, the Taskforce has produced five papers on the future of higher education in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The titles of the five papers are:

- 1) Higher education on the island of Ireland in 2035: a values-based vision of institutions advancing society, culture and the economy*
- 2) The future landscape of higher education*
- 3) Regions and place in higher education on the island of Ireland*
- 4) Equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education*
- 5) Re-imagining research and innovation in higher education in Ireland and Northern Ireland*

This paper outlines a values-driven and ambitious vision for the future of HE on the island. Beginning with the values themselves, and their particular relevance to the decades ahead, the paper then outlines a vision whereby HE not only contributes strongly to economic, social and cultural development and wellbeing, but also advances a democratic society founded on rigorous analysis, evidence, truth, fairness and tolerance.

(October 2021)

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ABBREVIATIONS

AHSS	Federation of All European Academies
AHSS	Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
DoE	Department of Economy, Northern Ireland
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistical Records Office
OA	Open Access
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SF DORA	San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment
TU	Technological University
UKRI	UK Research and Innovation

I. INTRODUCTION

Universities are both apart from and a part of society. They are apart in the sense that they provide a critically important space for grasping the world as it is and – importantly – for reimagining the world as it ought to be ... But universities are also a part of our societies. What's the point unless the accumulated knowledge, insight and vision are put at the service of the community? With the privilege to pursue knowledge comes the civic responsibility to engage and put that knowledge to work in the service of humanity.¹

Speech by the President of Ireland, Michael D.Higgins.

Higher education (HE) has made significant progress across the island of Ireland over the last three decades. Participation and attainment rates in third level education have soared, accompanied by a significant widening and deepening of Ireland's research base and a corresponding growth in its global profile and impact. Moreover, this period has seen the development of significant academia–industry collaborations in specific areas of research and innovation, active engagement with civic society and an enhanced understanding of the contribution that higher education makes to local communities and regions. Higher education is a high value employer and a major driver of research and innovation in enterprise, culture and society on the island.

PARTICIPATION IN HE ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND: AT A GLANCE

228,503

Total number of undergraduate and postgraduate (full- and part-time) enrolments in Higher Education Authority (HEA) funded higher education institutions (HEIs) in Ireland in 2018/2019



59,705

Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled in Northern Ireland HEIs in 2019

The island's HEIs are highly international in their outlook, attracting students, scholars and researchers to study and work. The majority of non-EU students enrolled in Irish HEIs are drawn from Asia and Northern America, with considerably smaller numbers from Africa, European countries other than EU member states, America South and Oceania.³ Similarly in Northern Ireland HEIs, the majority of enrolments from outside the UK and Ireland are drawn from Asia (China, India, Philippines)⁴. Both jurisdictions have encouraged and developed significant levels of international academic and industrial collaborations both within and beyond the UK, Ireland and European Union, although UK–Ireland collaborations are particularly strong for HEIs in Ireland and Northern Ireland.⁵

The Royal Irish Academy (RIA) believes the three core missions of higher education – teaching and learning, research and innovation, and service to society – are vital to maintain and develop flourishing HE systems whose strengths and values will make a critical contribution to the achievement of shared ambitions, north and south, for prosperous, secure, socially cohesive societies and healthy democracies.⁶ The island's HE systems will contribute to helping solve global challenges such as climate change and sustainability and help develop and encourage the take-up of appropriate island-wide initiatives and interventions to achieve these ambitions.

¹ Higgins, Michael D. Speech by the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins at the launch of the Irish Centre for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Research. 24 February 2012. Available online at <https://president.ie/en/media-library/speeches/irish-centre-for-autism-nuig> (accessed 10 September 2021)

² See reports from Higher Education Authority (HEA), 2018/2019 and Northern Ireland Statistical Records Office (NISRA/DoE) 2019.

³ HEA Key Facts and Figures 2017/2018, p. 12 <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2019/01/Higher-Education-Authority-Key-Facts-Figures-2017-18.pdf>, (accessed 31.08.21)

⁴ Department for the Economy, Enrolments at UK HEIs: Northern Ireland Analysis 2019/2020, table 9d <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/enrolments-uk-higher-education-institutions-northern-ireland-analysis-201920>, (accessed 31.08.21)

⁵ Royal Irish Academy, 2017, Research and higher education on the island of Ireland after Brexit. Report of the Royal Irish Academy Brexit Taskforce: https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/roi_brexit_report_-_e-version-1.pdf (accessed 31.08.21)

⁶ This discussion paper was prepared by the Vision and Values sub-group of the Higher Education Futures Taskforce. A full listing of the sub-group's membership is provided in the Appendix.

2. THE DECADES AHEAD

Experience tells us that attempting precise predictions of the future is a futile exercise. Nevertheless, there are evident trends and evolving issues that are likely to have a strong influence on the trajectory and shape of HE over the coming decades. Higher education on the island of Ireland will need to adapt and respond to these foreseeable global and regional factors, several of which are already impacting upon the delivery, structure and priorities of higher education. These include:

- Post-pandemic societal changes and norms.
- Ubiquitous digitalisation and its impact on teaching and learning in HEIs.⁷
- The rapidly evolving nature of work ('the future of work') and the preparation of students for jobs that do not yet exist.⁸
- An increasing emphasis on flexible modes of learning and the move to a hybrid campus concept, embracing both physical and virtual spaces.⁹
- The unbundling of traditional academic qualifications into units of learning such as micro-credentials to assist lifelong learning and employability.¹⁰
- The impact of a greater use of technology including learning analytics and artificial intelligence in the delivery of higher education teaching and learning and its impact upon pedagogical practices and outcomes and student experiences.¹¹
- The crucial role that education, research and innovation will play in developing awareness, understanding and societal consensus around the opportunities and challenges required to respond to global climate change and environmental degradation, as expressed through initiatives such as the European Green Deal.¹²
- Challenges to democratic values and the functioning of a democratic society including the rise of populist politics, misinformation, disinformation and malinformation.¹³
- The competition for public funding in a context where national governments will be faced with many challenging priorities (e.g. healthcare, ageing demographic, climate action etc.)

A more in-depth discussion on these and related issues is provided in the RIA Higher Education Futures Taskforce position paper 'Future landscapes of higher education.'¹⁴

3. SHARED VALUES

Higher education will face many challenges in the decades ahead. In the process of envisioning an ambitious future where HEIs on this island will adapt successfully to those challenges and play a central role in advancing society and the economy, submissions to the RIA's Higher Education Futures Taskforce emphasised consistently that a framework of strong values should underpin that vision of the future.

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- 7 OECD, 2020, Digitalisation today: Benefits and risks for teaching and learning. Key messages, <https://www.oecd.org/education/higher-education-policy/Digitalisation-today-webinar-key-messages.pdf>, (accessed 31.08.21)
- 8 Slade, C., 2017, 'New world of work: are universities preparing students for future careers?', Times Higher Education <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/hub/pa-consulting/p/new-world-work-are-universities-preparing-students-future-careers>
- 9 European Universities Association, 2021, Universities Without Walls. A Vision for 2030 <https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/universities%20without%20walls%20%20a%20vision%20for%202030.pdf>, (accessed 03.09.21)
- 10 European Commission, 2020, A European approach to micro-credentials. Background paper for the first meeting of the consultation group on micro-credentials: https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/a-european-approach-to-micro-credentials_en, (accessed 03.09.21)
- 11 Bates, T., Cobo, C., Mariño, O. and Wheeler, S., 2020, 'Can artificial intelligence transform higher education?', International Journal Educational Technology Higher Education, 17, 42 (2020): <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-020-00218-x>
- 12 The European Green Deal aims to make Europe climate neutral by 2050, boost the economy through green technology, create sustainable industry and transport and cut pollution (https://ec.europa.eu/reform-support/what-we-do/green-transition_en)
- 13 ALLEA. 2021, Fact or Fake? Tackling science disinformation. Discussion Paper, accessed at, <https://allea.org/portfolio-item/fact-or-fake/>, (accessed 03.09.21)
- 14 RIA, 2021 RIA Higher Education Futures Taskforce position paper; 'Future landscapes of higher education', <https://www.ria.ie/policy-and-international-relations/higher-education-and-research-policy/higher-education-futures>

As a result, ten core values are proposed in this paper:

- 1. A commitment to excellence across the core missions of higher education**
- 2. A commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion**
- 3. A commitment to delivering value for society**
- 4. A commitment to educational opportunity**
- 5. A commitment to sustainable and equitable development**
- 6. A commitment to engagement and partnership**
- 7. A commitment to furthering the all-island dimensions of tertiary education**
- 8. A commitment to the global dimension of higher education**
- 9. A commitment to academic freedom and research integrity**
- 10. A commitment to institutional autonomy**

I. A commitment to excellence across the core missions of higher education

Excellence in teaching and learning, scholarship, research and innovation, and civic engagement are essential drivers of an informed society, a vibrant culture, and a flourishing economy.

Talent will continue to be the greatest asset to this island. It will be critical to our future success that, through our actions, we merit a reputation for excellence in teaching and learning, underpinned by an ongoing commitment to innovations in those areas. The primary focus should be on fostering the development of rounded and adaptable individuals with a broad range of attributes that will enable them to contribute strongly to society as engaged and informed citizens and to their chosen workplace as creative and analytical thinkers.

High quality research and scholarship is the hallmark of an excellent university. The ability to draw on expertise across a broad range of disciplines from the sciences, arts, humanities and social sciences (AHSS) is essential for understanding and tackling the major challenges that will confront Ireland and the world in the decades ahead. Open research, research integrity and transdisciplinary research will be key foundations in maximising the impact that research will have in developing robust responses to these challenges. The RIA Higher Education Futures Taskforce position paper 'Re-imagining research and innovation in higher education in Ireland and Northern Ireland' offers a fuller consideration of the future of research and innovation on the island to 2035.

Implementation of the concepts of 'distributed excellence' and 'smart specialisation' has the potential to significantly enhance the spread and impact of higher education across the island.¹⁵ As a principle, distributed excellence is based on a broad foundation of high quality basic and frontier research and recognises local access to a high performing HEI as the sine qua non for social cohesion and competitive regional economic innovation.¹⁶ It respects and acknowledges the strength and value brought by a diversity of providers and HEIs to a flourishing higher education system.

Smart specialisation will also enable higher education to achieve its maximum contribution to local, regional and national advancement. This innovative approach aims to boost growth and jobs by enabling each region to identify and develop its own competitive advantages and involves the prioritisation of funding in areas where regions/institutions could have a competitive advantage.¹⁷ A particular aim of smart specialisation is to leverage higher education as a key asset in boosting regional growth including that driven by cultural as well as industrial development, achieving individual potential through access to higher education, and green and digital transitions. The RIA Higher Education Futures Taskforce paper 'The role of regions and place in higher education across the island of Ireland in 2035' offers a more detailed consideration of these issues.

¹⁵ See the RIA Higher Education Futures discussion paper, 'Future landscapes of higher education' for a fuller discussion on this. Available at: <https://www.ria.ie/policy-and-international-relations/higher-education-and-research-policy/higher-education-futures>

¹⁶ Duda, G. 2018. 'Distributed excellence: a model for European higher education'. University World News, 16 November <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20181116095806949>, (accessed 03.09.21)

¹⁷ Smart Specialisation Strategy'. Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Innovation-Research-Development/Smart-Specialisation/>

2. A commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion

The Taskforce identifies three key areas in which equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) should be prioritised in higher education:

- As reflected in the composition of students, staff and higher education leadership
- As reflected in the operation and governance of HEIs
- As reflected in the lived experience of those who participate in higher education

EDI is a value in, and of, itself which should be embedded in institutional strategies, national policies and sectoral actions.

Higher education systems are strengthened by embracing a diversity of people, disciplines, research and contributions. HEIs will need to address a legacy of under-representation of certain groups of people within the student and staff population, with a particular focus on senior management and leadership roles. They should foster a culture of EDI, underpinned by principles of human rights with inclusivity understood to be a 'whole-of-institution' responsibility. The role of curriculum design and content in supporting inclusivity will be widely accepted and higher education will consider new modes of designing and delivering the curriculum so that it is responsive to different learning styles.¹⁸

HEIs will build communities that reflect diversity in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, ability and disability, disciplines and fields of study, independent scholars and research teams, from early career to senior academics, curiosity-driven inquiry to application-driven innovation, and those whose work is rooted in local and community and international challenges.

3. A commitment to delivering value for society

*'The university of the future will derive its right to exist primarily from being active in the world and by producing knowledge for the world.'*¹⁹

HEIs have the privilege and responsibility of creating and disseminating knowledge. In the decades ahead, with the increasing significance of a knowledge-dominated society and economy, HEIs will have to place an enhanced emphasis on the effective communication of knowledge and insights and, where relevant, the efficient translation of knowledge into societal and economic benefit. HEIs' role as guardians and reservoirs of knowledge and expertise will be ever more prominent in the 21st century and higher education has a critical role to play in countering misinformation and false information which now pose a serious challenge to evidence-based decision-making, science communication and democratic values and practices.

Higher education will take on a much more ambitious vision for knowledge transmission beyond the campus. It is in a unique position to raise scientific and media literacy, counter disinformation and misinformation and encourage open conversations and dialogue on the knowns and unknowns of evidence as it applies to pressing public policy issues and societal concerns.

HEIs will have to continually adapt their teaching and learning to ensure that they are responsive to the concerns and motivations of their students and wider society. Higher education must endeavour to equip learners with the skills, attributes and knowledge they need to understand and help develop the solutions to the challenges facing mid-21st century society and to be active, informed citizens.

HEIs should build relationships in and across communities on the island in order to be better informed and more inclusive in how problems are defined and solutions found. We need to encourage the participation of researchers in local, national and global research networks, policy for research and research for policy fora to build recognition of the wealth of knowledge and scholarship on the island of Ireland and to ensure that solutions at the global level are informed by a diversity of voices and perspectives.

¹⁸ A fuller discussion on EDI and related issues is provided in the RIA Higher Education Futures Taskforce position paper on equality, diversity and inclusion, which focuses on the impact of EDI issues on undergraduate and postgraduate students, postdoctoral researchers, academic staff and technical and support staff.

¹⁹ Van der Zwaan, Bert. 2017. Higher Education in 2040: A Global Approach. Amsterdam University Press, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvfp63n9.

4. A commitment to educational opportunity

Higher education is a transformative agent for society, for the economy and for culture but most of all for the individual. Access to, and participation in, an inclusive, integrated, high quality higher education system will have a tremendous positive impact on students' futures and their potential contribution to a prosperous, stable and socially cohesive society.

Striking differences remain within regions and cities across the island in terms of who progresses to, and benefits from, higher education, particularly when viewed through the lens of ethnic grouping or social class. The higher education sector of 2035 must have addressed these imbalances and extended the benefits of higher education more widely if it is to realise higher education's contribution to greater social cohesion and prosperity on the island. This requires affirmative actions by government, north and south, and greater collaboration by the HEIs and further education (FE) institutions in each region to reduce the economic and social disadvantages that exist to varying degrees in different regions of the island.

The Taskforce's vision is for a higher education system with multiple access and transition pathways into higher education available for students of all ages, north and south. This system will embrace more inclusive modes of provision that will respond to the needs of many different cohorts of learners, particularly those returning to education after a long absence or those pursuing it through pathways other than those followed by the more typical school-leaver cohort. It will create opportunities through hybrid models of delivery, new means of accumulating qualifications (e.g. via micro-credentials and educational passports) and increasing the variety of routes through which students can access higher education. The objective will be to provide flexible access to lifelong learning opportunities to facilitate new learners and returning learners who wish to refresh their skills or reskill.

5. A commitment to sustainable and equitable development

In the context of environmental sustainability and tackling the greatest challenges facing global society in the coming decades, HEIs have a particular responsibility in leveraging all of their expertise and assets to play a central role. They will need to become 'exemplar institutions', showing the way forward for wider society in terms of operational practices and ambitious carbon neutrality commitments. They will need to make radical changes to curriculum content and research priorities, integrating sustainable development issues into all aspects of teaching, research and service.²⁰

HEIs have been quick to recognise the relevance and importance of engaging with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.²¹ Higher education systems in the future will be expected to demonstrate significant leadership in respect of these goals. Sustainability as a key value will:

- Change the institutional practices of higher education.
- Challenge the modus operandi of international research practices and networking.
- Drive change in curriculum design and delivery to help people think and behave in ways that foster a more sustainable planet.²²

Taken together these changes will form much of the basis of transformation for sustainability in higher education.²³ The HEI of 2035 will be an early adopter of the knowledge and innovation produced by its communities as it moves to meet its responsibilities in areas such as reducing energy consumption, protecting and enhancing water quality and supply, reducing waste and achieving net zero carbon.

6. A commitment to engagement and partnership

The era of the 'Ivory Tower' university is over: The value and contribution of the third mission of higher education, namely societal engagement and service to the community, will grow sharply in significance in the decades ahead.

20 Blessinger, Patrick., Enakshi Sengupta and Makhanya, Mandla., 2018. 'Higher Education's Key Role in Sustainable Development. University World News: The Global Window on Higher Education. <https://www.universityworldnews.com>

21 The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. See <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

22 Blessinger, Patrick., et al, Op cit.

23 Žalėnienė, I. and Pereira, P. 2021. Higher education for sustainability: a global perspective. *Geography and Sustainability* (2), 2, 99–106

The public legitimacy of public HEIs will derive from the success with which they carry out their role as:

- Trusted, independent sources of knowledge and information to inform societal discussion and decision-making.
- Fora for independent, unbiased debate and exploration of differing perspectives, committed to upholding democratic values.
- Agents for 'engaged research' involving citizens in wider society in the articulation of problem statements for, and as participants in, research projects.

More active engagement and partnerships with other elements of the education system will become increasingly important over the decades ahead in recognition of the critical significance of a coherent approach to talent development at all steps along the education continuum and for early career researchers. A seamless integration of education pathways and opportunities across HE and FE will be particularly important.

Partnerships form an essential element of successful research. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the interdependence of multiple spheres of activity and communities, the importance of co-operation and resource sharing, internationally, inter-regionally and inter-institutionally, and the fundamental necessity of building caring communities.

7. A commitment to furthering the all-island dimensions of tertiary education

Across the higher education sector on this island, there is strong support for greater collaboration in higher education and research, and for increased interaction and sharing of resources between the higher and FE sectors. This value elicited very strong support across submissions and consultation inputs to the RIA Higher Education Futures Taskforce. The rationale underpinning these contributions focused on the following elements:

- The benefit of an integrated support system to underpin the needs of the knowledge-based economy.
- The growth in higher education offered by the further education sector in partnership with local universities opening access.
- Enhancing mobility opportunities for students and staff.
- Leveraging synergies for mutual benefit across the core missions of higher and further education.
- Avoiding unnecessary duplication of expensive resources and capital infrastructure.
- Enhancing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) attractiveness for the island.
- Contributing to mutual cultural awareness and promoting social and cultural cohesion and understanding.
- Creating an exemplar of cross-jurisdictional (transnational) mutual recognition and sharing of new learning modules and qualifications.

The Taskforce expressed support for the establishment of a joint Northern Ireland Executive-Irish Government advisory council to optimise the potential for strategic and planned development in higher and further education, and in research, on a north–south and east–west basis.²⁴ Such a council would provide advice to the governments on strategic priorities, funding issues, and policy and planning for all aspects of tertiary education and research.

8. A commitment to the global dimension of higher education

Although the HEIs on this island already have a strong global outlook and engagement, this dimension will become even more important in the decades ahead. The challenges faced by global society are greater than any one discipline or field of study within the island can resolve even when working together. Multifaceted, multidisciplinary collaboration that brings the best expertise from many nations together will be necessary to tackle the complex problems facing us.

Our future vision for higher education needs to be more collaborative and outward facing, with a particular emphasis on building the capacity of researchers to engage with international collaboration and normalising international student mobility.

²⁴ Since 1999, certain powers previously held by the UK Parliament and HM Government have been devolved to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Devolved powers are decisions that are taken in the devolved administrations, for example in policy areas such as education, health and social care, agriculture, the environment and tourism. Policy areas where HM Government remains responsible include international relations and defence, research councils and UK research and innovation. This means that only the UK parliament and government can make decisions on these matters (UK Parliament, 2021).

The opportunities available to higher education will differ by jurisdiction with those in Northern Ireland continuing to align, as appropriate, with UK-wide R&D policies and programmes as set by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), whereas those in Ireland will align with national and European Union policies and programmes. Horizon Europe, the European Research Area and the European Universities Initiative will be major drivers of change and practice. These multilateral frameworks will encourage and support greater strategic and transnational collaboration and co-operation in the delivery of higher education.

The very nature of research is experiencing significant cultural changes at the global level. Higher education on the island must recognise and show leadership in responding to these changes, most particularly those brought about by the adoption of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (SF DORA) principles, open research, citizen science and co-design and co-production of research.²⁵ The small open nature of the island's higher education system offers great potential to develop actions in respect of each of these areas and to demonstrate the island's agility, flexibility and inherent willingness and capacity to innovate in how we do, assess and use research.

The soft diplomatic power of higher education and research collaboration offers much potential to support the island's future. The rich web of international networks and relationships developed by the island's researchers and students should be recognised for its potential in supporting global dialogue and as a means of positively engaging with other political and cultural systems.

9. A commitment to academic freedom and research integrity

The principle of academic freedom is an essential, and indeed defining, element of HEIs. This principle means that both academic staff and students can engage in intellectual debate without fear of censorship or retaliation. Among other features, this preserves the intellectual integrity of higher education and thus serves the public good.

In a highly open society that protects individual rights and freedom of expression, there will be many voices and sources of information competing to influence public opinion and policy.²⁶ Researchers are highly trusted by the public as repeatedly evidenced in global and national surveys.²⁷ Higher education has a responsibility to:

- Communicate openly, honestly and with humility, acknowledging the boundaries to what can be definitively concluded at a moment in time.
- Explain how scientific practice works.
- Educate society on how to recognise authentic, credible and trustworthy science.

This trust and legitimacy should not be taken for granted. Protecting this value into the future requires a commitment to:

- Academic freedom, good research practices and high ethical research standards.
- Protection of the freedom of individual students to learn without interference from external sources.
- Protection of the freedom of scholars to pursue knowledge and communicate their research knowledge and findings to society without undue interference from external sources.
- Protection of society's trust in the legitimacy, independence and integrity of higher education.

Excellent research, open research, research integrity, ethical research practices and inter-disciplinary research are critical to the 21st century higher education system. Higher education on the island must continuously assert the primacy of academic freedom, research integrity and ethics as a cornerstone of higher education and research practice.

25 The Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) recognises the need to improve the ways in which researchers and the outputs of scholarly research are evaluated. It has become a worldwide initiative covering all scholarly disciplines and all key stakeholders including funders, publishers, professional societies, institutions and researchers. See <https://sf-dora.org/>

26 ALLEA 2021 Future of science Communication Conference: Moving Forward Research & Practice 29 June 2021/in ALLEA News, Peritia. Fact or Fake? <https://allea.org/category/allea-news/>

27 More than 80% of respondents to a March 2021 poll by Science Foundation Ireland said they trusted scientists, 94% agreed that research was important and 85% agreed that scientists have a professional responsibility to talk about research findings with the public. See Science Foundation Ireland, 2021.

10. A commitment to institutional autonomy

In publicly funded HEIs, the relationship between the government and the HEI is critically important and requires an appropriate balance across the areas of governance, regulation, performance assessment and autonomy. As such, institutional autonomy refers to: 'the degree of self-governance necessary for effective decision making by HEIs and leaders regarding their academic work, standards, management and related activities consistent with principles of equitable access, academic freedom, public accountability, and social responsibility.'²⁸

It is clear from international evidence, however, that there is a strong correlation between the quality of HEIs and their degree of autonomy. In other words, HEIs need to have high levels of institutional autonomy in order to best fulfil their missions and strategies. The promotion and protection of institutional autonomy as a core principle for HEIs on the island of Ireland in the decades ahead will continue to be highly relevant and important.

4. A VISION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND IN 2035

Building on the framework of intersecting values outlined in the previous section, the HE Futures Taskforce has developed a vision for higher education on this island in 2035 that relies upon a diversity of institutional missions. Realisation of this vision will result in a significant advancement of our society and economy with particular benefits for individual citizens in terms of prosperity and quality of life.

The core elements of this Vision for 2035 are as follows:

- Higher education on the island of Ireland will be renowned for its development of talent, the excellence of its research across the full spectrum of inquiry, the fostering of creativity and innovative mindsets, the active engagement of HEIs with society and industry, its culture of inclusivity and global outlook.
- Appropriate levels of resourcing, north and south, will enable HEIs to deliver on their full potential as centres of learning, knowledge creation and creativity, and as locations where the development of individual talent is a priority.
- Higher education on the island of Ireland will provide an excellent development and learning experience for all students with a focus on personalisation of learning that adapts to the needs and potential of each individual student. HEIs will develop lifelong learning relationships with their student community and their local and regional communities to extend widely the benefits of higher education.
- Higher education will develop a citizenry with the knowledge, skills and attributes to ensure a vibrant, prosperous and peaceful society and to enable a living and working environment that encourages and rewards innovation and creativity. It will integrate sustainable development issues into all aspects of teaching, learning and research.
- Higher education will build on the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and develop an effective hybrid campus model that accommodates the needs of a diverse student and staff community and which recognises the role played by the physical campus in delivering a positive student experience.
- Leveraging the affordances of digital technology, HEIs will develop and offer flexible and personalised learning pathways, including an unbundling of conventional academic qualifications to accommodate learners at all phases of their working life and beyond.

²⁸ Scholars at Risk. 2018. Promoting higher education values: a guide for discussion. https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SAR_PHV_DiscussionGuide_v20_ONLINE.pdf

APPENDIX

Membership of HE Futures Vision and Values sub-group

Clare Austick, Union of Students in Ireland (July 2021-)

Mark Bailey, MRIA, Emeritus Director, Armagh Observatory

Roger Downer, MRIA, President Emeritus, University of Limerick

Lorna Fitzpatrick, Union of Students in Ireland (July 2019- June 2021)

Brian MacCraith, MRIA (Chair of the Vision and Values sub-group) Former President Dublin City University

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