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

Consultation Paper

Ireland's International Education, Research and Innovation Strategy

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Section 1 - Introduction and Context

1.1 Introduction

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) will lead on the development of a new International Education, Research and Innovation (ERI) Strategy for Ireland in consultation with all relevant stakeholders. A commitment to a review and an update of Ireland's International Education Strategy was contained in the Programme for Government "Our Shared Future".

The establishment of this Department provides new opportunities to position Ireland globally as a leading knowledge economy to underpin sustainable economic and employment growth as well as supporting a more inclusive, sustainable and just future.

This consultation paper will set out Ireland's current approach to international engagement in ERI and will consider how best to strengthen existing international relationships and develop new ones, *having regard to the contributions of stakeholders*. It will also explore the potential for a more coordinated and enhanced engagement with international partners in the higher education and research domains.

1.2 DFHERIS Statement of Strategy

The DFHERIS Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023 states its mission to "*develop Ireland's further and higher education and research systems to support people in reaching their full potential and to create value, prosperity, resilience and a cohesive, sustainable and vibrant society.*" This mission is founded on the following six strategic goals:

(a) *Develop talent and skills*, through collaboration with educational institutions, employers and others to identify the talents and skills required, and to provide education and training, thereby growing potential and helping people engage in and contribute to our economy and society.

(b) *Promote research, knowledge, and innovation* by leading a whole-of-Government approach to agree the strategy, institutional framework, and investment needed to advance basic and applied research and innovation, grounded in collaboration between enterprise, educational institutions, and wider society, in Ireland and beyond.

(c) *Support learning for all*, through the provision of supports and opportunities for learning to all, recognising the needs of vulnerable learners and the most marginalised, and assist people in access to and progression through higher and further education and training, so as to grow prosperity across communities and build social cohesion.

(d) *Succeed on world stage* by positioning Ireland globally as a leading knowledge economy with a skills and innovation focus and as a leader in higher education and research, as well as deepening collaboration on an all-island and East-West basis, within the EU and beyond. This will attract talent from around the world to Ireland's international education system, thereby equipping Ireland to compete on the world stage.

(e) *Good governance* through the enhancement of quality by promoting the modernisation of the sector, implementing a sustainable funding model and enhancing governance, in order to drive quality and secure excellence in performance.

(f) *Department "fit-for-purpose"* by ensuring that critical Departmental resources and expertise needed to enable delivery of its Mission and Goals are in place, supporting staff to further enhance individual and collective capacity and underpinning excellence in performance.

While the underlying principles of developing a new international ERI strategy are evident in each of the six strategic goals, the strategy goals on succeeding on the world stage and the promotion of research and innovation very much frame the context of the international ERI strategy. Both of these goals emphasise the need for Ireland not just to strengthen existing relationships on a multi -lateral basis (North-South, East-West, EU and wider global basis), but also to seek to build new ones. The underlying imperative is to demonstrate Ireland's standing and capacity to engage in the evolving global ERI ecosystem.

1.3 Key Drivers for The International Education, Research and Innovation (ERI) Strategy

The purpose of the 2016 international education strategy was to support the development of global citizens through Ireland's high-quality international education system, by attracting talent from around the world to our education institutions, equipping Irish learners with the skills and experience they need to engage internationally and to participate in world-class research and international collaborations.

As previously noted, the establishment of DFHERIS offers the opportunity to bring the international education strategy and the research and innovation strategy together in an aligned framework. This, complemented by the Indecon Review (*see Para 2.2*) of the current strategy and wider public policy developments, provide the basis for the key drivers informing the new strategy:

(a) **Developing talent and skills**

A core goal for the strategy will be to support the role of skills, human capital, international research and innovation collaboration in strengthening Ireland's proposition as a global innovation hub and a partner in addressing global challenges.

Ireland seeks to attract talent from around the world to its education and research institutions, and to equip Irish-based learners with the skills and experience they need to engage internationally. The new ERI strategy will look at how more focus can be given to other international education opportunities beyond student recruitment that will benefit all of our learners, our higher education and R&I systems and our international partners. It needs to explore whether existing policies including current scholarships schemes, or joint programmes/ awards can be deployed to support this goal.

(b) **Promote research, knowledge and innovation**

International R&I will continue to be a central pillar of Ireland's national R&I strategy as we develop a new national strategy, as committed to in the Government's Economic Recovery Plan. The importance of strengthening relationships and engagement beyond our shores cannot be underestimated as these have been an important asset in enabling Ireland to excel in key areas of R&I. The Irish R&I community has developed strong and well-diversified collaborative links with a wide range of international partners, mainly through the EU Framework Programmes. The new EU programme, Horizon Europe, will provide significant opportunities for Ireland to deepen collaboration within the EU and with new and existing partners across the globe. Furthermore, as the education and research sectors become central to national challenges such as climate action, a new ERI strategy must evaluate potential to build alliances with countries with similar priorities and values.

(c) **Support learning for all**

Ireland's commitment to inclusion throughout its education and training system has increasingly been evident to all students. It has been a longstanding national policy priority in Ireland as well as a European priority. It is critical that our economic, cultural and social development as a nation is led by graduates who reflect the diversity of the population having regard to socio-economic background, ethnicity, gender, geographical location, disability, age or other circumstances.

The commitment of our many stakeholders – HEI leaders, International Officers, academics, researchers, students, administrators and representative bodies to name a few - has also been central to engaging with, and welcoming of, the many students and early stage researchers coming to Ireland. As is evident in the system's response during the pandemic, staff across Ireland's education institutions are central to ensuring the experience of international students is professionally and personally rewarding. This is the basis for strengthening Ireland's reputation as a location with an education system, which is truly welcoming and supportive of international students, researchers and academics.

(d) **Succeed on the international stage**

The new ERI strategy must maintain strong relations with existing partner countries, the Department must also look to develop wider global linkages which support its ambitions to position Ireland as a leading knowledge economy with international ERI at its core. This will include ensuring appropriate risk management is built into our approach to internationalisation, complete with a greater focus on environmentally sustainable forms of engagement.

The establishment of DFHERIS, with its mandate to promote international ERI, is a focussed opportunity to strengthen the alignment required, as Ireland's ERI system re-engages, post-Covid. The new ERI strategy will consider the potential role of additional education and research attachés, tasked to promote Ireland as centre of education and research excellence, and facilitate strong person-to-person, and institution-to-institution relationships globally.

It will also be critically important to strike the appropriate balance between maintaining an open approach to international cooperation, while protecting shared values and principles in global partnerships.

(e) **Good governance to enhance quality**

Each international engagement, at institutional or individual level, is an indication of confidence in the education and research infrastructure in Ireland. It is vital that the hall mark of this underpinning of Ireland's international ERI system is quality, both in terms of institutional processes as well as excellence in teaching and learning.

While quality is particularly critical to all sectors, it is particularly relevant in the English Language Education (ELE) sector. It is a broad and diverse sector which experienced extensive growth and success over the period of the last strategy, but this exposed certain regulatory gaps. As this sector moves towards statutory regulation for the first time, the roll-out of the International Education Mark (IEM) will underpin a high quality ELE sector that safeguards the interests of students. It will also ensure that the educational function of this sector, which is the teaching and learning of English language proficiency will be the core focus of its future direction.

(f) **Department 'fit for purpose' leading cohesive policy and cross-sectoral approaches**

The international ERI strategy will align with the ambitions of the Government's Global Ireland strategy and will seek to ensure a strategic approach is taken to engagement with key external stakeholders – including in the EU, the UK and with other global partners. The strategy will explore the scope for greater cohesiveness between higher education and R&I collaboration with international partners under the EU programmes and bilaterally, as well as the scope for greater linkages between HE and ELE will be explored as part of this strategy. This will include examining options to develop the pathways for students who travel to Ireland to study ELE to transition into HE, alongside diversifying and enhancing ELE offerings such as international foundation year programmes to support and develop the language capabilities of HE students.

Finally, it is important to frame international ERI policy as part of a broader international relations agenda for Ireland. Education is often a precursor to the establishment of wider relationships such as cultural, economic or intergovernmental with other States. Essentially, the value of person-to-person or institution-to-institution relationships should be measured beyond education.

1.4 Impacts of the Pandemic

The COVID-19- pandemic will result in major strategic challenges for international education as the patterns and modes of international mobility are disrupted over the coming years. It is too early to tell whether these disruptions will be permanent. Recovery of the sector internationally over the medium term will depend on a range of factors including the prevalence of the virus, take-up of vaccination programmes, particularly in countries of interest, and recovery in international travel. It is also clear that there are other dependencies in areas such as labour market conditions to support part-time work, post-graduation employment and modes of delivery of higher education.

All sectors with international relations were deeply impacted by the pandemic, in particular the recruitment of new learners over a sustained period of time. Consideration will need to be given to measures which will be required to facilitate medium-term recovery given the very significant changes to international engagement and student mobility.

During the pandemic, the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science led the development of additional support measures for international students, which further confirms, inter alia, Ireland's commitment to their care and well-being. This was also supported by many stakeholders and this spirit of collaboration should be carried into the strategy.

In the year prior to March 2020, Indecon reports that there were 44,229 international students in all HEIs in Ireland. Arising from the subsequent travel restrictions, it emerged anecdotally that many students, particularly those on 2 or 3 year programmes, opted to remain in Ireland, rather than travel home. It is not possible to confirm the numbers involved. As travel restrictions were eased, HEIs, supported by DFHERIS, established a 'meet and greet' service, which was designed to transport incoming students from Dublin Airport to the receiving HEIs, in accordance with the prevailing public health guidelines. This arrangement was repeated in August 2020, and approximately 16,000 international students were welcomed to Ireland. For the reasons outlined above, it will not be possible to confirm the full impact of the Covid. However, it is clear that returning to the numbers in 2019/ 2020 will be an immediate priority.

The new strategy will need to consider what measures are necessary to support and drive this recovery over the medium-term while also giving consideration to Ireland's longer term goals in the area of International ERI.

1.5 Structure of Consultation Paper

In addition to providing detailed background on international ERI, stakeholders are invited to respond a series of questions, which are structured thematically along the following lines:

(a) Develop talent and skills/ Promote research, knowledge, and innovation;

(b) Succeed on world stage;

(c) Support learning for all/ Good governance to enhance quality;

(d) Department "fit-for-purpose";

A copy of the Indecon Report accompanies this consultation document.

Section 2 - International Education

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In October 2016, the second Government-approved international education strategy, *Irish Educated, Globally Connected: An International Strategy for Ireland 2016-2020* was launched by the then Minister for Education and Skills, and was developed around four key strategic priorities:

(a) A supportive national framework;

(b) Internationally-oriented, globally competitive higher education institutions;

(c) Sustainable growth in the English Language Education Sector; and

(d) Succeeding abroad.

The strategy also contained a number of key actions contributing to the overall objective, including:

(a) Increasing the number of higher education international students studying in Ireland by 33% to 44,000 by 2020;

(b) Increasing the economic value of the international education sector to €2.1bn per annum by 2020; an increase of 33%.

(c) Attracting outstanding researchers to Irish institutions and building research capacity and commercialisation of research;

(d) Building world class networks of learning and innovation that can attract funding from outside the Irish education system;

(e) Equipping Irish learners with the skills and experience to engage internationally;

(f) Having more Irish students integrate overseas experience into their study through maximising mobility opportunities for all;

(g) Connecting the benefits gained from internationalisation in education with enterprises to support the achievement of national economic ambitions;

(h) Enhancing international alumni networks to build global connections for greater social and economic outcomes for Ireland at home and abroad.

2.2 REVIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION STRATEGY (2016-2020)

In advance of drafting a new strategy, DFHERIS commissioned an independent review of the most recent one. Indecon Research Economics was appointed as the successful bidder, and were tasked to:

(a) complete a full evaluation of the strategy, including its targets and actions, through research and consultation with relevant stakeholders;

(b) bring forward recommendations as to how Government should proceed in relation to the continued growth of international education in Ireland; and

(c) undertake a full Cost Benefit Analysis exercise on the value of international education to Ireland.

Based on consultations with stakeholders, Indecon concluded that the strategy has been very effective in achieving its overall objectives, and its principal findings were:

(a) Key Objectives

Indecon found that 'exceptional progress' was made in expanding the number of international students and in growing overseas research income. The strategy set a target of increasing international student numbers in HEIs by 33% by 2019/20 academic year. Data verified by Indecon suggests that Ireland achieved this objective, with a 33.6% increase in international student numbers (44,229 students) for the 2019/20 academic year. However, there remains a challenge in achieving some of the wider goals of the globalisation of Irish education. For example, stakeholders felt that the strategy had been less effective in the attraction of international academic staff and researchers.

(b) Gross Impact on Economy

The significance of international education to the Irish economy can be seen by examining the gross economic impact of the fee income and expenditures of overseas students. Indecon's detailed analysis concluded that the sector had a major economic impact (estimated at a gross annual economic impact of €2.38 billion) on the Irish economy. This is an increase of impact of 46% over the lifetime of the strategy.

(c) Cost Benefit Analysis

A rigorous cost benefit analysis undertaken by Indecon has highlighted the very positive benefits to cost ratio (BCR), which is estimated as 1.67. This implies that for every €1 of costs associated with international students visiting Ireland, there is €1.67 in benefits. This does not fully take into account the wider economic benefits of the international strategy.

(d) Data Challenges

A number of the strategic objectives set were associated with clear quantified targets. However, this was not the case for all of the objectives. Significant data challenges exist in measuring the impact of some of the wider objectives, which should be considered for the next strategy.

(e) Regulation of English Language Education (ELE) Sector

The success of the strategy is dependent on the reputation of Ireland's education and training providers. Stakeholders suggest that some concerns remain regarding the regulation of the ELE sector and the impact of closure of any private colleges. While significant improvements in the regulation of the sector are recognised, potential issues remain concerning the need to ensure the viability and appropriateness of individual providers and of the quality of the education provision in this sector.

(f) Brexit

Following the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union, Ireland is the largest English-speaking country in the EU. This will open up new opportunities for Ireland to increase its share of students wishing to study in the EU. There may also be significant potential new opportunities to expand R&I collaborations and to attract more international researchers.

Section 3 - International Research and Innovation

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Innovation 2020, Ireland's whole-of-Government strategy for research and development, science and technology was published in December 2015 and encompasses Ireland's international R&I policy. A new strategy is currently in development which will shape the agenda for R&I over the coming years.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a seismic shift in the challenges and opportunities faced by the Irish economy and society which is also reflected at a European and global level. The pandemic has accelerated and strengthened the importance of global R&I interaction to find effective solutions to the most pressing challenges globally including climate change, digitalisation and health.

As a small open economy, Ireland has a strong outward focus, which is reflected in its promotion of an open approach to international R&I collaboration. However, in addition to policy developments at European level, there have been very significant geo-political changes during the intervening years, which need to be considered.

The core strategic objective of Ireland's current international R&I strategy is to increase engagement with researchers and innovators globally, through:

(a) Participation in the EU R&I framework programmes, which remains the most effective for the Irish R&I community to collaborate with their counterparts in other countries. Ireland has drawn down €1.2 billion in competitive funding under Horizon 2020 to January 2022. The new programme, Horizon Europe, was officially launched in February 2021 and has a budget of €95.5 billion for the seven-year period, 2021-2027.

(b) Membership of key International Research Organisations (IROs) which also provides opportunities to enhance Ireland's international R&I relationships. Ireland is a member of the European Southern Observatory (ESO), the European Space Agency, ELIXIR (a distributed infrastructure for life science information), LOFAR (radio telescope network), the European Molecular Biology Laboratory, the European Molecular Biology Conference, EUREKA (the largest international network for R&I cooperation), European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) and Centre Européen de Calcul Atomique et Moléculaire (CECAM –focused on fundamental research on advanced computation).

(c) Bilateral cooperation with a small number of non-EU countries including the UK, the US and China.

3.2 Overview of Ireland's R&I Performance

Ireland has a growing reputation for scientific excellence. It is ranked 19th in the 2021 Global Innovation Index, thus recognising its standing as a world leader in generating and using new knowledge for economic and social progress. Ireland's global rankings for individual subject areas further demonstrate that it continues to play an important role in global R&I. Ireland is first in immunology, second in agricultural sciences, fifth in material sciences, fifth in neurosciences, ninth in molecular biology and genetics and ninth in microbiology.

By transforming the level and quality of interactions between higher education and research institutions and Irish based enterprise, Ireland has developed a world-beating capacity to commercialise its public research. Ireland is ranked first in the world for knowledge diffusion, and for knowledge impact and third for knowledge absorption and fifth for overall knowledge and technology outputs.

While Ireland remains in the "strong innovators" group, the 2021 European Innovation Scoreboard ranked Ireland eleventh of the EU-27, down from ninth place in 2020.

3.3 Overview of Ireland's Participation in Horizon 2020

As previously mentioned, the most effective way for a small country like Ireland to collaborate with other countries is under the EU R&I Framework Programmes. The *Midterm Review of Innovation 2020* (published in June 2019) attributed Ireland's strong performance in Horizon 2020 to the excellence of the Irish research community and the national support structures in place – notably the Network of National Contact Points, which is managed by Enterprise Ireland.

Tables 1 and 2 overleaf provide an overview of Ireland's participation in Horizon 2020 to January 2022. Some awards for the final Horizon 2020 calls have yet to be reflected in drawdown data.

Table 1: Overview of Ireland's Performance in Horizon 2020 – as of January 2022

H2020 Indicator	Ireland's performance
Total H2020 drawdown	€1.2 billion
Total applications	17,831
Success rate	14.74% (EU average: 11.98%)
Budget ranking	13 out of 28
Participation ranking	14 out of 28
No of ERC Principal Investigators (PIs)	112
Drawdown by ERC	€163 million
No of SME applications	4,944
No of SME participants	758
Drawdown by SMEs	€303 million

Table 2: Ireland's Top 10 partners in Horizon 2020 – as of January 2022

Country	Number of collaborative links
Spain	4,8984
Germany	4,533
Italy	4,171
France	4,081
United Kingdom	3,898
Netherlands	2,545
Belgium	2,542
Greece	1,557
Sweden	1,306
Austria	1,281

3.4 New European approach to international R&I Cooperation

It is important that the development of Ireland's international R&I policies and strategy aligns with recent developments at EU level.

In May 2021, the European Commission published a new communication on the global approach to R&I, which reconfirms Europe's commitment to openness while protecting fundamental rights and shared values. It called for a rebalancing of Europe's cooperation with other countries to reflect the need for reciprocity and a level playing field, as well as setting out a number of actions that will be progressed in close consultation with Member States.

In September 2021, the Competitiveness Council (R&I) adopted Council Conclusions, which set out the Member States' response to the Commission communication. They identified key actions to strengthen the EU global role in R&I, with a strong focus on shared fundamental values and principles, and the need to balance openness with a more cautious approach. This sees the Horizon Europe programme as the central framework for the facilitation of international R&I. There is also a strong focus on safeguarding scientific freedom and promoting gender equality.

The Commission and Member States are working closely together to co-design an implementation plan to progress Europe's priorities for international cooperation in R&I. One of the first actions to be progressed will be the development of guidelines to help safeguard academic freedom, integrity and intellectual property rights. The Commission also plans to bring forward a code of practice on the smart use of intellectual property in 2022.

Section 4 - Consultation Issues and Questions

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As part of the development of the new strategy, you, as key partners and stakeholders are invited to participate in this consultation process to inform Ireland's future international education and R&I engagement.

This section is structured thematically along the following lines:

(a) Develop talent and skills and promote research, knowledge, and innovation;

(b) Succeed on world stage;

(c) Support learning for all and Good Governance to Enhance Quality;

(d) "Fit-for-purpose" structures;

Section 1.2 details the links between the strategic goals, which frames this structure. However, it is also important to note that other inputs, notably the Indecon Report and the contributions of stakeholders during the many High Level Group meetings, are reflected in this material. Central to each theme is the determination to be ambitious in the development of a new ERI strategy.

4.2 DEVELOP TALENT AND SKILLS AND PROMOTE RESEARCH, KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION

The pandemic has accelerated and strengthened the importance of global interaction to find effective solutions to the most pressing challenges we face globally, and Ireland must play to its strengths to build relationships in terms of provision of quality education and its R&I reputation. The impact of public health restrictions on travel has been felt in the Irish ERI system, albeit unquantified. However, similar impacts have been experienced within other countries' ERI systems. Many are now reviewing their ERI offering to international students and researchers as they also look to recover and re-engage. International ERI is now a more competitive environment. The challenge for Ireland is to build and sustain its unique brand and competiveness.

Ireland already has a number of key instruments at its disposal, including:

(a) scholarship schemes in place including the Government of Ireland and George Mitchell Scholarships, which are managed by the Higher Education Authority and the US-Ireland Alliance respectively;

(b) track record of building long lasting and meaningful relationships with international partners of excellence in other countries through the EU Framework Programmes for R&I;

(c) active membership of key research organisations such as ESO, ELIXIR and LOFAR (Low Frequency Array telescope);

(d) active participation in EURAXESS (support for relocating researchers), MSCA (doctoral education and postdoctoral training) and COST (science and technology research networks), which play a central role in Ireland's ability to attract the best researchers.

While consolidating these strengths, there are key emerging national and international developments which will impact on inward mobility of students and researchers, such as:

(a) Disruption of traditional student mobility patterns in higher education, combined with a well-managed experience for international higher education students in Ireland during the pandemic provides opportunities to consolidate over the short to medium term.

(b) Horizon Europe provides new opportunities for R&I communities across Europe to collaborate with other countries. In particular, the launch of the missions and the new approach to partnerships offer significant opportunities for the Irish R&I community to engage with their counterparts in other countries to develop solutions to address the significant challenges ahead, including climate, digital and health.

The new approach to partnerships involves the streamlining and rationalisation of the European partnership landscape to improve their effectiveness and impact. As a result, there are fewer, larger, more strategic and interdisciplinary partnerships. To ensure the effective implementation of the new approach to partnerships, a new governance framework – the strategic coordinating process – is being put in place at European level. For countries like Ireland that take a bottom up approach to participation in European partnerships, a more coordinated approach to agenda-setting, monitoring and evaluation will now be required at national level.

(c) While Ireland has been an active participant in a number of European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructure (ESFRI) projects, a new roadmap was published in December 2021. Europe's research infrastructure networks play a pivotal role in supporting transnational collaboration and are also crucial to drive excellence and impact, provide top-class training for a new generation of researchers, and promote and enable data sharing and interdisciplinary collaboration. As is the case with European

partnerships, Ireland takes a bottom up approach to participation in European research infrastructure networks.

(d) Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, Ireland's primary markets for ELE outside of the EU/EEA focused on countries such as Brazil, Russia, Japan and Mexico. Covid-19 has had substantial and differing impacts on many of these markets which has created considerable and lasting uncertainty. Accordingly, it is prudent to consider how to engage with these existing markets and what new markets should be explored both for growth opportunities and to increase diversification so that providers are not dependent on a narrow select few markets.

(e) International Foundation Years and related programmes have strong growth potential. These programmes provide a distinct link between the ELE and HE sectors. This both supports the retention of International students in Ireland as they first improve their language skills and then embark on further studies in addition to attracting students who wish to improve their English ability prior to embarking on further studies in their home countries.

Question 1	Are there new marketing and promotion approaches which should be used to promote the Irish higher education, research and ELE sectors to protect and grow our market share to an appropriate level?
Question 2	Are there initiatives introduced as a result of the pandemic which should be continued in a post COVID-19 world?
Question 3	Has Ireland used its scholarship programmes to the maximum advantage? Would you recommend changes to the current schemes to support a more strategic approach? What elements should be considered as part of a review of scholarships?
Question 4	Looking specifically at inward student (ELE and higher education) and researcher mobility, what partners would stakeholders seek to work with in developing existing markets and expanding into new ones?
Question 5	What other measures and policies can be introduced or enhanced to support inward mobility and recruitment? (Alumni engagement, immigration, employment policies etc.)
Question 6	Should Ireland link the granting of visas to enable a more balanced provision on certain programmes in accordance with national policy priorities?

Outward mobility is also a key component of Ireland's internationalisation agenda. There are two main opportunities as part of undergraduate studies. In the first instance, Irish Leaving Certificate students will apply directly to higher education institutions in Europe and further afield. There are no statistics available on the numbers involved. The second option is through Erasmus mobilities, which provides for mobilities, including internships in companies, and is popular among higher education students. However, as noted in the Indecon Report, Ireland receives more students than it sends, by almost two to one. Furthermore, the destination of Irish students over the past number of years remains very much focussed on traditional destinations such as France, Germany and Spain. Ireland should aim to have more Irish registered students and researchers pursuing international mobility opportunities to give them the skills and experiences that they will require to engage and collaborate globally. Irish students studying abroad can also assist in building relationships for their institutions and indeed for Ireland.

The new Erasmus+ programme will provide for a significant increase in the funding available to Ireland for student and staff mobilities, though this will not materialise until 2023. This also aligns with the recent action by the EU Commission to promote staff and researcher mobilities on a multi-lateral basis through the European University Initiative. While a third call was recently launched, already seven of the current forty-one partnerships include Irish HEIs. This initiative will also increase mobility opportunities by offering student-centred curricula jointly delivered across partner campuses.

It is also open to Irish HEIs to become involved in international partnership agreements that allow for similar mobilities outside of the Erasmus programme, through inter-institutional Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) as well and international MoUs concluded by DFHERIS with key partner countries. But the number of students engaging in these opportunities is currently comparatively low.

Ireland's ability to develop, nurture, retain and attract talent has never been more critical than it is in today's dramatically changing world. While the student mobility has shaped the previous discussion, it is equally important to note that it is a particularly vital element of a researcher's development, in particular for early-career researchers who seek to gain experience with international research teams as an important part of their career development and progression. The experiences while abroad are critical to the strengthening of the so-called 'soft skills' which enable Irish students and researchers to engage and collaborate internationally.

Question 7	Looking at Erasmus and other mobility instruments, what measures should be looked at to increase the number of Irish students choosing to study abroad in countries beyond the traditional destinations?

4.3 SUCCEED ON THE WORLD STAGE

This mission of DFHERIS is to develop Ireland's further and higher education and research systems to support people in reaching their full potential and to create value, prosperity, resilience and a cohesive, sustainable and vibrant society. In line with this ambition, DFHERIS is determined to exploit its full mandate to ensure the delivery of a new ERI strategy. This will encompass the economic, social and individual student and researcher dimensions of internationalisation, as well as the wider benefits for Ireland in having a globally connected network of Irish-educated alumni in important partner countries.

In terms of ambition, the new ERI strategy should reflect the pre-Covid success of international engagement, as well as charting a new course in the post-Covid world of recovery. It should seek to articulate the unique strengths which Ireland has as an international partner, and destination, and what it needs to do to best leverage these strengths.

The strategy will also need to position internationalisation within the wider context of tertiary ERI policy, having regard to the diverse missions and aims of the sector at a national and regional level. This will include a focus on articulating an enhanced role for technological universities in international engagement, alongside the traditional university sector which has long-standing strength in this area. The strategy should also seek to articulate a renewed vision for high-quality English language education as it heads towards statutory regulation.

Question 8	How can Ireland's approach to International ERI contribute to achieving the mission and objectives of the DFHERIS Statement of Strategy? What should the vision for the new strategy be and what level of ambition should Ireland have, given the range of competing demands on resources, including rising demographic demands in higher education? What targets should be set for the new strategy?
Question 9	What synergies can be seized with a dual focus on international ERI engagement?
Question 10	What risks need to be managed over the course of the next strategy, including potential for over-reliance on international fee income, potential shocks to future mobility, environmental challenges etc.?

EU engagement

Under the EU Treaties, R&I is a shared competence between the Union and Member States while education is a national competence. A new framework for European R&I policy has recently been agreed by EU Ministers with responsibility for R&I, and it will cover:

(a) The Pact for R&I, which is an overarching, long term strategy and includes common values and principles, jointly agreed priority areas and the tools required to drive implementation at EU and national level;

(b) European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda, which sets out the specific actions to be progressed during the period 2022 – 2024; and

(c) New governance structures to ensure the effective implementation of the ERA priorities.

The European Commission has recently proposed the development of a European Education Area by 2025, which incorporates a number of key initiatives to enhance mutual learning, recognition of qualifications, language development and mobility in education and training. Ireland and other EU Member States have full responsibility for the organisation of their education and vocational training systems, the content of teaching and their cultural and linguistic diversity, while the EU's role is to encourage and facilitate cooperation and support and to supplement the actions of the Member States. In this context, Ireland has been a strong supporter and contributor to mutual and peer-learning processes as well as contributing to a wide variety of initiatives to facilitate mobility and recognition of qualifications for our citizens.

One of the main areas of focus at European level is how to develop concrete steps to foster better links between the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area. As previously noted, the European Universities Initiative is considered an important testbed to ensure greater coordination between the education and research dimensions across Europe.

Ireland has had a long and positive involvement in the Erasmus+ programme, which is the flagship European initiative to support mobility for students, staff, trainees, youth and sports staff. In addition to its mobility actions, Erasmus+ supports teaching, learning, research and discussion on issues including future challenges and opportunities for the EU through a number of key actions supporting engagement between organisations and institutions as well as supports for policy development at national level.

Question 11	How can Ireland best promote cooperation between its agencies and institutions with those in other European Member States, and support more opportunities for Irish students, academics and researchers to undertake studies across the EU and to strengthen Irish ERI linkages?

Global engagement

Ireland's current international education strategy concentrates engagement with core target countries such as the US, China, India, Brazil, Malaysia and the Gulf Region and high potential countries such as Canada, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana.

Resources such as pathfinders and market advisors have been allocated to these markets based on engagements and market intelligence provided in country by Irish Embassy Networks and Enterprise Ireland. While this activity may lead to new market opportunities, it is important to continue to support engagement with the current core and high potential markets, which continue to yield successful outcomes. Striking the right balance between deep engagements with existing partners and exploring new opportunities will be critical.

Question 12	Is Ireland engaging with the countries that are of most mutual benefit? Are there new or existing market opportunities that need to be targeted, having regard to the need to efficiently and effectively marshal limited resources?
Question 13	Where do you see opportunities for greater synergies between higher education and R&I cooperation with international partners? Are there international opportunities which Ireland could better capitalise on?
Question 14	How can Ireland ensure the appropriate balance between maintaining an open approach to international cooperation in education and R&I while protecting shared values and principles in global partnerships?

East-West relationships

The EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) sets the frame for relations between Ireland as a member of the EU and the UK, post-Brexit. However, recognising the deep and enduring relationship between Ireland and the UK, both Governments entered into a Memorandum of Understanding reaffirming their joint commitment to the Common Travel Area (CTA), and to maintaining the associated rights and privileges of Irish and British citizens under this longstanding reciprocal arrangement. This unique

arrangement places Ireland in an advantageous position in comparison to other EU Member States. Neither Irish citizens in the UK nor British citizens in Ireland are required to take any action to protect their residency status and rights associated with the CTA. Linked to this right are associated reciprocal rights and privileges that are enjoyed daily by British citizens in Ireland, and Irish citizens in the UK. These include access to employment, healthcare, all levels of education, and social benefits on the same basis as citizens of the other State.

In addition, the Department of Foreign Affairs concluded an Ireland-Scotland Bi-lateral Review in November 2020, and an Ireland-Wales Shared Statement in February 2021. Both documents recognise the potential of deepening relationships with the Devolved Governments across a range of policy areas including education, but equally being mindful to maintain strong relations with the Department of Education in London.

The UK has also stated that they will not participate in the Erasmus+ programme which impacts one of the key instruments to facilitate student and academic mobility. It is somewhat mitigated through the introduction of the Turing Programme by the UK Government, albeit that it only facilitates outward UK student mobility. However, the Welsh Government have confirmed that they will fund inward student mobilities into their HEIs.

Notwithstanding their decision in terms of the Erasmus+ programme, the UK Government has declared its desire to be associated to Horizon Europe by means of a protocol to the EU-UK TCA. The Commission is working with the aim of completing this process at the earliest opportunity.

Question 15	Which education and research areas show most potential to further explore joint initiatives on an East-West basis? Where do you see opportunities for greater synergies between higher education and R&I collaborations with UK partners? What barriers need to be overcome?

North-South Engagement

The North-South Ministerial Council provides a framework for collaboration on a cross-border basis, though this is limited to primary and post-primary education. Notwithstanding this, there has always been a rich history of collaboration between HEIs on a North-South basis. As part of the New Decade New Approach agreement and the Shared Island initiative, DFHERIS is engaging actively with several Departments in

Northern Ireland to ensure ongoing cooperation on a number of shared priorities, including the North-South research programme, which is being funded up to €40 million over the next 5 years.

DFHERIS is also working closely with the Department of the Economy in Northern Ireland and with stakeholders in the North-West on strengthening education and skills provision in that region. This work also includes the delivery of further and higher education programmes and meeting skills needs in addition to strengthening research collaboration.

Additional areas of collaboration are being explored as part of the draft programme for PEACE PLUS, which has been approved by the Irish Government and the North-South Ministerial Council. The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) are currently finalising the programme for submission to the Commission for final approval.

Question 16	What more can be done to strengthen education and research links, and North-South mobility in higher education? Where do you see opportunities for greater synergies between higher education and R&I cooperation with partners in Northern Ireland?
Question 17	Are levers such as Joint Programmes, Joint Awards and other programme instruments being used to full capacity to support institutional relationships between HEIs, North and South, East and West? What factors, if any, inhibit their full deployment?

4.4 Support Learning for All and Good Governance to Enhance Quality

Student Welfare

The Covid-19 pandemic has served to illustrate the challenges and difficulties that can be encountered by international students living and studying in Ireland. The student voice has been a key feature in addressing the issues that have arisen over the course of the pandemic. It is essential that we reflect on the experiences of students over this period and consider the measures that can be introduced and enhanced to safeguard student welfare and their overall experience in Ireland.

Student Experience

The Indecon Report noted that the success of any international strategy is dependent on the reputation of Ireland's education providers, and cited stakeholder concerns regarding the closure of any private sector colleges. In addition to the reputational risk, the negative impact on the student experience, and its media

coverage, influences the perception of Ireland's wider education system and its underpinning quality enhancement regulatory framework.

The International Education Mark (IEM), which will be administered by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), is a key component of the Government's policy for this ELE sector and is intended to provide a regulatory framework for the provision of education to international students. While the introduction of new regulation, via the IEM, will establish and support standards, quality must be at the heart and be the hallmark of Irish ELE provision. This will ensure that students who study here have a high-quality experience, will support our international competitiveness, and will enhance Ireland's reputation as a destination of choice for students.

Once fully implemented, the IEM will be linked to the student immigration system and therefore only providers authorised to use the IEM will be eligible to recruit international students.

Question 18	What more can be done to enhance supports for International students at an institutional, sectoral and national level both to safeguard student welfare and to improve the student experience?

4.5 "FIT FOR PURPOSE" STRUCTURES

In bringing leadership to the ERI framework, DFHERIS actions must align with wider whole of Government policy framework, including climate action and other national priorities. The goals and ambitions of DFHERIS are informed by, and contribute to those of other Government Departments, not least the Department of Education and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The development and sustaining close relationships on a cross Governmental basis is central to cross Governmental collaboration.

Delivery of policy implementation is achieved through a number of channels, including key agencies within its remit. DFHERIS' approach is to respect the expertise and competency of agency colleagues to deliver on agreed actions within the responsibilities under agreed Codes of Practice. While acknowledging different contexts, this spirit of partnership also extends to its engagement with stakeholders, where our shared interests of supporting learners and researchers direct our collective actions.

The previous international education strategy set a structure for a supportive national framework comprised of Government Departments, agencies and stakeholder representatives tasked with ensuring a coordinated approach to Ireland's international education policy and practices.

Climate and sustainability issues

Students, along with the whole of society, are quite rightly looking to see how the world can reduce its carbon footprint. International student recruitment and engagement by its nature involves a significant amount of travel. Students are looking at how countries are taking into account the green agenda when they engage internationally and it is possible that this will in the future be a factor they consider when choosing a country they wish to study abroad in. The new strategy gives Ireland an opportunity to differentiate itself from others by promoting and delivering a more environmentally sustainable internationalisation agenda.

Question 19	What measures do you think could be introduced in the new strategy to mitigate against the high carbon footprint associated with international education travel and to make international education more environmentally sustainable in Ireland? How could R&I contribute?

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and development education

Ireland's policy for international development, *A Better World*, was published in February 2019. It places a strong emphasis on partnerships with multilateral organisations and civil society, on innovation and on sharing Ireland's own experiences in international development. Through the Irish Aid programme, Ireland has a world class reputation for collaborative delivery of development education. It enables participants to analyse and challenge the root causes and consequences of global poverty and inequality and to transform the social, cultural, political and economic structures, which affect their lives and the lives of their communities.

The international development strategy also recognises the contribution that R&I can make to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It aims to develop new partnerships with Irish research institutions, including Science Foundation Ireland and the Irish Research Council and encourage a challenge-based approach to research, with a focus on outcomes for those furthest behind. For example, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Science Foundation Ireland have engaged in a joint initiative to incentivise researchers in Ireland to address global challenges. They supported a number of challenge-based funding opportunities in food, plastics, zero emissions and artificial intelligence for societal good.

The new international ERI strategy is an opportunity for Ireland to lead on changing the way people think and act; empowering them to take action and become active global citizens in the creation of a fairer, more just, more secure and more sustainable world for all. It is also an opportunity for Ireland to build on the relationships that have been nurtured through our work in development education and create new international ERI opportunities for Ireland.

Ireland has a number of formal and informal agreements in place with partner countries and Ministries that allow for regular meetings to share policy information. Ireland also assists countries with building the capacity of their education systems, through partnership, by welcoming study visits and by sending experts to these countries to assist with education policy development.

Question 20	Are there existing initiatives that can be expanded or are there new opportunities for Ireland's ERI systems to become more involved in its development education programme or contribute to resolving global challenges?

Policy Delivery Structures

This structure took the form of a sub-group of the High Level Group on International Education and the Indecon review considers that this structure was successful in implementing a number of policy changes that benefited Ireland's international education agenda. The subgroup oversaw a range of successful policy levers that were used to promote Ireland's international education offering such as the Government of Ireland international scholarship, academic mobility schemes and an enhanced third level graduate permission scheme.

Similarly, the Innovation 2020 Implementation Group, which is a cross-Government group, oversees the implementation of the national and international R&I policies. The new national R&I strategy will consider the appropriate governance structures to ensure its effective implementation.

DFHERIS is currently examining the feasibility of located dedicated staff in the key locations to assist in the development of new ERI partnerships, in addition to providing a dedicated contact point for education and research institutions. While the position profiles have yet to be finalised, it is likely that two appointments may be made as part of the finalisation of the new strategy.

Question 21	What new structures or changes to existing policy implementation structures across all sectors could be considered as part of the new strategy?
Question 22	Are there other issues that need to be considered to maximise the synergies between higher education and R&I?
Question 23	What role would you envisage for DFHERIS ERI attachés, and what do you consider to be the priority locations?

Targets and Data

International education and research is a broad and diverse sector ranging from junior to adult provision and from small, seasonal operators to larger, year-round providers. The Indecon report stated that there were issues with data to support the impact of policy interventions. A clearer, data driven picture will help to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the sector and where efforts and supports should be targeted.

Question 24	What targets should be set for the new strategy? What are the key metrics and indicators that should be used to measure activity, including successful policy interventions in international ERI?

SECTION 5 - CONCLUSION

As previously noted, the establishment of this Department presents a timely opportunity to bring closer alignment across further, higher education and R&I in Ireland. In its Statement of Strategy, the mission of the Department is to develop these systems "*to support people in reaching their full potential and to create value, prosperity, resilience and a cohesive, sustainable and vibrant society.*" The International ERI strategy is a key element in the delivery of this mission.

A detailed and inclusive consultation process will be vital to shaping the new strategy. While this has been the norm in previous iterations, it is more critical than ever. All stakeholders have been impacted by the pandemic, and most particularly international students. However, there were innovative and supportive responses from providers and Government which could prove a model for future approaches. In particular, the strong voice of students informed many of the responses, complemented by the collaborative and whole of education system response. The Department is looking to all stakeholders to harness this collective once again to co-construct the ERI strategy.

This consultation paper is a key step in that process.