
Ireland's International Education, Research and Innovation Strategy

**Response from the American Chamber of
Commerce Ireland (AmCham) to the
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science's public
consultation.**

April 2022

The American Chamber of Commerce Ireland

The Voice of US-Ireland Business

The American Chamber of Commerce Ireland (AmCham) is the collective voice of US companies in Ireland and the leading international business organisation supporting the Transatlantic business relationship. Our members are the Irish operations of all the major US companies in every sector present here, Irish companies with operations in the United States and organisations with close linkages to US-Ireland trade and Investment.

AmCham welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Department's consultation on Ireland's International Education, Research and Innovation Strategy. AmCham believes that having a strong, interconnected strategy in this area will continue to strengthen the Irish talent pool to meet the demands and needs of industry into the future and provide the structures and resources to ensure that this talent is competitive on a global stage.

Developing Talent and Skills and Promoting Research, Knowledge and Innovation

Key Recommendation: The Department must work on a cross-governmental basis to meet challenges for re-location to Ireland such as housing and immigration issues.

The positioning of Ireland as a key point at the juncture of international research, knowledge and innovation means the delivery of resources and policies that facilitate access to the RD&I environment and a quality of life while doing so. To that end, it is crucial that a cross-departmental workstream would be developed to examine some key issues that present barriers to international thought leaders when considering Ireland as a place to develop their skills:

- *Immigration:* It is key that a streamlined and timely process for immigration is developed and accessible to talent that wants to relocate to Ireland to develop our RD&I sector. As outlined in AmCham's 2022 Pre-Budget Submission 'Next Century Ireland', the speedy completion of the digitalisation of ISD and the Employment Permits Unit's service would be beneficial in this context, and given that first impressions last, it is important our visa and employment permit services create a positive first impression to talent relocating to Ireland. There is also scope in this context to examine specialised visa pathways for researchers seeking global refuge, in line with similar processes enacted in other countries.
- *Housing:* Housing remains a key issue for talent wishing to relocate to Ireland. The future of inward investment will be as much about where talent want to live as it will be about where business wishes to locate. Ensuring the delivery of quality housing will be an important enabler in ensuring Ireland's continued attractiveness as a destination of choice for talent. The delivery of affordable housing is of vital importance, particularly to talent at the early stages of their careers. This will require the continued prioritisation of capital investment and planning.
- *Cost of Living:* The cost of living in Ireland compared to many other EU countries remains very high and this can create a difficult environment for talent relocating to Ireland, particularly those supporting family units.
- *Remuneration for Professorships:* A key aspect of attracting talent to Ireland to lead on the development of research and innovation is the provision of adequate remuneration for thought leaders in the areas in which Ireland is hoping to develop expertise. This is a key aspect of Ireland's competitiveness for talent in this area on the world stage.

Key Recommendation: A global #WhyIreland campaign must emphasise the attractiveness of Ireland as a place to study, research, and meet global challenges.

Key to the reputation of Ireland as an international leading location for innovation is the inclusion of an Irish university within the Top 100 universities in the world. Although there are debates surrounding the metrics used within university rankings; they are a key statistic for corporates assessing the capacity of a country's innovation ecosystem. As such, every effort must be made to include the attractiveness of Irish universities as part of a global #WhyIreland campaign advertising Ireland's attractiveness as a location for investment. Particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the globalised and hybrid nature of studying and working has come distinctly to the fore. In light of this shift in the way we work and learn, now more than ever, Ireland Inc. must make every effort to market Ireland as an attractive place, not only to work and study, but also to live.

Succeeding on a World Stage

Key Recommendation: Ireland must continue to create a hospitable environment to support Research, Knowledge and Innovation.

The average EU spend on RD&I investment is 2.8% of GDP – Ireland's rate of investment in RD&I is 1.2%. In order to create a stronger culture of RD&I as part of the Irish education and working environments, immediate action will be required to move towards a greater rate of investment in RD&I at national level. Greater investment in RD&I, in particular for graduates and research graduates creates an educational environment that not only encourages the development of indigenous innovation, placing Ireland centre stage competitively, but also will attract researchers and innovators from across the globe to come to Ireland to contribute to this environment. If aligned with Horizon Europe strategy, RD&I policies can provide opportunities to develop solutions to global challenges while helping Irish companies develop products, services, and intellectual property that keep them competitive on a global scale.

As AmCham outlined in its 2022 Pre-Budget Submission, *'Next Century Ireland'*, to support Ireland becoming a centre of excellence for RD&I, AmCham is of the view that Ireland's R&D investment, as a percentage of GNI, should be increased to three percent by 2025. The development of an environment that supports and attracts talent from across Ireland and overseas also necessitates reform of the Irish R&D tax credit. While the tax credit is a substantial incentive for entities to pursue RD&I activities in Ireland, AmCham believes its scope could be refined and expanded to meet the demands of the modern era. Key amongst these recommendations is the expansion of the list of qualifying scientific fields to which the credit applies to include artificial intelligence, data analytics, digitalisation, and other emerging technologies from the field of Industry 4.0 and carbon neutrality.

Additionally, the establishment in the 2020 government formation process of a Department for Further and Higher Education Research, Innovation and Science was a crucial development in relation to strengthening the research, knowledge and innovation sector in Ireland. By international standards, this sends a clear message about Ireland's prioritisation of this area and a willingness to continue to develop the sector on an ongoing basis. This emphasis at

national level on the research and innovation sector displays sustainability and longevity in relation to supporting the sector in Ireland and this will increase Ireland's attractiveness and competitiveness in this area on an international scale.

Key Recommendation: The development of talent and skills must match the needs of the future of work.

Ireland's competitive edge is its people – proportionally we have the 4th most international workforce in the EU. The share of 25–34-year-olds in Ireland with a third level qualification is 53.5% compared to an EU average of 40%. With that said, a co-ordinated effort will be required for Ireland to take advantage of this high level of educated graduates by providing opportunities for Irish talent to utilise this training in Ireland. Furthermore, it is key that investment in third level education and other training opportunities reflects the future planning of the entire employment ecosystem – particularly in organisations whose Irish operations have a substantial focus on research, development and innovation (RD&I). In addition to this, it is clear that there is a role to play for industry leaders in RD&I in advising Government Departments and higher education institutions about what their future needs will be in order to grow their RD&I outputs in Ireland. Greater collaboration between academic institutions and industry—including the development of career pathways for post graduate research students and the alignment of the skills needed by industry with those developed in research institutions—could help grow a world-class ecosystem of RD&I and ensure the strong talent pipeline for Irish companies remains a key element of Ireland's attractiveness into the future.

Supporting Learning for All and Good Governance to Enhance Quality

Key Recommendation: Ireland must ensure diverse investment in academic and training pathways to maximise access to the RD&I sector.

It is key that the strategy would address the promotion of many different and diverse types of learning as part of its remit. In addition to looking at the role of higher education institutions in the RD&I space, it is important that that the strategy would also address the facilitation and funding of other learning avenues such as apprenticeships and life-long learning. The development of a strong RD&I sector involves the strengthening of every element of the supply chain relating to innovative technologies and research. This includes many roles in the supply chain whereby learning could be facilitated through apprenticeships and other forms of “on-the-job” learning to bring the necessary skillset to strengthen the respective parts of RD&I supply chains. In addition to this, many RD&I advancements have impacts of the global community that may require upskilling within the general population in order to benefit fully from the development itself. In line with this, AmCham believes that Ireland should continue its upward trend in participation in lifelong learning (12.5% - ahead of the EU average at 11.5%) and further believes that any strategy designed to facilitate research, knowledge, and innovation must also advocate for a national up-skilling/ reskilling strategy in order to facilitate greater accessibility to the products of the RD&I sector.

Key Recommendation: Ireland must ensure the accessibility and diversity of its academic institutions to deliver a workforce with modern outlooks.

Now, more than ever, diversity and accessibility are key facets of the delivery of good governance structures for academic and research institutions. In the area of RD&I, in particular, there can be no question that the greatest outputs in innovation are those innovations that are developed with the greatest number of different viewpoints and diverse backgrounds around the decision-making table as possible. Many AmCham members engage in activities to bring RD&I skillsets to groups that are traditionally socioeconomically underrepresented in this field, such as encouraging girls to develop STEM skills. The impact of this diversification is two-fold:

- An expansion of interest in RD&I fields to groups who have traditionally felt excluded from these fields will result in a greater number of potential graduates down the line that will increase the talent pool from which RD&I on a national and global scale can choose.
- The development of a more diverse and inclusive workforce has substantial impacts on improving decision-making processes within organisations as well as substantially improving the workplace culture within institutions.

As noted above, many AmCham members already engage in environmental social and governance (ESG) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities that positively impact on communities right across Ireland and this has proven to be an extremely worthwhile endeavour for those companies and the communities they work with. This clearly shows that, where industry and the will to diversify workforces and open up RD&I to new communities come together, there are benefits not only to the community but to the company also. With this in mind, AmCham would advocate for the inclusion of measures in the strategy to ensure diversity, inclusivity and accessibility in the structures surrounding the international promotion of the research, knowledge and innovation sector in Ireland.

Developing Fit-for-Purpose Structures

Key Recommendation: Adequate, long-term funding for Higher Education Institutes in Ireland must be provided to ensure sustainable futures for academic institutions.

Ireland must make smart policy choices to fund our higher education and research sector if Ireland is to continue to develop high quality research outputs and collaborations. AmCham believes this will reinforce Ireland's ability to seek funding from outside the Irish education system and to attract and retain leading educators to build a world class talent pipeline. This should also include funding for professorship programmes, and the expansion of programmes between leading global universities and Irish universities. The development of better-funding models for higher education institutes is a key investment in the future of our capacity to meet the demands of global industry but also to provide for the long-term stability of institutions that will encourage further investment into the future. Simply put, increased strategic funding to higher education institutes will provide for more sustainable and long-term security for

these institutions and will provide greater opportunities for long-term planning to meet the needs of the future of RD&I and of other sectors in the Irish economy.

Key Recommendation: Long-term planning and investment in higher education institutes must be informed by the future of work in RD&I in Ireland.

Unquestioningly, there are many companies operating in Ireland that are at the cutting edge of global RD&I developments, and this is key to Ireland's attractiveness as a location for innovators all over the globe to invest in and base their talent in Ireland. The presence of the world's leading employers in Ireland is a source of huge advantage in many areas and these organisations hold key insights into future planning in respect of the future of industry and the future asks of the talent pool, both in Ireland and globally. The integration of this knowledge base with the future planning happening with higher education institutes is key to the future success of both industry and education in Ireland. As such, AmCham believes that greater collaboration between academic institutes and companies operating in the RD&I sector holds the key to the development of a wider RD&I ecosystem in which industry provides insights into the future needs of the workforce and opportunities for students to develop those skills with them, while academic institutions, in turn, produce a higher quality of graduate with the working experience to deliver in the RD&I sector in Ireland.

Additionally, the establishment of a Future of Work Centre in Ireland would be key to bringing this shared ecosystem to fruition. Such a centre could bring together thought leaders from the education and research centres, policy making, and industry, among others to further develop a wider RD&I ecosystem that focuses on both the Irish and global outlooks in respect of the sector, and contributes to the conversation on how best to nurture and facilitate access for talent to the RD&I sector in Ireland and overseas.

Key Recommendation: Clear benchmarks and evaluation metrics must be set to measure impact of the strategy

It is key for the strategy's success that clear, measurable benchmarks are put in place, through which the strategy can be assessed. Developing a model for ongoing assessment and evaluation for the strategy will afford all stakeholders an opportunity to continue to shape and optimise its ultimate delivery. In the first instance, it would be key that stakeholders across educational institutions, and industry, along with policy-makers set out clear markers as to how the collective RD&I ecosystem defines success in the context of the strategy – some possible metrics may include quantity of investment into RD&I programmes, number of graduates produced/attracted to Ireland in the RD&I sector, number of projects undertaken in the timeframe of the strategy that have reached completion. Stakeholders for the strategy will also need to examine the metrics through which the impact of investment in the RD&I sector is assessed. It is of vital importance that the sector as a whole can assess that investments made are resulting in tangible benefits to the whole Irish ecosystem of RD&I. Many AmCham members in this sector employ industry-based assessments in this regard and are leaders in assessments of this nature.