

## **National Review of State Supports for PhD Researchers**

**Please respond to the following consultation questions**, using the six themes of the review and *Impact 2030* as an outline for your response.

**What, in your view, are the primary challenges facing PhD researchers in Ireland at present and how are these affecting their educational experience and graduate outcomes?**

Consider your organisation, do you have data or metrics to support your views?

Do you have any examples of best practice?

*Maximum word count: 300*

*The cost of living in Ireland compounded with the limited availability of housing, means that the primary challenge faced by PhD researchers is the comparatively low stipend they are provided with (€18,500). Ireland compares poorly to its European counterparts in this regard, in Germany the average stipend is €24,500, in France it is around €27,000, and in the Netherlands around €38,400. The current stipend acts as a barrier to post graduate education for those whose families cannot support them throughout their research period.*

*A second core challenge faced by PhD students in Ireland is the visa system. There is a degree of uncertainty around the visas that are granted to PhD students and their families. Of particular note is the fact that spouses of PhD students are usually given a Stamp 3 visa, meaning they are not allowed to engage in any kind of employment, self-employment, business or trade. This poses a significant barrier to researchers in planning to relocate their families to Ireland. Visas are also an issue when it comes to graduate outcomes- it is in the interest of Ireland that talented researchers who study here remain here and enter the workforce. In this regard it would be beneficial to extend the period of time after completion of PhD commences that students are allowed to remain in the country.*

*Access to well-maintained infrastructure is a pre-requisite to carrying out quality research. However, in the physical sciences it has been over a decade since the last significant investment in research infrastructure, including buildings, equipment and people. Students are therefore relying on aging and obsolete equipment which frequently breaks down to generate research output. This further means that many students graduate without the hands-on practical experience and skills relevant to industry. (291 words)*

**How can these challenges be best resolved such that educational experience and graduate outcomes are enhanced?**

Consider your organisation, what part do/should you play in the solution going forward?

Do you have any plans/actions in the next 12 months that focus on this area?

Is there a role for other stakeholders in addressing these challenges? If so, who and what are/should they be doing?

*Maximum word count: 300*

*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. AmCham therefore welcomed Government's commitment in its Enterprise White Paper to enhance R&D spending by 2.5% GNI\* by 2030. As part of this increase in expenditure, it would be beneficial to consider an enhanced stipend for PhD researchers, to at least €24,000 per annum. Crucially, however, this should not come with a decrease in overall numbers of PhD studentships. At present Ireland graduates around 550 – 600 PhD*

*students per year. This is insufficient if we are to realise our national goals for maintaining FDI investment and deepening the innovation capability across the enterprise sector.*

*In order to make living in Ireland more affordable, and to generate greater graduate outcomes, AmCham suggests that a form of PhD apprenticeship is developed. This would serve as a win-win for sectors which are citing talent shortages as a key challenge. Participants could be paid or partly paid over the course of their research through carrying out apprenticeships with extended periods in industry.*

*Clarity is needed in relation to visas for PhD researchers, and their families. The speedy completion of the digitalisation of ISD and the Employment Permits Unit's service would be beneficial in this context. The introduction of a specific visa stamp for graduate research students is something that should be further considered in order to address the family reunification issue, and to permit researchers to stay longer in Ireland after their PhD is complete.*

*There further needs to be standardised fair and equitable conditions for PhD researchers in areas such as maternity leave, sick leave, and other life events. (280 words)*

**Are there wider ramifications of your proposed solutions? If so, discuss.**

*Maximum word count: 300*

**Are there any other issues facing PhD researchers in Ireland at present that are relevant in addition to the six review elements outlined on page 2 and the over-arching *Impact 2030* strategy?**

*Maximum word count: 300*

**Is there anything else that you would like the co-chairs to consider?**

*Maximum word count: 300*

*Diversity and accessibility are key facets of the delivery of good governance structures for academic and research institutions. An expansion of interest in RD&I fields to groups who have traditionally felt excluded from these fields would result in a greater number of potential graduates down the line, and therefore increase the talent pool from which RD&I on a national and global scale can be chosen. 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. AmCham therefore advocates for the inclusion of measures to ensure diversity, inclusivity and accessibility in the structures surrounding the international promotion of the research, knowledge and innovation sector in Ireland.*

*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. (268 words)*