



Union of Students in Ireland
Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

**The Union of Students in Ireland Written
Submission to the General Scheme of the
Research and Innovation Bill 2023**

May 2023



About the Union of Students in Ireland (USI)

The Union of Students in Ireland (Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn) is the national representative body for third-level Students' Unions in Ireland. Founded in 1959, USI now represents more than 374,000 students in Further and Higher Education Colleges across the island of Ireland. The goal of USI is to work for the rights of students and a fair and equal post-secondary education system in Ireland. USI is a full member of the European Students' Union (ESU), and a member of Eurodoc, the European Council for Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers.

The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) welcomes the opportunity to be part of the Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Research and Innovation Bill 2023. We have proposed amendments in the following heads:

- Head 3–Interpretation
 - Head 8–Objects
 - Head 9–Functions
 - Head 15–Membership of Board
 - Head 28–Corporate Plan
 - Head 29–Annual Plan
 - Head 35–Arrangements with other public research funders
 - Head 45–Preservation of Contracts made by Science Foundation Ireland
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Head 3–Interpretation:

USI recommends an elaboration of the definition of research as recommended by Teachers’ Union Ireland (TUI) as follows:

“research” means creative and systematic work undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge (including knowledge of humankind, culture and society), and to devise new applications of available knowledge, across the spectrum of Arts, Engineering, Humanities, Mathematics, Sciences, Social Sciences and Technology, having regard for the terms and conditions of employment, remuneration, superannuation and career path of those so engaged on all levels.

Head 8–Objects:

The following sub-heads are suggested to be modified (underlined in green colour) to ensure promotion of research in all its forms and career stages, as well as the support for parity of esteem and research for sustainability:

- Head 8 (a): to promote and support excellence in research in all its forms and innovation, within and across all disciplines and across all career stages, spanning from ‘bottom-up’, fundamental research that includes discovery, blue skies research, and critical and theoretical scholarship, to applied research activity through competitively awarded research and innovation funding.
- Head 8 (b): to promote and support the contribution of such research and innovation to Ireland’s economic, social, cultural sustainability and environmental development
- Head 8 (e): to promote parity of esteem and to advance and facilitate equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion in research and innovation
- Head 8 (f): to promote, develop and assist the carrying out research in a range of areas, including strategic areas of endeavour that concerns the future societal development, sustainability and competitiveness of the State.

The following subheads are proposed to be added under Head 8 to promote academic freedom, open research, regional development, value of research and public funding:

- Head 8 (g): to preserve and promote the principles of academic freedom.
- Head 8 (i): To promote and support open research
- Head 8 (j): to promote and support balanced regional development of research and innovation
- Head 8 (k): to promote and support the value and necessity of research to society and the economy and the need for appropriate support and reward at all career stages of those engaged in research.
- Head 8 (l): to support increase in public funding and ring-fenced funding for all research aspects of the third-level sector.

Head 9–Functions:

The following sub-heads are suggested to be modified (underlined in green colour) to ensure researchers rights and the parity of esteem:

- Head 9 (d): through competitive funding calls, and notwithstanding the role and responsibility of higher education institutions and having regard also to the role of An tÚdarás in terms of supporting the development of research talent, Research and Innovation Ireland shall contribute to supporting the development of research talent, working conditions and employment rights of researchers such as casualized academics and PhD researchers, and appropriately facilitating the contribution of researchers to teaching and learning; having due regard to the employment rights and opportunities.
- Head 9 (k): to promote parity of esteem and support equality, diversity and inclusion in research and innovation;

The following subhead is proposed to be added under Head 9 to promote attractiveness of research:

- Head 9 (o): promote the attractiveness of research as a valued and viable career having due regard to the security and continuity of employment, the terms and conditions, remuneration and superannuation of researchers;

Head 15–Membership of Board:

We propose the three options to amend the Head 15 about the membership of the board:

Option 1:

- Head 15 (1b):11 ordinary members, a majority of whom shall be active researchers from a wide range of disciplines across all career stages, and shall include casualized researchers, PhD researchers, and trade union nominee.

Option 2:

- Head 15 (1b):11 ordinary members, a majority of whom shall be active researchers from a wide range of disciplines across all career stages.

Option 3:

- Head 15 (1b):11 ordinary members, a majority of whom shall be active researchers from a wide range of disciplines.

Head 28–Corporate Plan:

The following amendments are proposed (underlined in green colour) under Head 28 to include independent review and consultation with HEIs and researchers when preparing the corporate plan.

- Head 28 (2b): include an independent review and evaluation of the work of Research and Innovation Ireland in the performance of its statutory functions in the previous 5 years
- Head 28 (3c): shall consult with Enterprise Ireland
- Head 28 (3d): shall consult with Industrial Development Authority Ireland
- Head 28 (3e): shall consult with Higher Education Institution and their representative organizations, researchers and their representative organizations, citizens, and other bodies as it considers appropriate.

Head 29–Annual Plan:

The following subhead is proposed to be added under Head 29(3) to include consultation with HEIs and researchers when preparing the annual plan:

- Head 29 (3a): In preparing the annual plan, Research and Innovation Ireland shall consult with Higher Education Institutions and their representative organizations, researchers and their representative organizations, citizens, and other bodies as it considers appropriate.

Head 35–Arrangements with other public research funders:

The following amendment is proposed in Head 35 (underlined in green colour):

- Research and Innovation Ireland shall, in so far as it is consistent with the proper performance of its functions under Head 9, and only to the extent that these collaborations further support and fund competitive research and innovation, endeavour to secure administrative co-operation.

Head 45–Preservation of Contracts made by Science Foundation Ireland:

The following amendment is proposed under Head 45 (underlined in green colour):

- Every contract, subcontract, agreement or arrangement made between the dissolved body or any trustee or agent thereof acting on its behalf, and any other person, which is in force immediately before the date determined in Head 42, shall continue in force and shall be construed and have effect as if the name of the Research and Innovation Ireland were substituted therein for the dissolved body or, as may be appropriate, its trustee or agent, and shall be enforceable by or against Research and Innovation Ireland

Conclusion

USI welcomes a new research agency that supports all stakeholders across STEM subjects, the humanities, arts and social sciences, to drive a research ecosystem which is better, more equitable and more accountable to all stakeholders. USI welcomes competition and collaboration in the sector. However, we need a fair, open and high-quality research agency that caters for the needs of our society. The Bill should ensure the fair allocation and distribution of funding in the legislation and follow international standards of good practice that support the recruitment, training and career development of researchers.

The regulatory architecture being created by the Bill should have academic representation at the centre of the formation, management and oversight of the new agency. USI recommends stakeholder engagement through public consultation and structured consultation.

We also support and acknowledge submissions from IFUT, Irish Humanities, TUI, IRSA, ICTU, TUI, Students4Change, and open letter signed by over 1,400 researchers.

Finally, in providing this written submission to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, USI would be happy to be involved in further conversations relating to the Research and Innovation Bill 2023 and, would welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss the recommendations within this submission.

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