

Ireland needs a roadmap for Higher Education reveals Prospectus survey

Dublin, Wednesday 28th November 2007. According to the Prospectus Survey on Higher Education launched today the sector is facing significant global challenges in the absence of a clear national strategy. Having surveyed 175 key opinion leaders such as heads of universities and institutes of technologies, senior academics, research centres and Government departments, Prospectus found close to nine in ten respondents (86%) believe that the absence of a national strategy for higher education is **hindering the advancement** of the sector.

Noticeably, 84 percent of respondents feel that the sector is **underfunded** while more than eight in ten (84%) agree that **structural reform** of higher education institutions is both necessary and beneficial.

Despite the advent of free fees, two thirds of respondents feel that third level education is **not accessible to students from disadvantaged backgrounds or meeting the needs of Ireland multi-cultural population**. Six in ten (64%) feel that **international rankings** are highly relevant to the position and reputations of Irish Institutions, however, less than half (47%) felt that these rankings are a valid measure of quality. 60% felt that the research carried out in Irish institutions is **not yet of a quality** that compares well with the world's leading knowledge economies.

These are just some of the key findings in this **first ever survey** of the Irish higher education sector carried out by Prospectus, which was launched today by Michael Kelly, Chairman of the Higher Education Authority and David W Duffy, Executive Chairman, Prospectus. The Prospectus survey report captures the climate, concerns and ambitions of the Irish higher education sector and incorporates **ten key recommendations** to guide the future development of the higher education sector. The full survey is available online at www.prospectus.ie/survey.

Launching the survey, Michael Kelly, Chair of the HEA said "This survey by Prospectus, the first of its kind, bringing together the views of a wide range of higher education stakeholders, demonstrates how much has been achieved in Irish higher education and research; confirms the central role that higher education and research will have in future social and economic development, and emphasises how essential it is that we adequately resource and proactively develop the system."

Speaking at the launch David Duffy, Executive Chairman, Prospectus said: "The Prospectus Survey reveals that the higher education sector is clearly divided on many important topics and would strongly benefit from a more unified policy framework and a clear strategy.

"The research indicates that this is a sector that is fully aware of the fast-changing environment in which it operates, but which needs support and freedom to respond effectively to changing requirements. There is strong recognition amongst respondents that higher education is global in its challenges, standards, benchmarks and reach, and Irish institutions appear to recognise that they will have to respond to this."

"The future development of the sector will depend on a number of things such as: developing and empowering its leadership; providing appropriate reward and recognition for academics & researchers; investment of additional funding that could bring Ireland into line with the world's leading countries for 3rd and 4th level education."

At the launch Prospectus made a number of **key recommendations** to guide the future development of the higher education sector which include:

1. Develop a clear roadmap for Higher Education that sets Ireland apart internationally and contributes to Ireland's economic, social and cultural goals.
2. Establish a *Higher Education Leadership & Management Institute* to build the leadership and management capacities of the higher educational institutes further to enable the institutes to succeed globally.
3. Adopt a radical and innovative approach as to how third and fourth level institutions should be funded in the future.
4. Develop a more co-ordinated approach as to how the higher education institutions and enterprise (MNC / SME) can work together to develop / exploit our emerging world class research base and the role that they can play in our transition to a knowledge economy.
5. Rethink how Ireland markets, sells and supports its higher educational services to capitalise on the opportunities in the global educational services market, based on a reputation for quality teaching, leading pedagogical approaches and outstanding pastoral care.
6. Establish a working *National Think Tank* to bring all higher education stakeholders together in a real way.

The full survey is available online at www.prospectus.ie

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NOTES TO EDITOR

Key survey findings

Irish Higher Education Landscape

The survey shows that while higher education policies are well progressed, a national strategy is necessary. 86 percent of respondents feel that the absence of a national strategy for higher education is hindering the advancement of the sector with over one third strongly supporting this view. However, 57 percent agree that current higher education policies support Ireland's ambitions to achieve a knowledge economy.

84 percent of respondents believe that higher education is under-funded, but equally, 88 percent think that institutions need more diverse sources of income.

There are divided views on moving to centres of excellence with 62 percent of respondents overall stating that higher education might be better served by moving to national centres of excellence. However while government agencies are most in favour with 88 percent agreeing, researchers were least in favour with 57 percent disagreeing.

Two thirds of all respondents felt that the third level education is not accessible to students from disadvantaged backgrounds and not meeting the needs of Ireland's new multi –cultural population.

Irish Higher Education in an International Context

64 percent of respondents agree that international rankings are recognised as being relevant to the position and reputation of Irish institutions, however just 47 percent believe them to be valid measures of quality. Since this survey was carried out, the latest 2007 Times Higher Education Supplement universities ranking has been published, in which a number of Irish institutions climbed significantly in these rankings.

An overwhelming majority of respondents (87 percent) concur that government policy does not provide enough support to institutions in competing abroad for students, while 74 percent believe that Ireland does not maximise its potential in attracting income from international sources.

Governance and Management

57 percent of respondents state that governance structures present a greater challenge to the success of a university or institute of technology than their respective legislation. This reflects the challenges that institutions have had with governance, organisational and management reform. However, there is strong overall agreement (84 percent) that the structural reform of higher education institutions is both necessary and beneficial, although the difficulties of implementing change were highlighted with just 40% of respondents agreeing that staff within institutions are embracing change.

Teaching and Learning

While teaching and learning remains at the core of what higher education institutions do and is the major determinant of the annual budget of all institutions, the survey shows that there is little consensus on the role that research and industry experience should have in undergraduate study. Just 49 percent of respondents believe that undergraduate students have enough exposure to research, while just 47 percent believe that undergraduate students have enough exposure to industry. Government agencies most strongly disagree that students' exposure to research and industry experience is sufficient at 87 percent and 88 percent respectively.

62% of the all respondents (and 79 percent of researchers) feel that Irish higher education is not moving towards more modernised forms of teaching and learning.

Fourth Level Ireland

Six in ten respondents agree that research carried out in Ireland is not yet of a level equal to the leading knowledge economies, while just half of respondents consider that an adequate pipeline of researchers is being generated to support the knowledge economy. 82 percent think that the physical infrastructure needed to deliver national targets is not in place.

On the issue of collaboration in research, 60 percent of respondents agree that collaboration has helped raise the quality of research in Ireland; however 83 percent believe that the best collaboration occurs between individuals rather than institutions.

Despite record investment in research through initiatives such as the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions and funding by Science foundation Ireland, 82 percent of respondents disagree that Irish research is in receipt of sufficient levels of funding. Meanwhile just 18 percent of respondents agree that the Irish higher education system provides structured career paths for researchers with just 7 percent of researchers concurring.

Development of Human Capital and Excellence

The development of human capital and excellence is seen as integral to the future of Irish higher education. However the survey reveals that less than one in four respondents agree that performance management systems within Irish higher education institutions recognise and reward excellence. Less than one in ten researcher respondents agree, compared to 23 percent of university respondents.

Half of the respondents overall feel that the culture within Irish universities and institutes of technology is not supportive of partnership, collaboration and inter-disciplinarity. The majority of respondents (95 percent) consider that the quality of management capability within institutions is critical in guaranteeing their future position. ENDS

Research Methodology

Funded and carried out by Prospectus to support and inform the advancement of third and fourth level education in Ireland, the survey is the first of its kind to be carried out for the higher education sector. The survey was carried out by post in Spring 2007. Questionnaires were sent to key stakeholders across the higher education sector including: system and institute leaders, senior academic and administrative personnel in universities and institutes of technology, directors and principal investigators in the major research institutes; relevant government departments and state agencies; private colleges and philanthropists in Ireland. A shorter survey consisting of selected questions on the higher education landscape was circulated to members of Irish industry via an electronic survey of members of the American Chambers of Commerce. The survey was circulated to over 600 individuals, with a response rate of 29 percent or 175 respondents. **The full survey is available online: www.prospectus.ie/survey**

Prospectus

Established in 1991, Prospectus is Ireland's leading independent strategy consultancy. The firm focuses on three related sectors: Healthcare & Social Services; Higher Education & Research; Philanthropy, Not-for-Profit and Religious Congregations. Prospectus' dedicated higher education practice advises clients on a varied range of policy, strategy and operational issues, working with universities, institutes of technology, research institutes, centres for science, engineering and technology (CSETS), philanthropists and other stakeholders in addressing various strategic challenges emerging within the sector.