

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2024



Introduction

This document accompanies the Irish Research Council Strategic Plan 2020-2024, and its purpose is to set out in detail the deliverables that are necessary for implementation, and ultimately the realisation of, the strategic plan.

The deliverables as set out below will give practical effect to the strategic goals and associated actions for 2020-2024.

Periodic reporting on progress to Council, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and our parent Department (Education and Skills) will be put in place for the duration of the strategic plan. The implementation plan will also form the basis of the annual Council work programme drawn up by the executive team.

A mid-term review of progress will be carried out by mid-2022, and this will inform a refreshed, published implementation plan for the remainder of the strategy's timeframe.

The implementation plan below sets out key deliverables under each strategic action and the timeframe for delivery.

The five strategic goals for 2020-2024 are:

1.

Enable excellence in people, skills and ideas across all disciplines for discovery and enterprise research.

2.

Be a partner of choice nationally and internationally to support excellent research that addresses the challenges of our time.

3.

Demonstrate the value of the research we support, ensuring that the knowledge and innovations generated are shared and exchanged to the maximum extent.

4.

Make a tangible contribution to innovation, evaluation and reform in the higher education and research ecosystem.

5.

Achieve and maintain excellence and optimise the IRC's capacity as an organisation.

Strategic goal 1

Enable excellence in people, skills and ideas across all disciplines for discovery and enterprise research.

The IRC will continue to make a significant contribution to meeting Ireland's education, research and skills needs. We will do so by growing the pipeline of exceptional researchers across all disciplines and career stages.

	Key Strategic Actions	Key Performance Deliverables	Timeframe
1.1	Consolidate the IRC's role in enabling excellent discovery research across all career stages and disciplines.	Suite of IRC funding programmes launched and successfully delivered	2020-2024
		Framework of programmes published, along with annual publication of call schedule	2020-2024
		Website and other information on programmes reviewed and updated	2020-2024
1.2	Enhance Ireland's track record in world-class research by embedding the Laureate awards within the annual funding cycle of the IRC.	Completion of review of first cycle of Laureate awards, with external assistance as appropriate	2020
		Programme of Starting, Consolidator, and Advanced calls launched (subject to budget)	2020-2021
1.3	Undertake a comprehensive review of the management of our programmes with the objective of enhancing synergies and opportunities for streamlining.	Single Terms and Conditions document for all core Council awards introduced	2020
		User/stakeholder feedback reviewed annually and integrated into programme development and implementation	2020-2024
		New opportunities for programmatic synergies/efficiencies implemented	2020-2024
		Application forms and templates for core programmes reviewed and updated as appropriate	2021
1.4	Embed evolving independent peer review best practices in the assessment of all funding applications and across all disciplines.	Benchmarking of Council assessment processes to national and international practice completed	2022
		Assessment criteria updated to reflect the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment	2020
		Feasibility study commissioned for the establishment of an IRC College of Peer Reviewers	2021

	Key Strategic Actions	Key Performance Deliverables	Timeframe
1.5	Continue to develop researchers with the skills and talent that enterprise and employers need, and further develop enterprise programmes in line with demand.	Enterprise Advisory Group established	2020
		Resources for enterprise liaison and support enhanced	2020-2024
		Enterprise programme reviewed and policy-proofed with national strategies for enterprise support	2022
1.6	Promote the highest ethical and governance standards for the investments we make, reflecting international best practice across key areas including responsible research and innovation, the remuneration of early-career researchers and open research.	Maximum take-up of online Research Integrity training by Council awardees promoted	2020-2021
		Alignment of early-career awards with national researcher career framework implemented (<i>subject to budget</i>)	2021
		Active engagement with the development and roll-out of the National Open Research Statement implementation plan	2020
1.7	Build on the IRC's leading track record in promoting gender equality and the integration of the gender dimension in research, in step with evolving international best practice.	Review of the Council's gender strategy & action plan completed	2020
		New gender strategy and action plan published	2021
		Council policies on gender reviewed and updated	Annually from 2020
		Monitoring of gender data and outcomes implemented	Annually from 2020
		Participation in Gender-Net Plus ERA-NET project completed	2020-2022
1.8	Work with other research funders and key stakeholders to develop and implement policies that promote diversity and inclusion in the research community.	Actions arising from the HEA-Research funders gender working group jointly implemented, including in relation to Athena Swan accreditation	Ongoing
		Engagement with and implementation of learnings from international best practice	Annually from 2020
1.9	Drive the internationalisation of early-career researchers across all disciplines via European and international mobility programmes and opportunities.	CAROLINE MSCA CO-FUND programme successfully completed	2021
		Outcomes of current partnership for the operation of the Irish MSCA Office assessed (to include stakeholder consultation)	2020
		Proposal(s) for national MSCA support service under Horizon Europe jointly developed	2021
		Monitoring of international engagement opportunities by early-career awardees implemented	Annually from 2021
		Opportunities identified for IRC-led initiatives in Horizon Europe (MSCA strand)	Ongoing

Strategic goal 2

Be a partner of choice nationally and internationally to support excellent research that addresses the challenges of our time.

The IRC will be at the centre of a vibrant interdisciplinary ecosystem that engages national as well as international partners, and that enables research-informed policy development, practice and decision-making. In doing so, we will further develop partnerships with European and international stakeholders to promote the international engagement of Ireland's researchers.

	Key Strategic Actions	Key Performance Deliverables	Timeframe
2.1	Extend partnerships with Government departments and agencies who wish to foster research for policy-making, and enhance the research talent pipeline in key areas of policy need.	Strategic funding partnerships for COALESCE and other programmes developed	2020-2024
		Enhanced guidance for departments and agencies in developing research topics and questions	2020
		Successful implementation of strategic funding partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	2024
2.2	Develop the IRC as national research champion for the UN's Sustainable Development Agenda.	SDG impact of CAROLINE MSCA CO-FUND programme evaluated	2021
		Integration of SDG classification and monitoring for all Council awards	2020-2021
		SDGs championed through IRC activities (Researcher of the Year awards, annual report)	2020
2.3	Lead in the development of the Irish research system as an international exemplar for interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration.	Dedicated interdisciplinary programme strand delivered via COALESCE	2020-2024
		Increased number of intersectoral partners in Council programmes achieved	2020-2024
		Civic society engagement programme strands reviewed and further developed	2020
		New partnership with cultural institutions on promoting cultural research impact	2020

	Key Strategic Actions	Key Performance Deliverables	Timeframe
2.4	Create new pathways for interdisciplinary research engagement with enterprise and employers to enhance their capacity to meet complex challenges and new opportunities.	Assessment of interdisciplinary research engagements (nationally, internationally) with enterprise completed	2020
		Consultation with research and enterprise stakeholders on new approaches	2020
		Additional strand of enterprise programmes piloted (<i>subject to budget</i>)	2021
		Innovative case studies developed and disseminated	2021-2024
2.5	Open up new opportunities for international research collaboration across all disciplines.	IRC International Engagement Strategy 2018-2021 fully implemented	2021
		New strategy for international engagement scoped and published	2022-2024
		Annual meeting of UK-Ireland research funders forum convened	2020-2024
2.6	Provide targeted support for Irish membership of research and infrastructure networks supported by the European Union and maximise the benefits for researchers in Ireland.	Successful completion of funding rounds under currently supported ERA-Nets	2020-2023
		Sponsorship of national membership of ESS and DARIAH research infrastructures implemented	2020-2024
		Targeted participation in new Horizon Europe joint research programme mechanisms	2021-2024
		Support for Ireland's membership of CESSDA* in place (<i>national membership subject to Cabinet approval</i>)	2020
		*Consortium of European Social Science Data Archives (European Research Infrastructure Consortium)	
2.7	Continue to engage with and influence the European research and innovation landscape through membership of programme committees and via collaboration with national and international stakeholders.	Active participation in Science Europe and other leading networks	2020-2024
		Active membership of High-Level group of Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe and other national steering and network groups	2020-2024
		Successful engagement with MEPs, Irish offices in Brussels and in other key locations	2020-2024

Strategic goal 3

Demonstrate the value of the research we support, ensuring that the knowledge and innovations generated are shared and exchanged to the maximum extent.

The IRC will continue to fund research that has impact and that is ambitious in its goals for scientific discovery, knowledge creation and enterprise development. We will make the value of this work known to the wider audience it deserves, and we will seek to ensure that the knowledge that is created can be used for economic, social and cultural benefit.

	Key Strategic Actions	Key Performance Deliverables	Timeframe
3.1	Establish and implement a new broad-based, comprehensive impact framework for IRC-funded researchers.	Impact framework developed, drawing on national and international best practice	2021
		Resources/tools developed to assist awardees in capturing and maximising impact	2021
		Impact framework fully integrated at system level	2021
3.2	Regularly publish and disseminate quantitative and qualitative information on the impact of the awards we fund across all disciplines.	Bi-annual impact reports published	2023
		Platform for systematic dissemination of research impacts developed	2021
		Case studies across all key career stages and for varied disciplines regularly disseminated	2020-2024
3.3	Actively follow the careers of researchers we have funded at an early-career stage, and so get a better understanding of the long-term benefits of such funding in helping career development.	Tracking exercise completed on all early-career IRC awardees funded to date	2021
		Early-career development metrics and indicators integrated into impact framework	2021
		Consultation measures with early-career researchers across all disciplines in place	2020

	Key Strategic Actions	Key Performance Deliverables	Timeframe
3.4	Launch an IRC alumni network to strengthen and cultivate long-term relationships with researchers we have funded.	Alumni database integrated into CRM system	2021
		New channels developed to highlight alumni research achievements and career development	2021
		Enhanced engagement with alumni offices in respect of Researcher of the Year awards and other opportunities	2021
		Alumni gathering and networking event successfully piloted	2020-2024
3.5	Promote open access of IRC-funded outputs and data sets across all disciplines.	IRC policy on open access and programme terms and conditions reviewed in context of NORF Statement and Implementation Plan	2021
		Guidance on open research for applicants and awardees enhanced	2021
		Monitoring of open research outcomes and impact for awardees implemented	Annually from 2021
		Funding support for the Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI) implemented	2020-2024
3.6	Increase understanding among stakeholders and the wider public of the role and contribution to Ireland of discovery and enterprise research. We will do this through the #LoveIrishResearch campaign and also by developing new outreach activities.	Review of Council communications strategy	Annually from 2020
		Enhanced engagement by researchers with #LoveIrishResearch campaign	2020-2024
		Selected strategic support for media initiatives implemented	2020-2024
		Targeted, strategic sponsorship of research-related events implemented	2020-2024

Strategic goal 4

Make a tangible contribution to innovation, evaluation and reform in the higher education and research ecosystem.

The IRC will support appraisal, innovation, reform and policy development in higher education and research. In doing so, we will work together with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Higher Education Authority, and with higher education institutions and other stakeholders in the research ecosystem.

	Key Strategic Actions	Key Performance Deliverables	Timeframe
4.1	Facilitate the development of the evidence base for higher education and research policy through the IRC's policy-oriented funding programmes.	Engagement with DES, HEA and other stakeholders to identify gaps in the higher education and research policy evidence base	2020-2021
		New opportunities provided for research in higher education policy and practice through COALESCE and other programmes	2021-2024
		Evidence for higher education and research policy integrated into the Council's impact framework	2021-2024
4.2	Support the development of policy and practice on 'engaged research' in Ireland.	Current phase of funded partnership with Campus Engage completed	2020
		Outcomes of Campus Engage partnership reviewed and opportunities identified for future action	2021
		Engaged research themes integrated into Council communications and #LoveIrishResearch campaign	2020
4.3	Critically appraise the health of the research and innovation ecosystem, with particular attention to identifying gaps in support and emerging risks.	Framework for statistical and data analysis agreed and implemented	2020-2024
		Annual stakeholder survey implemented	Annually from 2020
		Web-based, publicly accessible statistical analysis dashboard developed and implemented	2021-2022

	Key Strategic Actions	Key Performance Deliverables	Timeframe
4.4	Collaborate with other national funders to identify potential for coordination on funding processes and procedures with the aim of enhancing the Irish research funding system.	Priority areas for coordination/synergy identified	2020-2021
		Engagement with other national research funders on international best practice	2020-2023
		Engagement with the SmartSimple community to identify joint system enhancements for the benefit of researchers	2020-2024
4.5	Positively influence the national strategic and policy framework for research through collaboration and engagement with relevant Government departments, agencies, and committees.	Final progress reports on <i>Innovation 2020</i> completed and submitted	2020
		Engagement with stakeholders on outcomes of HERG HE Review and Action Plan for Education	2020-2021
		Participation in departmental and interdepartmental action plans and standing committees maximised	2020-2024

Strategic goal 5

Achieve and maintain excellence and optimise the IRC's capacity as an organisation.

The IRC will foster organisational excellence as a strategic objective. We will optimise our capacity and systems in order to deliver the best possible service to researchers and other stakeholders and to ensure successful achievement of each of the goals set out in this strategic plan.

	Key Strategic Actions	Key Performance Deliverables	Timeframe
5.1	Optimise the IRC's staffing resources and associated structures to enable successful implementation of this strategic plan.	Development and implementation of the HEA Workforce Development Plan supported	2020-2021
		Executive organisational structure and role profiles reviewed to ensure it is best placed to deliver the Strategic Plan 2020-2024	2020
5.2	Equip staff with new knowledge and skills to respond to evolving requirements and opportunities.	Postdoctoral in-Council internship opportunities extended to optimise capacity to deliver on key projects	2020
		PMDS sessions undertaken annually with training and development plans implemented	2020-2024
		Engagement programme with external agencies and organisations embedded to broaden the knowledge base of staff on emerging trends and agendas	2021
5.3	Strengthen mechanisms for regular engagement with research performing organisations (RPOs), to deliver best practice in research management and administration and to maximise opportunities for programme development.	Service agreements established with research performing organisations to enhance transparency and clarity.	2020
		Formal framework of engagement with research offices established	2020
		Programme of Council 'roadshow' visits to research offices introduced	2020

	Key Strategic Actions	Key Performance Deliverables	Timeframe
5.4	Drive the transformation of IRC business processes and systems.	Recommendations of independent review of the Council's grant management system (GMS) implemented	2021
		Full suite of Council programme online templates/forms reviewed and updated as appropriate	2020-2024
		HEA's business transformation initiative leveraged	2020-2024
5.5	Continue to assure the highest standards of governance in the work of the IRC executive and board.	IRC code of conduct for Council members reviewed and updated as appropriate	2020-2024
		Register of interests for Council members reviewed and updated annually	2020-2024
		Governance training implemented for new Council members and staff implemented	2020-2024
5.6	Leverage international best practice for research funders by actively engaging with Science Europe and other funder networks.	Engage as a member of Science Europe (SE) with SE-European University Association (EUA) joint initiative on research assessment	2020-2024
		Engagement with Global Research Council (GRC)	2020-2024
		Active membership of national steering and network groups	2020-2024
5.7	Ensure that the IRC meets the highest standards of compliance with national and European data protection legislation.	Recommendations of the HEA/IRC independent GDPR review implemented	2024
		GDPR and data protection requirements compliance within grant management system monitored	2020-2024
		GDPR training implemented for new executive staff and refresher training offered for existing staff	2020-2024

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