

Overview of the Irish HE and Research Landscape

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Brief history of Ireland

Established as independent state in 1922, following War of Independence or Anglo-Irish War (1919 to 1921). British rule in Ireland began with Anglo-Norman invasion in 1169;

Officially declared a republic in 1949, following the Republic of Ireland Act 1948

Geographical island of Ireland consists of the sovereign independent state of Ireland comprising 26 counties, and the six counties of Northern Ireland (under jurisdiction of the UK);

Parliament/Houses of the Oireachtas: Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann

Member of the UN, 1955; member of Security Council 2021-2022, and President in September 2021 (also 1962, 1981-82, 2001-2002)

Member European Economic Community 1973; signed Lisbon Treat 2007

Founding member OECD, 1961



Policy shifts from protectionism to globalism

Beginning 1930s, public policy promoted a protectionism in economic dealings.

- The idea was based on the need to develop native industry, and move away from over-dependence on Britain, as well as its failure to develop industrially under free market conditions.

Beginning 1959, principle of protectionism abandoned and replaced by economic expansion based on foreign investment and transformation of Irish society and the economy:

- Emigration substantially declined; access to education broadened; consumer spending increased, and holidaying abroad commonplace; Catholic social teaching challenged; etc.

Today, most open economy in the EU. Knowledge-intensive services and high-tech manufacturing are key drivers of the economy.



Growth/expansion of higher education

At beginning of 20th century, 3,200 students enrolled in 6 universities on island of Ireland; Expansion underpinned by societal appreciation of benefits of educational attainment for personal and societal advantage, and demographics.

Free secondary education in mid-1960s, labour shortages due to rapid economic growth and international competitiveness in subsequent decades drove demand for higher education.

Today, almost 230,000 full and part-time students in 23 public-funded institutions in the Republic.

- More than half (~57%) enrolled in universities compared with 43% in the institute sector

Ireland has one of the highest levels of tertiary education attainment and completion rates in the OECD with 47% of 25-64 year-olds surpassing the EU2020 target of 40%.

- Economic returns for individuals are significant.



System re-shaping

Historic binary system has been undergoing significant changes:

Regional Technical Institutes (1970s-1990s) → Institutes of Technology (1990s) →
pathway to designation as Technological Universities

- Levels 6-8 on NMQ; professional/VET education; application focused research;
strong regional commitment;

Colleges of Education – merged with universities

Increased emphasis on Further Education (TVET/VET) as entry to
employment/educational ladder for all learners



Main agencies

Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Higher Education Authority

SOLAS

Science Foundation Ireland

Irish Research Council

Knowledge Technology Ireland

Enterprise Ireland

Industrial Development Agency



Overview of Irish Higher Education System

System has diversified/differentiated from a simple binary to now comprise 23 publicly funded HEIs and 13 private colleges (registered with HECA)

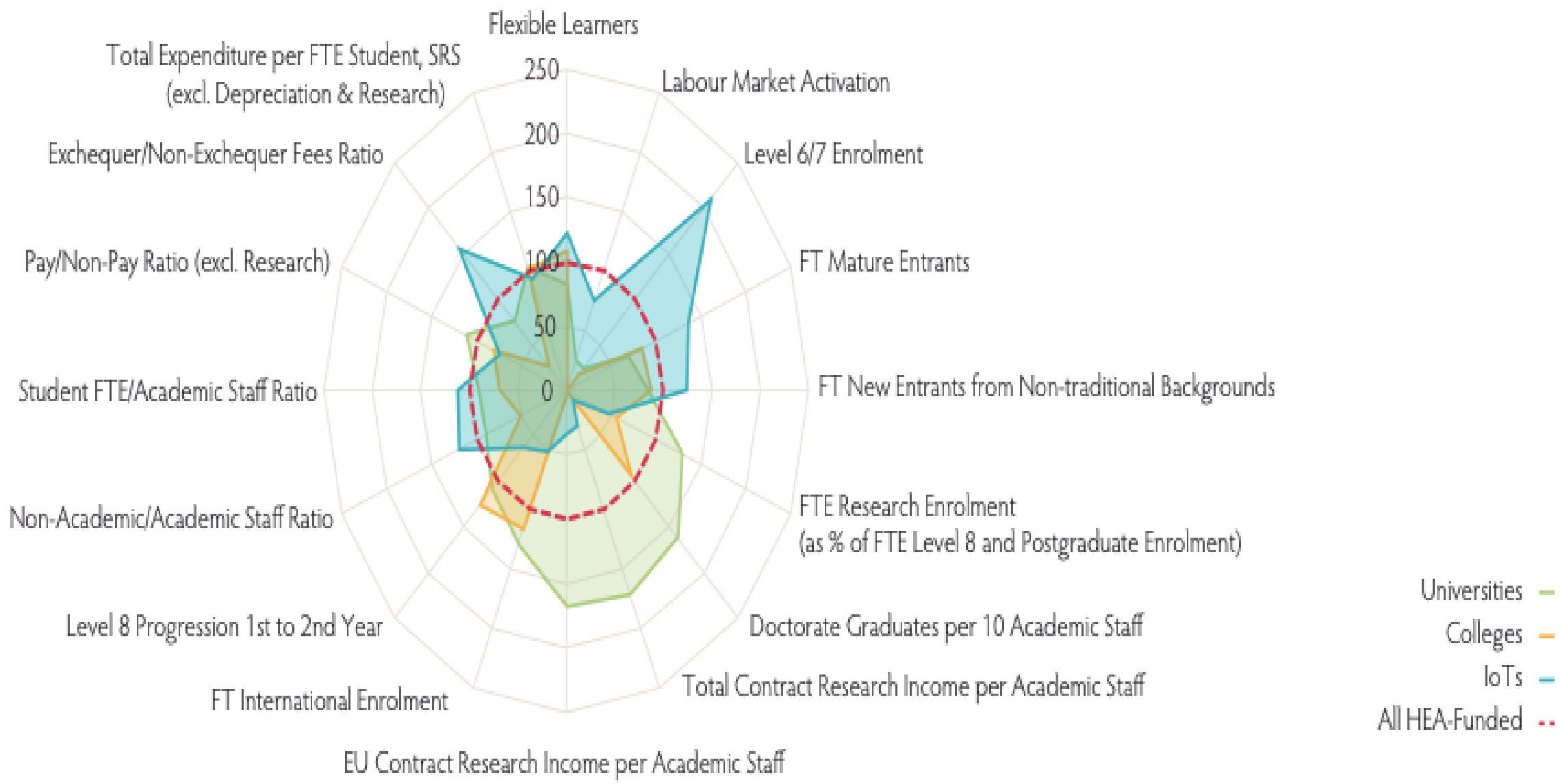
- Universities/Technological Universities (10),
- Institutes of technology (9)
- 3 other colleges: Mary Immaculate College, St Angela's College, National College of Art & Design

+ 5 other HEIs in receipt of public funding



Geographic distribution of universities (7), technological universities (2), institutes of technology, colleges





RDI

Prior to 2000, Ireland had no national research policy, investment strategy or noteworthy international reputation in scientific research

Between 1997 and 2007, ~€3bn invested, dramatically changing Ireland's international profile

- PRTLII provided integrated support for institutional strategies, programmes and infrastructure to ensure HEIs had capacity and necessary incentives

Research system came under heavy pressure during GFC; Ireland placed in an Economic Adjustment Programme, usually referred to Bailout programme.

Stronger research planning and investment framework now in place, and updated since, 2014. R&I funds heavily tipped towards research/technology push.

Key fields: Pharmaceuticals, Bio Technology, Medical Devices, ICT and Financial Services.



Challenges and issues ahead

Challenges of the future arise arising from international and national trends:

Being part of the EU is vital but it is no longer sufficient for success; international landscape is much more competitive and multipolar; Quality will be an even sharper driver and differentiator in the future;

Ireland is privileged by student demand but this has forestalled scrutiny of demographic and learner trends;

Model of education provision is very traditional; few mature students/LLL limited;

Pandemic has exposed weakness of digitalisation – infrastructure, pedagogically, training

Research policy has remained largely outside the purview of both researchers and the policymaking community;

Regional divisions and inequality – role of HEIs;

Strengthening the academic heartland and steering core;

More co-ordinated tertiary system.

