

07-Sept-2000

## Survey of Research in the Higher Education Sector

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### Over £160m (€203m) Spent on Research in the Higher Education Sector in 1998 – Forfás Survey

A survey published by Forfás today (Thursday, 7 September 2000) shows that over £160m (€203m) was spent on research in the higher education sector (HERD) in 1998. This represents a real annual growth rate of 12 per cent since 1992.

The following are the major findings of the survey:

- The expenditure of £160m (€203m) in 1998 compares with £121m (€154m) in 1996 and £73m (€93m) in 1992. This represents a real annual growth rate of 12 per cent between 1992 and 1998.
- Despite this growth rate, from a relatively low base, HERD in Ireland in 1998 amounted to 0.27 per cent of GDP, compared to the EU average of 0.37 per cent of GDP.
- The total number of researchers in the third level system was 2,425 (full-time equivalent) in 1998, or 1.5 per thousand of the labour force. This compares with an EU average figure of 1.8.
- The universities account for the major share of HERD (over 90 per cent). Research in the Institutes of Technology doubled in value between 1996 and 1998 to £10.6m but still accounts for only 7 per cent of HERD.
- The share of social sciences research increased significantly from 12 per cent of HERD in 1992 to 19 per cent in 1998. There was a corresponding fall in the share of the natural sciences from 42 per cent to 36 per cent in the same period.
- Third level research is funded from a variety of sources. The major source (42 per cent) is via the Department of Education and Science/HEA block grant to colleges, which funds salaries of academic staff; a proportion of this (a quarter on average) is assumed to be spent on research activities, which proportion is based on a survey of academic staff carried out in 1997. The second largest source of funding is from direct public funds for research activities (24 per cent). European Union research programmes account for another 16 per cent of funding. Industry (7 per cent) and own funds (8 per cent) are other sources of support for third level research.

All third level colleges, including the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland, were surveyed in this study. The scope of the survey extends to research across all academic disciplines, i.e. it includes arts, humanities and the social sciences, as well as the natural sciences, engineering, medicine and veterinary sciences and agriculture science.

Commenting on the findings of the survey, Mr Colm Regan, Executive Director, Forfás, said that while the growth was encouraging, the level of HERD in 1998 was still below EU levels.

Mr Regan said: "The research capabilities of the third level sector have assumed a higher national profile because of new initiatives by the Government to strengthen research performance, particularly in

strategically important areas such as biotechnology and information and communications technologies”.

In particular the Government’s initiative to make over £500m (€634m) available for research over the next five years, to be administered by Science Foundation Ireland, is indicative of the importance being accorded research and innovation and their relevance to maintaining and strengthening Ireland’s competitiveness in international markets.

The survey predates this initiative and other investments in HERD undertaken by the Higher Education Authority. It shows colleges were using all existing sources of funding at the time to maximise the level of research they performed. Under the circumstances, their performance has been very creditable. Third level research in Ireland is operating below the EU average level in terms of input funding and staffing but has still achieved significant levels of growth in real terms.

(ENDS).

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