



# Delivering for Technological Universities

## Budget 2022 submission from the Technological Higher education Association (THEA)

August 2021

### Introduction

Ireland stands on the cusp of a new era in higher education. Two technological universities – TU Dublin and MTU – are fully operational, a third – TÚS:MM – will commence later this year and a final two – TUSEI and CUA – are expected to be in place by the start of 2022. The 2011 National Strategy for Higher Education challenged the institutes of technology to come together and merge to create new technological universities. Subsequently, the Technological Universities Act 2018 set out the pathway, and the challenging criteria that had to be satisfied in order for institutes of technology to become technological universities. Those challenges have been met by the institutes and as a result Ireland will, by the start of 2022, have five technological universities. It is time now for the government to step up their efforts to address the complex funding needs of these new technological universities.

The requirement for funding fully to establish and embed technological universities in the higher education landscape is not unexpected. The 2011 Strategy, now ten years old, set out the challenge starkly.

*“To match our national ambitions, there will need to be greater investment in higher education into the future as well as greater effectiveness in the manner in which resources are deployed.”<sup>1</sup>*

By merging and consolidating, by expanding their role and remit in the legislative context, the technological universities increased the effectiveness of how resources are deployed. The other side of the equation – greater investment – is the one that now requires action. One particular area that remains outstanding is the development of a borrowing framework for the sector. This was provided for in the legislation for both technological universities and institutes of technology but has been delayed as the government awaits clarification from Eurostat of what can be included under this heading. But there is a fundamental question of equity here; the sector must be put on the same

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<sup>1</sup> National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, p.111 <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/National-Strategy-for-Higher-Education-2030.pdf>

footing as the traditional universities without any further delay. We urge government to enable the borrowing framework as provided for in the legislation as a matter of urgency.

Naturally, before examining the specific longer-term strategic needs of higher education, we must also acknowledge that we are still living in an era defined by the COVID-19 pandemic. Significant funding has already been provided to support our new and aspirant technological universities in meeting the challenge of COVID-19, but the challenge has not gone away. Whether it is in terms of mitigating measures, COVID-19 testing, cleaning, sanitation etc., those measures can be expected to be required for many months to come and the requisite funding to implement those measures should be continued until such time as they - hopefully - are no longer required.

It is true that substantial investment in the creation of technological universities has taken place. However, this has mostly taken the form of one-off investment, designed to assist the development process, or competitive-based funding which is not guaranteed on a multi-annual basis and does not allow the institutions to “plan forward” in terms of spending. Consequently, not only is there a need for significant multi-annual, long-term investment in higher education generally, there is also a further specific need for same in technological universities.

Over the last few years, the THEA Budget submissions have eloquently made the case for further funding for the sector. We have also made numerous submissions to Government at other times, in response to public consultations or directly where appropriate or requested. These submissions from the sector have been reinforced by other Reports such as the HEA review of the finances of the sector,<sup>2</sup> as well as the case robustly made in the TURN Report.<sup>3</sup> Rather than repeat the detailed cases put forward in those submissions, this Budget submission will build on the previous submissions and add in several additional requirements that have come to light in the past year. Our September 2020 submission in advance of Budget 2021 identified four key pillars with attendant funding requirements:

- Digitalisation and Infrastructure
- Human Capital
- Research and Innovation
- Climate

The full background case for this funding can be found at [http://www.thea.ie/contentFiles/THEA\\_pre-budget\\_submission.pdf](http://www.thea.ie/contentFiles/THEA_pre-budget_submission.pdf)

The case made in last year’s submission is strong and the arguments remain valid today. Rather than repeat those arguments here, in this submission we will summarise the issues that have come to the fore in the intervening period and that require further or adjusted funding including:

- the European Universities Initiative;
- multi-annual investment to build research and innovation capacity; and
- the implementation of the National Framework on Consent.

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<sup>2</sup> Financial Review of the Institutes of Technology (2016) <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/IOT-Financial-Review.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Connectedness & Collaboration through Connectivity: Report of the Technological Universities Research Network to the Department of Education and Skills (2019) <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2019/12/Report-of-the-TU-Research-Network-2019.pdf>

## Pillar 1 Digitalisation and Infrastructure

As we move into a post-pandemic context, we can expect that the radical changes that have been seen in higher education teaching and learning will be consolidated into an improved blended learning approach. The investment required in digitalization remains vital to enabling the bedding-down of the remote delivery aspect of blended learning. Our 2021 Budget submission identified a rising need for investment in 2022 – in the order of a further €34.5m – including €18m for systems upgrade and future proofing (including cybersecurity) and €16.5m for educational delivery platform upgrade and expansion. This investment will be essential to supporting educational provision in multi-campus technological universities, supporting students in the new TUs to benefit from the range of education offerings across the campuses of the predecessor institutes of technology.

**We call for a Digitalisation and Infrastructure investment of €34.5m in 2022, rising to €44.5m in 2023 and €54.5m in 2024.**

Specific Measures		2022	2023	2024	Total
Pillar 1		€m	€m	€m	€m
Digitalisation and Infrastructure	Systems upgrade and future proofing including security	18	23	28	69
	Educational delivery platform upgrade and expansion	16.5	21.5	26.5	64.5
	<b>Sub Total 1</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>44.5</b>	<b>54.5</b>	<b>133.5</b>

## Pillar 2 Human Capital

The previous budget submission requested €18m of funding in 2022 to support staffing and staff professional development. This includes actions to enhance the capacity of professional and support services in the institutions, to embed new and flexible working models to support the professional resilience of staff, and to enable staff to embrace the advent of increased digitalisation in the delivery of higher education. These needs remain a priority for the sector and are deserving of increased investment. It can be anticipated that such investment will be required as a consequence of the current OECD review on the lecturing contract commissioned by the HEA.

In addition, the mental health challenge of recovering from COVID-19 should not be underestimated. Our young people have taken the brunt of that effect, losing out on their most important formative years with many rites of passage either delayed, postponed or passed by. No doubt, this will have an impact in our institutions. Mental health issues are one of the biggest challenges of the next half-decade. While much support has been provided to date, our sector still lags behind the traditional university sector in the extent, quality and quantity of mental health supports available to students. Further concerted, directed investment in mental health supports in the order of **€12 million in 2022** within our institutions is an absolute must. This investment would build on the very valuable tranche

of additional funding for mental health supports allocated to higher education in 2021 after collective lobbying by THEA and IUA.

One major development this year has been the implementation of the Framework for Consent in Higher Education Institutions.<sup>4</sup> Early this year, THEA published the report of the THEA PROPEL (Promoting Consent and Preventing Sexual Violence) project.<sup>5</sup> The report recommended a number of resources which should be established within higher education institutions to support the implementation of the Framework. These include:

- A Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Support Manager (SMPSM) who will play a central and proactive role in fostering a safe, respectful, and supportive culture in the institution;
- Appropriate staff to support the work of the SMPSM, including additional Counselling Staff to provide support to affected staff and students;
- Bespoke Consent training for students and staff, including enhanced training for staff/students most likely to receive disclosures;
- Funding to deliver special communications and awareness-raising campaigns;
- A budget to pay for independent external investigators to manage these sensitive investigations for the institution;
- A national or sectoral coordinator to be hosted by THEA, who will provide expert support to institutions and act as a sectoral liaison with relevant national and international bodies.

More information on these resources can be found in the project report. THEA estimates that the total cost of these resources to enhance the implementation of the Framework in the sector is approximately **€2.6 million per annum**,<sup>6</sup> a relatively small sum of money particularly considering the relevance of this work to wider society, with higher education having the potential to be an exemplar.

**We call for a Human Capital investment of €44.6m in 2022, rising to €58.6m in 2023 and €72.6m in 2024.**

	Specific Measures	2022	2023	2024	Total
<b>Pillar 2</b>					
<b>Human Capital</b>	Student mental health	12	18	24	54
	Support staffing and staff professional development	18	22	26	66
	Embedding equality diversity and inclusion	12	16	20	48
	Implementation of the consent framework	2.6	2.6	2.6	7.8
	<b>Sub Total 2</b>	<b>44.6</b>	<b>58.6</b>	<b>72.6</b>	<b>175.8</b>

<sup>4</sup> Framework for Consent in Higher Education Institutions: “Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive – Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions” (2019)  
<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/framework-for-consent-in-higher-education-institutions.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.thea.ie/contentFiles/PROPEL.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> For a full breakdown of this cost, please see  
[http://www.thea.ie/contentFiles/THEA\\_Consent\\_Implementation\\_Costs\\_Final.pdf](http://www.thea.ie/contentFiles/THEA_Consent_Implementation_Costs_Final.pdf)

## Pillar 3 Research and Innovation

There are two key points which need addressing as part of the 2022 Budget Process in relation to Research and Innovation. As foreseen by the Technological Universities Act, building the research capacity of the technological universities will be key to their success and these two measures are absolutely key in that regard.

### 1) Increasing Recurrent Grant Funding to the Sector

In providing the financial support to build research & innovation capacity in TUs and IOTs in line with the recommendations within the aforementioned TURN report, it is essential to provide an appropriate balance between the following three elements:

- 1) Core funding for R&I through the Recurrent Grant provides a bedrock of financial support which allows the institutions to forward-plan, making multi-annual financial commitments in supports and enablers for R&I, including personnel;
- 2) Capacity-building funding, such as the TU Transformation Fund, which facilitates time-limited investment in R&I capacity-building initiatives;
- 3) Competitively-won funding, from a range of sources including national public, private sector, philanthropic and international / European funds, is supported by investment in 1) and 2). The recent TU / IOT-specific funding allocated to IRC and SFI allows researchers to build a track record in securing funding from these two agencies, with a view to future success in the medium-to-long term without the need for TU/IOT-specific funds.

In the 2021 THEA pre-budget submission, THEA called for a doubling of this allocation in 2021 and subsequent years which was not provided for in Budget 2021. Following wider consultation during 2021, THEA has recently submitted a paper to D/FHERIS, putting forward a case for a more gradual increase in the R&I allocation via the Recurrent Grant to the sector, as shown in the table below.<sup>7</sup> The paper includes details of an independent review of the impact of the first two tranches of the R&I allocation (in 2019 and 2020)<sup>8</sup>, which found ample evidence of strategic use of the funding by the sector, early-stage impact and identified future needs to justify an increase to 5% of the overall RG allocation for the sector via provision of additional funding, as recommended in the 2018 Review of the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model.<sup>9</sup> Based on the 2021 RG allocation to the sector, 5% of total amounts to approximately €18.5 million. THEA proposes a phased increase to this amount over a period of 5 years, increasing by €2.7 million per year:

2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
€5.0m	€7.7m	€10.4m	€13.1m	€15.8m	€18.5m

As stated in the introduction to this document, we are at a key milestone moment in the creation of new technological universities. Government must increase this allocation at this point in time in order to show the correct support for the emerging technological universities. A commitment to increasing

<sup>7</sup> The full paper is available at

[http://www.thea.ie/contentFiles/THEA\\_paper\\_re\\_increasing\\_R\\_I\\_RGAM\\_allocation\\_-\\_Jul\\_2021.pdf](http://www.thea.ie/contentFiles/THEA_paper_re_increasing_R_I_RGAM_allocation_-_Jul_2021.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.thea.ie/contentFiles/Impact\\_Study\\_Report\\_THEA\\_2020\\_Final\\_Sep\\_2020.pdf](http://www.thea.ie/contentFiles/Impact_Study_Report_THEA_2020_Final_Sep_2020.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Review of the Allocation Model for Funding Higher Education Institutions: Final Report by the Independent Expert Panel for the Higher Education Authority (2018). Available at <https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/funding/funding-review/>

the funding year on year in this manner would allow the institutions to commit to multi-annual R&I expenditure in line with their individual needs, using the RG funding to co-fund initiatives where appropriate. Initiatives which are “kick-started” using capacity-building funding could be embedded using the RGAM funding.

## 2) Supporting the sector to benefit from full membership of the Irish Research e-Library

As described in detail in the THEA Budget Submission from September 2020<sup>10</sup>, one piece of R&I infrastructure that requires urgent investment is providing the funding for the sector to become a full member of the Irish Research e-Library (IReL).<sup>11</sup> IReL provides access to quality peer-reviewed online research publications, including journals, databases and index & abstracting services, as well as ebooks, for member institutions. Not having full IReL membership means that the sector does not benefit from the collective purchasing power of IReL and must negotiate separately with the publishers. The end result is that the sector’s researchers do not enjoy the same equity of access to the online research literature as those in other Irish higher education institutions. Similarly, the significant success of IReL in the negotiation of Transformative Agreements (TAs) has the potential to further increase inequality in the research landscape. These TAs facilitate researchers within IReL member institutions to publish their articles as open access in high-impact journals for ‘free’ at the point of publication, subsequently contributing to reputation enhancement and alignment with Open Research requirements<sup>12</sup>. This is another significant success for IReL, but for researchers outside the consortium, similar open access publishing supports are unavailable bar one shared TA with Science Direct. A 2019 review of IReL recommended that membership should be expanded to include the institutes of technology and other state research bodies, as financial resources permit. THEA estimates the cost of this to be approximately **€5 million per annum**.

**We call for a Research and Innovation investment of €42.7m in 2022, rising to €45.1m in 2023 and €55.1m in 2024.**

Specific Measures		2022	2023	2024	Total
Pillar 3		€m	€m	€m	€m
Research and Innovation	RDI capacity building fund	20	20	27	67
	Continued RFAM reform	7.7	10.4	13.1	31.2
	IReL reform	5	5	5	15
	Regional enterprise engagement	10	10	10	30
	<b>Sub Total 3</b>	<b>42.7</b>	<b>45.4</b>	<b>55.1</b>	<b>143.2</b>

<sup>10</sup> See page 36 and 37 of [http://www.thea.ie/contentFiles/THEA\\_pre-budget\\_submission.pdf](http://www.thea.ie/contentFiles/THEA_pre-budget_submission.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <https://irel.ie/>

<sup>12</sup> See National Framework on the Transition to an Open Research Environment (2019), National Open Research Forum. Available at <https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/0287dj04d>

## Pillar 4 Climate

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has said in August 2021 that strong and sustained reductions in emissions of carbon dioxide are required urgently to limit the damage to the planet and that climate change is widespread, rapid and intensifying. The funding sought last year for our sector was to enable us to play our part in meeting the then targets for mitigating climate change. The challenge since then has increased, but the funding has not. The submission last year requested the following multi-annual investment:

- A new multi-annual investment plan for the greening of our campuses through a multi-level plan including decarbonisation, a retrofitting programme targeting B energy ratings for existing buildings, EV charging etc. This fund would be in addition to recurrent grant funding and would be specifically tailored as a HEI Buildings Climate retrofitting & Upgrade fund. We estimate that this fund would need to be set at a level of €71.8 million over three years.
- A campus Green Flag fund to enable technological universities to act as exemplars in the region and among their wider community of learners, teachers and innovators. Funding of €43.9m over three years would enable us to put this into practice.

In light of the overwhelming challenge facing our planet, this should be seen as the minimum required.

**We call for a Climate investment of €36.2m in 2022, rising to €44.5m in 2023 and €133.5m in 2024.**

Specific Measures		2022	2023	2024	Total
Pillar 4		€m	€m	€m	€m
Climate	HEI buildings climate retrofitting & upgrade fund	13.4	18.5	23.6	55.5
	Campus Green Flag	22.8	26	29.2	78
	<b>Sub Total 4</b>	<b>36.2</b>	<b>44.5</b>	<b>52.8</b>	<b>133.5</b>

## International Cooperation

Strengthening and deepening of international co-operation is vital; in particular the European Universities Initiative, a flagship EU programme to strengthen cooperation in teaching and research in Europe. Eight Irish HEIs, including IADT, AIT, and LIT, have successfully obtained competitive funding for their participation in seven new European University Alliances. It is strategically important that this significant Irish participation be facilitated with adequate resourcing in order to play leading roles in these Alliances. The Council of the EU (May 2021) recently invited national governments to co-fund their participating HEIs to enable their universities strengthen and deepen this cooperation, leading to joint study programmes, greater cooperation in research and enhanced international competitiveness. Many competitor countries are already providing this. THEA and the IUA request a total investment of €10.5m to co-fund the participation of 4 universities, 1 technological university, 1 future technological university and 1 institute of technology for the period 2022-2025. This relatively small investment of circa **€3.5m per annum** over a three-year period will enable Irish HEIs to play

leading roles in these flagship European alliances, paving the way for significant innovation in European higher education and raising Ireland’s profile and attractiveness as a European leader in higher education, research and innovation.

**We call for an investment in the European Universities Initiative of €3.5 per annum in 2022, 2023 and 2024.**

## Summary of Investment Requirements

Taking into account the previous request submitted in September 2021, plus the additional investment areas highlighted above, the **total investment request is €596.5 million** over a three-year period, beginning with 161.5 million in 2022. A detailed breakdown is provided in the table below.

Specific Measures		2022	2023	2024	Total
<b>Pillar 1</b>		<b>€m</b>	<b>€m</b>	<b>€m</b>	<b>€m</b>
<b>Digitalisation and Infrastructure</b>	Systems upgrade and future proofing including security	18	23	28	69
	Educational delivery platform upgrade and expansion	16.5	21.5	26.5	64.5
	<b>Sub Total 1</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>44.5</b>	<b>54.5</b>	<b>133.5</b>
<b>Pillar 2</b>					
<b>Human Capital</b>	Student mental health	12	18	24	54
	Support staffing and staff professional development	18	22	26	66
	Embedding equality diversity and inclusion	12	16	20	48
	Implementation of the consent framework	2.6	2.6	2.6	7.8
	<b>Sub Total 2</b>	<b>44.6</b>	<b>58.6</b>	<b>72.6</b>	<b>175.8</b>
<b>Pillar 3</b>					
<b>Research and Innovation</b>	RDI capacity building fund	20	20	27	67
	Continued RFAM reform	7.7	10.4	13.1	31.2
	IReL reform	5	5	5	15
	Regional enterprise engagement	10	10	10	30
	<b>Sub Total 3</b>	<b>42.7</b>	<b>45.4</b>	<b>55.1</b>	<b>143.2</b>



Pillar 4					
<b>Climate</b>	Campus Green Flag	13.4	18.5	23.6	55.5
	HEI buildings climate retrofitting & upgrade fund	22.8	26	29.2	78
	<b>Sub Total 4</b>	<b>36.2</b>	<b>44.5</b>	<b>52.8</b>	<b>133.5</b>
<b>International Cooperation</b>	European Universities Initiative	3.5	3.5	3.5	10.5
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>161.5</b>	<b>196.5</b>	<b>238.5</b>	<b>596.5</b>