

Case Study: Ireland

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Research Ireland

MLE in Science Communication in Research and Innovation

Topic 1: Meeting Focus – Capacity

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Research Ireland



Research Ireland was established 1st August 2024 via a merger of Science Foundation Ireland and Irish Research Council.

Research Ireland is the national research and innovation agency responsible for public engagement with research through funding programmes such as Discover, Curious Minds, the Public Fellowship Scheme, Research Centres and Challenge Funding.

As a national government agency it plays a lead role in promoting science communication – as the custodian of Science Week Ireland – as well as providing training, resources, and a range of networking opportunities for researchers.

Policy and Strategy

- Science Communication is not *explicitly* addressed by national policies, strategies, plans or laws in Ireland.
- Science Communication is incorporated into broader legal frameworks governing research infrastructure and funding bodies.

Research Ireland is guided by:

- The Research and Innovation Bill (2024) : Established Research Ireland, putting public engagement and communication among the core functions of the new agency. This legislation is not explicitly about science communication, but it legally formalises public engagement with research as an institutional objective.
- Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy: Ireland's national strategy which recognises public engagement as key to maximising societal and economic impact from research.
- Research Ireland's new Strategic Plan is due in 2026.



Research Ireland Programmes

Discover Programme:

- Main competitive funding stream specifically supporting public engagement with STEM, funding institutions, NGOs, and researchers to develop public engagement and science communication projects targeting diverse audiences.
- In the last 10 years we have funded more than 500 projects valued over €50 million. In 2025 almost €6.5 million will be invested in approx. 40 projects.



Credit: RI

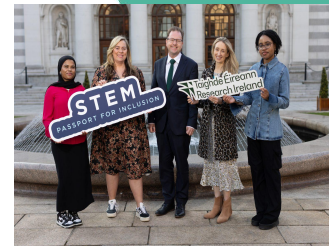
Science Week Funding:

- Annual support for organisations and institutions to run public-facing science events during Science Week. 30th anniversary this year!
- In 2025 we distributed funding of €847,820 for 36 projects across Ireland.

Public Service Fellowships: Researchers in government departments and agencies.

ESERO Ireland: An education project of the European Space Agency.

Curious Minds: Tools to empower primary schools to teach STEM.



Credit: RI

Main Stakeholders

A number of bodies collaborate with Research Ireland to either fund or support capacity building for science communication directly or indirectly.

- **Government Departments:** Most of our budget comes from the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. Some funding comes from the Department of Education and partnerships for Challenge Funding
- **Collaborations** with stakeholders working in science communication, including **Research Centres** and **Challenge Teams**.
- **Discover Centres:** A network of centres offering accredited workshops and STEM outreach for primary schools.
- **Individual Research Groups in Universities:** The focus is on research and/or education either in collaboration or supported by RI funding. (e.g. DCU Celsius Group, Science and Society Research Group TCD).
- **Community and Voluntary Sector:** Typically **NGOs and individuals** who develop events, activities (e.g. Simply Science, Dublin Maker), often supported by RI funding.



Drivers and Barriers in Ireland

Drivers:

- Establishment of Research Ireland, bringing together Science, Technology and AHSS to support interdisciplinarity. SciComm sits at this intersection.
- Governmental support, and establishment of independent Chief Scientific Advisor (Prof Aoife McLysaght)
- Small country, making collaboration and knowledge sharing easier.

Barriers

- No clear policy or strategy specific to science communication.
- SciComm only weakly present in Higher Education
- Demand for meaningful SciComm evaluation not matched by the resources available
- No national Science Museum
- No national Science Communication Conference
- Funding available is typically only short term (1 – 2 years)
- Country size can also be a negative in that the usual suspects can dominate.

Outcomes and Impact

Measuring:

- Historically the following definition of impact has been used: *“the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy”*.
- However, there is a move towards **Engaged Research** in Research Ireland which acknowledges that the definition of impact needs to be broadened so that it includes community empowerment, policy change, capacity building, and social equity.
- Outcomes become more important than outputs.
- Impact2030 Pillar Two: States that impact, evidence and evaluation will be central to the alignment of R&I activity with national needs:

“We will leverage latest international good practice, with particular regard to work underway in the European Research Area, modernising how we define research impact, how we monitor it and how we incentivise it”.

Resources and Sustainability

- The Research Ireland funding comes from our parent department – DFHERIS.
- Most funding is on an annual basis though there is a move towards 3-year funding in order to offer more sustained opportunities for development and collaboration.
- Overhead rates to a maximum of 30% can be included in funding applications
- Principal Investigators (PI) can include a supplemental discretionary allowance to support their Research Ireland-funded Grant when either a PI or an eligible member of the Research Team takes a period of maternity, paternity, or adoptive leave.
- Research Ireland is committed to increasing the engagement of Historically Underserved Communities in the design, conduct, and evaluation of research, as well as minimising barriers to participation in the research endeavour. Our Disability Policy provides eligible Research Ireland-funded grant holders and their team members with supplementary budget for the costs of required, eligible, reasonable accommodations where those costs are not available via other existing funding mechanisms.

Policy Relevance/ Transferability

Context-dependent Considerations:

- RI recently established as a merger between two national funding bodies and is currently the main funder of research and innovation in Ireland
- New emphasis on evaluation

Interesting Irish Initiatives:

- Citizens Assembly: Ireland considered a pioneer in method, where members of the public examine evidence, exchange views and provide recommendations on social and constitutional / policy issues – including socio-scientific. Eg. Biodiversity
- Creating Our Future public engagement campaign (2021) which gave the opportunity to everyone in Ireland to submit research ideas to support a better future. Over 18,000 submissions.
- **Engagement Expo**: Dublin, 7 May 2026.

Reflections and Future Direction

- **T** Ireland is at an exciting turning point when it comes to Research and Innovation.
- The underlying philosophy behind most funding programmes is one of cooperation, yet it is still a very competitive process.
- New emphasis on realist evaluation, Theory of Change thinking, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research.
- All applicants are expected to collaborate and think about the social and economic impact their research has.
- This presents a unique opportunity for capacity building for quality science communication, which sits at an interdisciplinary nexus, spanning both STEM and AHSS.
- Watch this space 😊



Thank You