



Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann
Royal Irish Academy



*The Royal Society
of Edinburgh*

KNOWLEDGE MADE USEFUL

1) Jenny Gilruth, MSP. Minister for Europe and International Development

The Scottish Government, St Andrew's House, Edinburgh, Scotland

2) Simon Coveney, T.D. Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Iveagh House, St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland

19 March 2020

Dear Ministers,

Re: Submission to the 2020 Strategic Review of Irish-Scottish relations

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) and the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) are delighted to offer this joint submission to the Scottish and Irish Governments' 2020 Strategic Review of Irish-Scottish relations. The RSE and RIA are the National Academies for Scotland and the island of Ireland respectively. We represent, champion and disseminate research, learning and useful knowledge. Our joint submission primarily focuses on the review theme of academic, educational and research links.

We recognise that this consultation represents the beginning of a longer-term programme of work aimed at enhancing Scottish-Irish collaboration. Both the RSE and the RIA would welcome the opportunity to work with the Scottish and Irish Governments in support of this review. As a contribution to this we would be pleased to use our convening power to host joint roundtables that bring together a range of perspectives to discuss how we can strengthen academic, educational and research links between Scotland and Ireland.

Given the multidisciplinary expertise within both our Fellowships – which embrace the breadth of academia and leaders from business and public service – we are also well placed to contribute to other thematic areas of the review, including linguistic issues, governance and law; cultural experience and exchange; rural, coastal and island communities; and business and economic interests. We would be pleased to explore potential RSE and RIA input with the Scottish and Irish Governments.

Key messages

- Ireland and Scotland share a strong focus on research, development and innovation as an enabler and key driver of economic growth and prosperity and social and cultural ambitions.



- Scotland and Ireland rank in the top 20 global countries in the 2018 Incites Essential Science indicators.¹
- Ireland and Scotland have significant shared areas of research strengths and extensive collaborations have been developed in multiple disciplines and areas including the creative industries; linguistics; governance and law; energy (including renewables); history and literature; financial and business services; food and drink (including agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries); life sciences; and sustainable tourism.
- Dynamic traditions and practices of higher education student and staff mobility continue between Ireland and Scotland. For example, more students come to the University of Glasgow from Ireland than any other European Union country.
- The Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Royal Irish Academy, together with the Learned Society of Wales, have recently formed the *Celtic Academies Alliance* to support a good understanding of devolved issues in the development and delivery of UK Government policy including meaningful engagement and communication with the UK and Irish Governments and Devolved Administrations on research and innovation needs, priorities and policies.

Current higher education and R&D connections and associations between Ireland and Scotland

Irish-Scottish higher education mobility and collaboration has arisen from long close cultural and historical connections between our two countries. Ireland and Scotland have long benefited from a two-way flow of people and knowledge in the higher education sector.

This flow have been enabled through the Common Travel Area and, until recently, shared membership of the European Union: for example, the EU's Erasmus programme offered significant opportunities for student mobility and cultural integration across Ireland and Scotland. Movement of staff and students between Ireland and Scotland has enhanced the quality and reputation of our institutions. In particular our academic communities have been enriched, their composition has become more diverse, and they are more outward looking. International cooperation and collaboration in teaching and research has been demonstrated to be both synergistic and more impactful.

In recent years, research funders in Ireland and the UK have moved to secure future opportunities for UK-Ireland research collaborations through jointly funded research schemes to support networking, access to fellowship opportunities and specific areas of research collaboration. Such schemes have been enabled through partnerships by, amongst others, the Irish Research Council, Science Foundation Ireland, the Health Research Board (Ireland) with UK-wide research funders including the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Economic and Social Research Council, and the National Academies. In this context, the RSE has funded Scotland-Ireland research collaboration through its CRF European Visiting Research

¹ SFI, 2018 Annual Report, [https://www.sfi.ie/research-news/publications/annual-reports/sfi-AR-18-\(web\)-NEW-\(3\).pdf](https://www.sfi.ie/research-news/publications/annual-reports/sfi-AR-18-(web)-NEW-(3).pdf)

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Fellowships and the John Moyes Lessells Travel Scholarship. We consider it vital that future policies encourage and facilitate these very positive and productive experiences.

Ireland and Scotland share a strong mutual focus on investment in universities and the creative industries. More specifically they have notable shared areas of research strengths including the creative industries; linguistics; governance and law; history and literature; energy (including renewables); financial and business services; food and drink (including agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries); life sciences; and sustainable tourism.

Examples of research collaboration between Scotland and Ireland include: 'The Genetic Landscape of Scotland and the Isles' (2019), involving the University of Edinburgh, University of Bristol and the Genealogical Society of Ireland, with funding from the Science Foundation Ireland, the Scottish Funding Council, Wellcome Trust and the Medical Research Council UK; and the University of Aberdeen's Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies and Trinity College Dublin's Centre for New Irish Studies (previously the Centre for Irish-Scottish Studies), and their longstanding commitment to the development of Irish Scottish research links, including working the 1641 Deposition project, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Irish Research Council.

Supporting future collaborations

R&D activity in Ireland and Scotland has several priority objectives including, but not limited to, maintaining research excellence, enhancing the impact and relevance of public investment in research, contributing to wider national policy objectives e.g. transition to a low carbon economy, learning and skills enhancements, and driving commercialisation of research. Both Scotland and Ireland also use skills and enterprise agencies to deliver aspects of their R&D and innovation programmes and have a shared emphasis on developing business-academia research collaborations.

Given the significant synergies between the RDI systems, there is the potential to explore the possibility of a shared Ireland-Scotland R&D programme.

In recent years, the Irish government has sought to encourage cross-border linkages and synergies to support research and higher education collaboration and stronger regional growth and development on the island of Ireland. A similar focus on specific Irish-Scottish HE and research linkages – which could be facilitated by the RIA and RSE – would provide opportunities to link industry and academic institutions in Ireland and Scotland. Ireland and Scotland could, for example, consider the potential to pool resources to support priority skills development based in key sectors aligned to national growth priorities in either country.

More generally, given our geographical proximity, shared research strengths and ambitions, consideration could be given to the holding of joint science advisory forums/councils to exchange knowledge and information on specific issues and science related policy with a view to promoting economic growth and to the sharing of emerging solutions to progressing achievement of the

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Sustainable Development Goals. As the National Academies covering Scotland, Ireland and Northern Ireland, we would be happy to offer our services in support of this work.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet you to discuss the issues raised in this letter.

We are copying this letter to the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and Scotland and to key stakeholders within the devolved nations. We will be making the text available publicly.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Gerry McKenna, MRIA
Senior Vice-President, Royal Irish Academy

Dr Rebekah Widdowfield
Chief Executive, Royal Society of Edinburgh