

**SUBMISSION FROM THE IRISH SOCIAL SCIENCES PLATFORM (ISSP)  
TO SSTI PROCESS/CONSULTATION**

**23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015**

The Irish Social Sciences Platform (ISSP) is an all-island platform of integrated social science research and graduate training focusing on the social, cultural and economic transformations shaping Ireland in the 21st century. Under the PRTL4 programme 2008-14, ISSP brought together academics from 19 disciplines in 8 higher education institutions, initially, and subsequently a further 2 Universities, across the island into a common programme of research centered on knowledge, innovation, society and space. ISSP focused its efforts on investigating three broad themes of national importance - creating balanced development, sustaining communities and building the knowledge economy.

A key objective for ISSP researchers today is to continue to take an active role in key social, economic and cultural policy debates and innovation policies. To that end it works closely with local communities, voluntary and semi-state agencies, research bodies and local and national government in tackling critical issues and building a prosperous future for the whole island.

In the period since its establishment ISSP partners have leveraged significant EU funding under the IRC, FP7, HORIZON 2020 and ERC programmes, in particular. For instance, ISSP researchers Professor Rob Kitchin (lead PI in the PRTL4 ISSP programme) and Professor Sean O Riain have both been awarded senior European Research Council (ERC) awards. Recently funded major FP7 and HORIZON 2020 awards to ISSP researchers include GENOVATE, FESTA and ENTRUST (which is a collaboration between STEM and social science researchers).

PRTL4 government investment in 1. building social science research institutes (including NIRSA (MU), ISS21 (UCC) and Whittakar (NUIG), 2. in inter institutional social science research and 3. in a structured PhD programme under the PRTL4 programme has therefore established Ireland as a leading, international centre of excellence in social science research.

This submission sets out the conditions and strategy required nationally under the SSTI to further develop social science research to the next level.

***About ISSP Research***

ISSP research focuses on three strongly inter-related areas of recognised national importance: Building of the knowledge society/economy; supporting sustainable communities; and promoting balanced regional and rural development and competitiveness. These themes are tied-together and examined in relation to the concepts of innovation, spatial strategies and inclusion providing a comprehensive

understanding of contemporary Ireland.

### Knowledge Society

The creation of a knowledge society is a central pillar of government policy and its attainment is critical to Ireland's continued economic prosperity (as acknowledged in *Building Ireland's Knowledge Economy; Ahead of the Curve: Ireland's Place in the Global Economy; Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2006-2013*). A knowledge society is a complex and multifaceted aspiration encompassing local, regional, national and international aims and foci, embracing service provision and trade, organisational artefacts, information and communication technologies, and work systems. Understanding the complexity of the intertwined processes required to create and sustain a knowledge society is still far from complete. The programme encompasses a coherent set of comparative and applied research projects that focus on the processes, components, and drivers of a knowledge society and economy. The outcomes of the research will be utilized to inform policy making so as to ensure that Ireland can maximise the return on investment indicated within the National Development Plan and the National Spatial Strategy. The programme also has a critical role to play in educating the next generation of policy makers, thus assisting Ireland to stay ahead of the curve in the emerging global knowledge economy.

### Sustaining Communities

Over the past decade or so, Ireland has undergone rapid transformation of its social landscape. Agencies such as NESC, Forfas and the National Competitiveness Council have emphasised the effects of social and community issues on economic and environmental development and the Taskforce on Active Citizenship highlighted the importance of planning for strong communities in order to facilitate and promote civic engagement. It is increasingly recognised that the future of society will depend on the economic, social and civic participation of hitherto marginalized populations. Ensuring high levels of social inclusion is a major task, requiring high quality research which influences policy and practice. It is possible to undertake this research with a life cycle framework that examines cumulative advantages and disadvantages over the lifetime of individuals. The ISSP programme develops insights into forces that promote participation in economic and social life, particularly in relation to the labour market and voluntary activity; the development of social capital, trust and democracy; investment in healthy communities; and an understanding of alienation and integration at varying scales for marginalized communities.

### Balanced Regional and Rural Development

As promoted by the European Union through the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), the Cohesion Reports, EU Rural Development policy and The Territorial Agenda of the European Union - Towards a More Competitive and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions, coherent and well-coordinated spatial and sectoral planning are key drivers of economic competitiveness, territorial cohesion and balanced local and regional development. The Irish response has been the National Development Plan, A Strategy for Rural Development, the National Spatial

Strategy in the Republic of Ireland, the Regional Development Strategy in Northern Ireland, Spatial Strategies on the Island of Ireland, new planning guidelines, and a myriad of individual projects, many of which are funded through INTERREG programmes. The ISSP programme extensively undertakes research to guide spatial and sectoral strategy formulation that is needed to produce balanced and sustainable development across the island of Ireland in the long term. In doing so, it continues the partners' strong track record of contributing to key debates and policy, and training employees of the public and private sectors in spatial planning and development issues, thus helping to shape regional and rural patterns of development into the future.

For more information on the research activities of individual partners, please visit [www.issplatform.ie](http://www.issplatform.ie)

### **Response to draft SSTI: Summary of Strategic Requirements of Social Science in Ireland**

- increased and ongoing investment in social science research and in research infrastructures alongside investment in STEM and enterprise is essential;
- the 14 priority areas in the SSTI focus on particular industries rather than the social impact of relevant technologies in those areas (smart economy<=>smart society);
- the landscape of PhD funding in the current climate is very dependent on the IRC, and expanding PhD education requires much greater investment in the IRC postgraduate funding schemes in particular and inter institutional GREP programmes in the social sciences;
- prioritisation should not be reduced to immediacy and a more sustained strategy involving the perspective of social science is essential. A real danger at the current juncture is that a doctrine of 'immediate returns' in pure economic terms will override investment in longer-term initiatives, even when those longer-term initiatives are demonstrably successful - all of which is entirely consistent with the wider point about research and *human capital* (the example and importance of early social interventions highlight this point - better outcomes in terms of childhood development, educational attainment, health and wellbeing, involvement with the criminal justice system, employment and career development);
- an excellence scheme linked to strategic research professorship positions in the social sciences, similar to the HRB research professorships scheme, is urgently required to stem the brain drain of research leaders occurring as a consequent of lack of promotional opportunities in Irish HEI's and the public sector embargo placed on such new strategic research professor positions. International research led institutions are head hunting Ireland's best

researchers in the social sciences currently and awarding professorships on salaries equivalent to a senior lecturer position in Ireland. The formulation of creative approaches to promotional opportunities in HEI's in collaboration with the HEA and Department of Education, and a cost neutral research professorship scheme for established researched leaders that is linked to the SSTI, could also incorporate a research professorship award scheme specifically for women, given the profound problem with equal opportunities for women evident in Irish Universities and third level institutions and the manifest loss of female talent from the sector due to lack of opportunities in the current system.

#### 1. STRATEGY FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION: *SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC* INNOVATION ARE ESSENTIAL

The title of the document and the strategy in the document itself needs to more appropriately reflect the urgent need to balance economic innovation with social innovation in order to address the fundamental challenges Ireland faces at the current conjuncture. The creation of wealth and economic growth needs to be correlated with a sustained research and innovation strategy that can address an array of societal challenges through investing in cutting edge action oriented research, with concrete impacts projected, concerning the Irish social model. Just some of the current challenges that Ireland must resolve in order to create a sustainable economy into the future and in the longer term, include: tackling the very high levels of youth emigration and unemployment, social inclusion, good governance, the critical role of early educational interventions in generating prosperity and addressing social disparities, equality, developing effective third level institutions and graduate investment programmes that balance the need for STEM innovation with social and cultural knowledge and creativity, and effective health systems. Social scientists are essential to creating a balanced research and innovation strategy that has a futuristic emphasis and aims to put in place the essential societal structures needed to underpin sustainable economic growth that extends beyond financial investment in current businesses. Arts, humanities and social science combined create the necessary basis for creative industries to thrive, which Ireland has manifest key strengths in internationally, and contribute to a version of education that encompasses creative and cultural citizenship on which many important sectors of the knowledge economy rely (eg the media, publishing, the arts, civil service, planning etc).

#### 2. A SMART SOCIETY IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SMART ECONOMY

The next major Irish research programme proposed under the SSTI will undoubtedly develop a human capital pool with academic and professional

attainment that will support Irish based companies ranging from SME to multinational companies, public administration and society focused and orientated organisations, at a national and regional level.

Specifically one of the key national policy ambitions in Ireland 'is to incentivise MNC to locate R&D capacity in Ireland and to ensure commercialisation and retaining of ideas that flow from that investment (*Building a Smart Economy* p.7).

The promotion of social cohesion, the utilisation of the knowledge, skills and creativity of people, and the ability to translate these into different contexts will be core features of a Smart Society which is also required to build a Smart Economy. The Smart Society concept is based on the recognition that a society that wishes to develop in a smart and sustainable way must be able to motivate, mobilise and draw on the full range of its available talents. For that to happen the business and STEM sectors need to be comprehensible to the social sciences and the social context needs to be taken into account by the business/STEM sectors.

In general, the fruitful and unique collaboration that can exist between AHSS has not been at all explored to date in Irish research and innovation policy. The recently funded HORIZON 2020 ENTRUST project (see attached) is one excellent example and I think this is where we can propose something quite unique that builds on previously untapped capacity in STEM and social science research.

The development of an innovative solution to our current difficulties in Ireland is both a question of technological and social innovation. Each by itself is important but without the other each by itself provides an incomplete development plan for the State. The transferable skills developed from a smart society address the important challenge of bringing these into a more productive relationship and development plan.

Current national and local strategy in the Irish social sciences via the ISSP is clearly and uniquely aligned to developing: 'first class infrastructure that will improve quality of life and increase the competitiveness of Irish business.' (*Building a Smart Economy* p.7). Social science is vital for:

- (1) the development of Ireland's knowledge society and the realisation of the smart economy;
- (2) the enlargement of Ireland's potential to be a world class location for international social sciences research and graduate education.

ISS21 in collaboration with ISSP is, since 2008, leveraging the academic talents of senior researchers in the social sciences along with those from STEM, business studies and humanities to create a critical mass of shared expertise.

The “Smart Society, Smart Economy” research focus developed in the ISSP and ISS21 will meet the following national objectives in the coming years:

- it will promote a sustainable strategic and planned approach by HEIs that is responsive to national and regional objectives
- it will offer concentrated research-intensive excellence through investment in priority research areas
- it will produce further Inter-institutional *cooperation*
- it will offer structured graduate education to researchers
- it will be complementary to, and supportive of, the activities of other funding bodies

### 3. GENDER EQUALITY DIMENSION IN THE STRATEGY FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Gender equality is mentioned only on page 27, and only in relation to SFI’s Advanced Fellowship scheme. There is a lot more that could be included here, for example, the Irish Research Council’s Gender Strategy, the FP7 structural gender projects underway in the state including GENOVATE, Festa and Integer, and of course the introduction of Athena SWAN to Ireland. However, the existence of all of these initiatives does not mean that there is not a lot still to be done. It would be important to see a recognition in the Strategy of the issues and challenges in relation to gender in research, and a clearly stated goal of addressing these issues. This should cover the three dimensions of gender equality for researchers (academics and research staff), gender-sensitive research and gender in research. Gender-mainstreaming in research processes, practices and systems could be the goal, and this could be broken down further into clear objectives. This would be very much in line with current directions in EU research policy.

The document also contains a statement on page 27 that universities have gender-balanced recruitment committees. This is not the case in most universities. There is gender representation on recruitment panels but no requirement for gender balance. In fact, it seems that there isn’t even a gender representation requirement for recruitment committees for research staff.

As indicated above, the loss of female talent due to lack of promotional opportunities in the Irish HEI sector is a loss of development potential and innovation in terms of sustainable economic growth looking ahead.

**In conclusion, the SSTI strategy as it currently stands needs to consider in a more complex manner and fully incorporate the capacity building already achieved by Government investment under the PRTL14 in social science/the**

**ISSP programme, and to incorporate this in a more meaningful way into the current SSTI document.**

**Continued investment in the social sciences combined with attention to the clear social and economic benefits of investment in the Humanities and in the Irish Research Council (IRC) programme of activities in particular is absolutely essential if Ireland is to realize social and economic prosperity in the coming decades.**

**An investment model in research and SSTI that focuses purely on enterprise and STEM in isolation from the perspective of social science will not provide comprehensive prosperity and growth.**

**A Government Task Force to look more fully at the potential of social science in conjunction with the SSTI process would prove most progressive in terms of the achievement of the above aims.**

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