Implementation of Research Prioritisation:

14 Research Priority Area Action Plans and a Framework for Monitoring Public Investment in STI Investment

July 2013

Background

In February 2012, the Government agreed to the implementation of the recommendations in the Report of the *Research Prioritisation Steering Group* (RPSG) as a whole of Government policy goal. The report recommended the alignment of the majority share of competitive State funding in research and innovation to 2017 with the 14 areas of opportunity identified by the Steering Group. The areas were identified on the basis of existing strengths of the enterprise base, opportunities that exist in terms of the global marketplace and those which are most likely to deliver economic and societal impact, and jobs.

Following publication of the report in March 2012, the Government established the Prioritisation Action Group (PAG), under the chairmanship of the Minister for Research and Innovation, Sean Sherlock, to drive implementation of research prioritisation. The PAG includes representatives of all research funders and relevant Government Departments.

In its first year of operation, the PAG developed Action Plans for each of the 14 Priority Areas and a framework for monitoring the impact of STI investment, which outlines a range of metrics and targets at national, research funder and Priority Area level, supported by a suite of monitoring indicators.

The 14 Action Plans and Framework were approved by Government for publication at the end of June 2013 as key milestones in the implementation of Research Prioritisation.

Action Plans

A number of working groups were established by the PAG and charged with developing Action Plans for each of the Priority Areas. The working groups were chaired by PAG members, supported by Forfás, and comprised members from all research funders supporting that particular Priority Area. Each Action Plan includes a vision, key objectives and specific actions along with timelines and those responsible for leading and supporting delivery of the action. As well as aligning funding to the 14 areas, the actions identify wider eco-system or framework conditions that need to be addressed to allow investment in the Priority Area yield the optimum return – examples here include issues relating to the regulatory environment, skills, underpinning technologies and infrastructure as they are relevant to each Priority Area.

The Action Plans contain the detailed blueprint for actions to be taken by funding Departments and funding agencies to re-align the majority of competitive public research funding around the priority areas over the next five years. This new approach is driving new behaviours resulting in research funding being tackled in a holistic way by all Departments and funding agencies working together around the priority area Action Plans. Each Action Plan was validated through a process of external stakeholder engagement which involved researchers and industry in the relevant areas.

The Action Plans are accessible individually via the links in Table 1.

Table 1: Priority Areas Action Plans

A	Future Networks & Communications	H	Food for Health
B	Data Analytics, Management, Security & Privacy	I	Sustainable Food Production & Processing
C	Digital Platforms, Content & Applications	J	Marine Renewable Energy
D	Connected Health & Independent Living	K	Smart Grids & Smart Cities
E	Medical Devices	L	Manufacturing Competitiveness
F	Diagnostics	M	Processing Technologies & Novel Materials
G	Therapeutics – Synthesis, Formulation, Processing & Drug Delivery	N	Innovation in Services & Business Processes

A glossary of acronyms used in the Action Plans is available here.

Framework of Metrics and Targets for Monitoring STI Investment

The report of the RPSG recommended the development of a set of national indicators that should include indicators of economic impact. A renewed Framework for Monitoring the Impact of STI Investment including impact on the 14 Priority Areas has been agreed by the PAG, based on work carried out by Forfás. The Framework of metrics and targets will firstly monitor the impact of public STI investment, and secondly, monitor the impact of the implementation of Research Prioritisation on the 14 Priority Areas. The purpose of setting these targets is twofold; to stretch the public enterprise support system in order to maximise the impact of public investment in R&D; and to assess the success over time of the implementation of Research Prioritisation.

The Framework comprises three levels of targets as follows:

1. Overarching National Targets;
2. Departmental/Agency-level Targets; and
3. Priority Area Targets.

These targets are underpinned by a wide range of 79 monitoring metrics covering the enterprise support environment – these are at varying levels of granularity and include inputs, outputs and outcomes. These metrics are to be monitored annually as part of the assessment framework for the national targets. For example, if a national target is not achieved, then the monitoring metrics will facilitate the diagnosis of the failure in the system.

The Framework document is accessible via the following link.