Trinity joins LERU
(League of European Research Universities)

In January 2017 Trinity College Dublin became the 23rd member of LERU (League of European Research Universities), a powerful EU research and education policy group whose prestigious members include the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Heidelberg, Paris—Sud, Zurich and KU Leuven.

Trinity is the only Irish university to be admitted, thanks to significant success with research, innovation and entrepreneurship (see Table 1) and it joins at a critical juncture for influencing the development of the research funding policy environment, both within the EU and nationally.
Trinity is the only Irish university to be admitted, thanks to significant success with research, innovation and entrepreneurship.
We are currently midway through the world’s largest competitive public funding programme for research and innovation—the EU’s Framework Programme 8/Horizon 2020, also known as FP8 or H2020, which counts an overall budget of €77 billion and is of particular importance against a backdrop of cut-backs in many member states’ national research budgets. There is already intense lobbying around the budget and structure of the successor programme, FP9, due to launch in 2021, and there is pressure to prioritise funding for activities to bridge the European ‘innovation gap’. This is where membership of LERU is proving vital.

LERU promotes the internationally competitive research partnerships between universities, industry and society, enabled by EU funding. It is a voice highly regarded by the European Commission, and lobbies for a balanced approach to funding—from fundamental research through to commercialisation—making the argument that frontier research is a bedrock of innovation. This is Trinity’s position but single organisations and smaller member states cannot exact the same level of influence as larger countries and influential stakeholder organisations such as LERU.

LERU provides a particularly strong platform for the sharing of information and articulating of views around the shape and delivery of future funding. This is particularly important in the context of Brexit. The UK has been a strong voice and ally for Ireland in Europe and has helped with shaping research policy in a mutually beneficial way. In the Framework Programmes, the UK is one of the most important research collaborators for Ireland and the most important one for Trinity. With UK influence likely diminishing over the period to their EU exit date, LERU—which is advocating that the UK continues to contribute to the European Research Area—provides a strong voice for Trinity (and Ireland). Membership of LERU will be critical in maintaining Trinity’s and Ireland’s—success in accessing funding in the next FP9 round, and in preventing undesirable outcomes from Brexit.

LERU also has significant potential influence on national funding because national and EU funding systems are hyper-connected: the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy sets a target of 3% of GDP to be invested in R&D in each member state so as to develop a European Research Area (ERA) in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology can circulate freely.

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1 E-CORDA extraction date: 2017/02/28
Ireland’s gross expenditure in R&D as a percentage of GDP has been falling since 2009 and is well below the EU-28 average.\(^3\)

All Irish universities advocate for Ireland to meet the 3% GDP target of investment in R&D but as a LERU member, Trinity can draw on a particularly strong lobbying group. LERU is a strong advocate for the implementation of the ERA roadmap, which it believes helps progress necessary national reforms of the research ecosystem. LERU highlights that its research intensive members are hubs of creativity and have a catalytic effect on the economies of their regions.

LERU is currently calling for EU structural funding to be used in synergy nationally with FP funding to build up capacity across member states; this call is resonating in Europe. Put simply, to attract, support and retain the best researchers and to create a knowledge base for society requires cutting-edge infrastructure that can be enabled through structural funds. Trinity feeds the knowledge gained through LERU membership back to the Irish research environment via engagement with industry and with the educational sector in Ireland. In short, LERU understands the need to demonstrate impact so that politicians and the public appreciate that “Universities are key actors to build a knowledge-based society and to enable innovation in Europe”.\(^4\)


\(^4\) LERU advice paper No. 22-June 2017, Beyond the Horizon: LERU’s view on the 9th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.
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