

RESEARCH STRATEGY 2014 - 2018

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The Economic Research Institute was established in 1960 by a group of senior academics and public servants, led by Dr T.K. Whitaker. He identified the need for independent research to support economic policymaking in Ireland, and persuaded the Ford Foundation to provide seed funding for its establishment. The statistician, Dr R.C. Geary was appointed as its first Director.

Over 50 years later, the Institute's importance in providing authoritative research to inform public policy is widely recognised. This public good role is supported by an annual grant-in-aid from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; the grant has accounted for an average of 30 per cent of the Institute's income over the lifetime of the last *Research Strategy*. Most of the rest of the funds needed to sustain the research of the ESRI comes from research programmes in partnership with government agencies and departments, commissioned research projects mostly by public bodies and competitive research programmes (e.g. EU Framework programmes, IRC, HRB, SFI). Membership subscriptions and publication sales also contribute to the Institute's income.

The ESRI is a company limited by guarantee, answerable to its Members and governed by a Council made up of interested individuals drawn from the academic, public and private sectors. The Institute's constitution stresses its independence, and the practice is to publish all research that reaches an appropriate academic standard.

Further information is available at www.esri.ie

FOREWORD - JANUARY 2014



Laurence Crowley
Chair



Frances Ruane
Director

Ireland is steadily working its way through major economic and social changes as it seeks to move onto a path of more sustainable growth underpinned by social progress. The country successfully met the targets set by the Troika (the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission) as part of the 2010 Bailout, and the formal sign-off from that programme took place in December 2013. The success of the programme is reflected in the reduction in the gap between current day-to-day expenditures and the funds needed to pay for them.

Nonetheless, Ireland still faces many challenges: the ratio of public debt to GDP in Ireland remains high; a fully functioning banking system needs to be re-established and much remains to be done to rebuild the 'real' economy. Key to economic recovery is the expansion of exports and improvements in the confidence levels of domestic consumers and businesses. Only when these happen will we see growth in domestic investment and substantial falls in unemployment.

The Institute's *Research Strategy* is designed to ensure that its researchers can contribute evidence to help Ireland meet key domestic

challenges, through informing the policy debate and the process of decision-making at this critical time. Its research is also relevant to the changing external environment that Ireland faces in relation to the Euro Area, the United Kingdom and the rest of the world. The Strategy also addresses important new challenges faced by the Institute itself, and in particular the need to develop new funding sources to assure its sustainability as a centre of excellence in policy research.

In preparing this new Strategy, the Institute comprehensively reviewed its research priorities and capabilities, against the background of the challenges facing the country and the Institute itself. On behalf of the Council, the Executive undertook stakeholder surveys, held focus group meetings, and carried out internal staff consultations.

We would like to thank all those who took part in the consultation process, and particularly members of the Institute's Forum, for their valuable contribution to this process. We would also like to thank staff members for their ongoing commitment, professionalism and flexibility in meeting the many challenges facing the Institute.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Institute's *Research Strategy* will ensure that the Institute can contribute evidence to inform policy debate and decision-making at this critical time for the Irish economy. It outlines the Institute's priority actions for the next five years, building on the direction set in the 2008 – 2013 Strategy.

RESEARCH STRATEGY 2008-2013

The Institute achieved the major objectives in its 2008-2013 *Research Strategy*. Firstly, it enhanced its research output by consolidating its research focus, by moving to a more team-based research model, by entering a strategic alliance with Trinity College Dublin and by building research collaborations with a range of national and international research groups.

Secondly, it increased its engagement with the policymaking community by undertaking major research projects in new areas directly related to current policy issues, and by holding greater numbers of policy conferences and workshops.

Thirdly, it increased the accessibility of its research by providing publications free to download from its website, by publishing research bulletins and by scaling up its participation in media briefings and TV/radio broadcasts.

Fourthly, it successfully developed and implemented the ***Growing Up in Ireland*** project – the largest social science programme ever undertaken in Ireland. In doing this, the Institute concentrated its surveying capability and expertise on this major national survey, successfully delivering five stages of the cohort study by 2013, while significantly increasing its use of micro-data from the CSO and other public bodies in its research.

IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

All sectors in Ireland have been severely affected by the economic crisis, especially through its impact on both public expenditure and taxation.

The crisis has impacted very significantly on the work of the Institute and particularly on the balance of research across different areas. Reductions in budgets for research in government departments and agencies reduced funding in many important areas where the Institute has made strong research contributions in the past, e.g. social inclusion; education; and labour markets. This shortage of funds also reflected the difficulties for policymakers in considering longer-term issues, at a time when the challenges of immediate 'crisis' issues were so dominant.

Despite these challenges, the Institute has maintained financial stability since the start of the crisis by reducing operating costs, overall staff numbers, salary costs (in line with the public sector); and by expanding into key new areas (e.g. regulation, telecommunication, behavioural economics). Reduced staff numbers were possible by the replacement of departing research staff only where funding was available, and reorganisation of support functions following a number of administrative staff retirements.

CHALLENGES FACING IRELAND

Over the next five years, Ireland will continue to face many challenges associated with the final stages of its economic adjustment. The Institute's skill sets leave it well placed to address key issues in major policy areas such as growth; employment and unemployment; the distributional impact of policy changes; the quality and financial sustainability of health; education and training systems; the introduction of labour-market activation measures; and the evolution of the tax and welfare system.

Several important external factors will also impact on policy choices in Ireland: developments within the EU (especially in relation to energy and environmental policy) and the Euro Area (in relation to new financial governance and regulation); possible political/economic developments in the UK (UK leaving the EU; a looser relationship between Scotland and the rest of the UK; developments on the island of Ireland) and new patterns in global relations (international tax rules and US/EU trade relations).

Nationally, there are many issues where longer-term research perspectives are needed to inform policy development: energy and the environment; ageing, pensions and health; equality; integration of new communities, etc. The Institute's engagement with these research areas will depend on its research expertise and the availability of funding streams for related programmes and projects.

CHALLENGES FACING THE INSTITUTE

Over the period of this Strategy, the Institute also needs to address a number of important new challenges. It must develop new funding sources to assure its sustainability as a centre of excellence in policy research. New programme funding, such as the macro modelling programme with the Central Bank of Ireland, the housing research programme funded by NAMA and the Irish Banking Federation and the research programme with the Health and Safety Authority, will be crucial. The Institute also aims to broaden its funding base by seeking funds from non-governmental sources, while ensuring there is no risk to the Institute's independence.

The Institute will have to manage the impact on its finances and structures following the Government's decision to transfer the *Health Research and Information Division* to the new *Healthcare Pricing Office* – this Division accounted for around one quarter of the Institute's staff.

There are also opportunities that must be grasped, such as the possibility to tender for the next stage of the *Growing up in Ireland* contract, and the possibility to engage on a large scale with the funding schemes in *Horizon 2020*. In relation to succession planning, the Institute also needs to make additional strategic hires to fill current or emerging gaps in expertise.

STRUCTURE OF THIS DOCUMENT

Section 2 of this document outlines the Institute's Mission, Goals and Values, where it sees the relevant national Vision as seeking to have 'Informed policy for a better Ireland'.

Section 3 indicates the broad sweep of the Institute's research agenda and sets out its organisational framework for research. The specific research projects undertaken will reflect the

prevailing economic and social environment, the Institute's skills base and the availability of funding.

Section 4 sets out the key strategic priorities for the Institute over the coming five years.

Section 5 outlines the reporting structure and shows how the broad topics in the research agenda map into the Institute's Research Areas.

2. MISSION, VISION, GOALS AND VALUES

The Institute's role within the policy landscape is to contribute evidence to inform policy decisions – in effect, to contribute to a national vision of '**Informed policy for a better Ireland**'. This means producing high-quality analysis to provide robust evidence for policymaking, hence our research goals are simply **research excellence** and **policy impact**.

Research excellence is underpinned by the quality of the research staff and their commitment to the highest academic standards and practices. The Institute seeks to achieve policy impact by ensuring that research is relevant to contemporary issues, and is accessible and brought to the attention of relevant policymakers and the public.

The Institute's values are vital to its success in delivering on its goals. *Independence, Objectivity, High Quality and Relevance* are ensured through both our peer review process, which ensures high academic standards are met, and through our commitment to publishing research, regardless of the findings or the source of funding. Researchers work in a supportive environment where integrity, high ethical standards, multidisciplinary, collegiality and equality of opportunity are key values, integral to the Institute's ethos.

The Institute's vision, mission, goals and values are set out in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Mission, Vision, Goals and Values

3. RESEARCH AGENDA

The Institute’s research will address issues that reflect the current national objectives of **Sustainable Economic Growth** and **Social Progress**. Topics to be researched will reflect:

- (a) specific current challenges facing Ireland and Europe as identified by the Institute’s external stakeholders, its researchers and its Council;
- (b) areas of research expertise and excellence within the Institute;
- (c) long-term funding possibilities; and
- (d) developments in methodologies and data sets.

Topics will be reviewed on an annual basis over the five-year period of the strategy, and will be published in the Institute’s **Annual Review of Research**.

RESEARCH AREAS 2014-2018

Internally, the Institute organises its research across a range of research areas. These research areas link to major policy areas and reflect the organisation of research teams. Each area is headed by one or more senior researchers who coordinate its research activities. The research agenda is influenced by current policy issues, research expertise and available funding. The 12 areas are:

1. Macroeconomics	7. Education
Macro modelling; Housing markets; SMEs; Household behaviour; Consumer sentiment.	Educational pathways; Schools and learning; Special education needs; Higher education.
2. Internationalisation and Competitiveness	8. Taxation, Welfare and Pensions
Trade; Foreign direct investment; Innovation; Productivity.	Tax and Welfare policy; Tax modelling.
3. Energy and Environment	9. Social Inclusion and Equality
Energy markets; Regulation; Renewable power; Environmental valuation; Climate policy.	Inequality; Discrimination; Social Disadvantage; Poverty.
4. Communications and Transport	10. Health and Quality of Life
e-commerce; Broadband; Infrastructure.	Access to Healthcare; Healthcare quality; Health inequalities; Health systems; Wellbeing; Working conditions.
5. Labour Markets and Skills	11. Children and Young People
Unemployment; Skills and training; Further education.	Childhood; Adolescence; Family.
6. Migration, Integration and Demography	12. Behavioural Economics
Immigration; Integration monitoring; Ageing.	Consumer decision-making.

3. RESEARCH AREAS AND TOPICS





4. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2014 – 2018

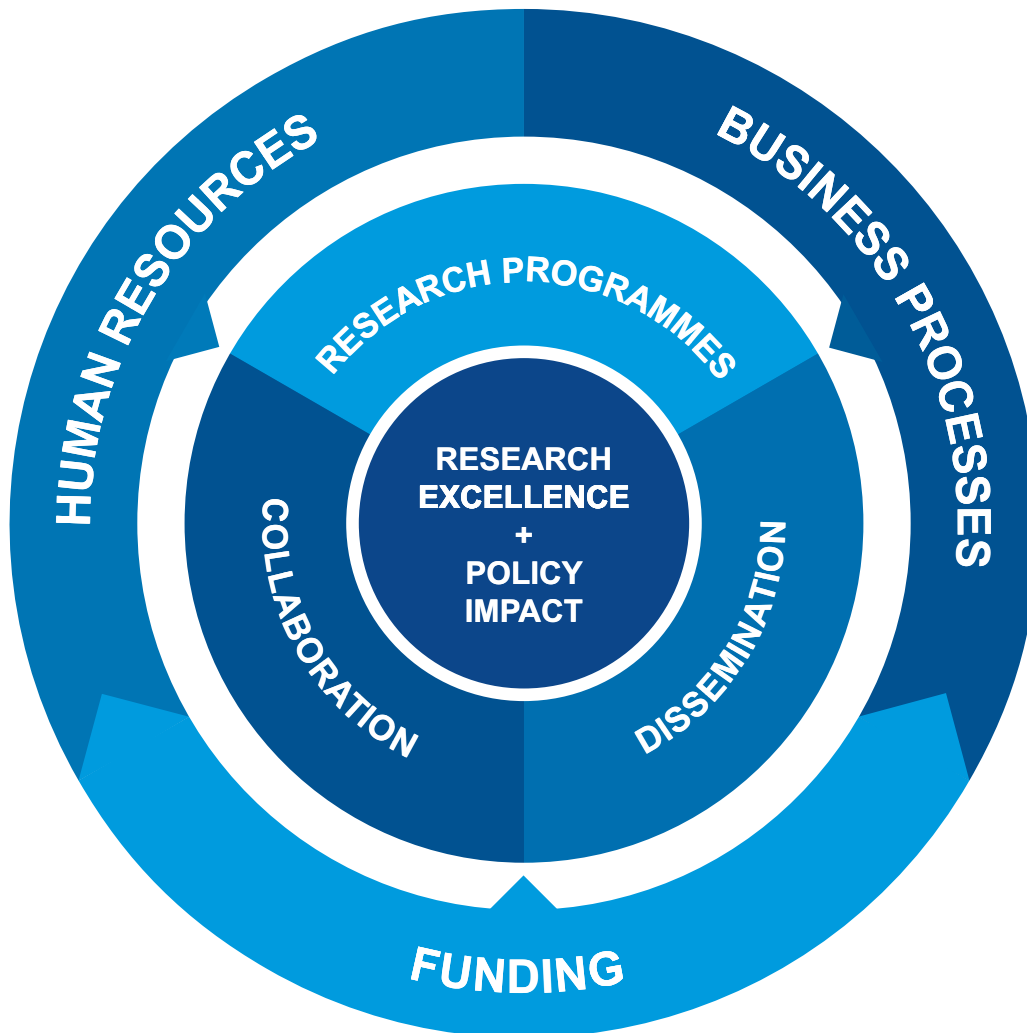


Figure 2: Research Excellence and Policy Impact

Our Goals of *Research Excellence* and *Policy Impact* will be achieved by focusing on six sets of strategic actions related to Research Programmes, Collaborations and Dissemination, supported by actions in relation to Funding, Human Resources and Business Processes.

4.1 Funding

In the five decades since it was set up, the Institute has become increasingly dependent on project and programme funding as the share of direct grant-in-aid in its total income has reduced - it averaged 30 per cent over the lifetime of the last strategy. As the Institute's research is policy-focused, government departments and agencies are the major funders of projects and programmes, seeking robust evidence to inform policy design and appraisal. Other key funders are research councils in Ireland and the European Commission.

Since 2008 the funds available to support research have reduced in tandem with reductions in overall government expenditure, thereby creating new challenges for the Institute. Consequently, the Institute must broaden its funding base, while remaining centred on key research areas. Without a portfolio of reliable funding lines, the Institute will find it increasingly difficult to attract and retain expert staff or to continue developing the research infrastructure needed to provide high quality evidence for informed policymaking. Our approach to broadening the funding base will be centred particularly on increasing the numbers of multi-year research programmes.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

1.1 Secure New Sources of Funding from National Sources

- Target departments and agencies for potential earmarked funding - both broad multi-year research programmes and specific research projects.
- Seek funding from philanthropic sources for individual research areas.
- Pursue institutional and corporate funding where this does not compromise the Institute's independent status.
- Continue to explore all possible sources of research grant funding in Ireland.

1.2 Secure New Sources of Funding from International Sources

- Target specific EU and international funding sources.
- Develop capacity for increased successes in competitive funding rounds.

4.2 Research Areas

Key to the Institute's organisational model is the creation of teams of researchers associated with each research area (see Section 3). Core funding for these research areas is essential to building the relevant expertise (in-depth knowledge of literature, methodologies, data and policies). This gives researchers the capacity to produce high quality research where individual projects require complex analysis within a short timeframe. Recent project examples include the pricing of pharmaceuticals (HSE), the strategic development of further education and training (FÁS/SOLAS), and regional population projections (Irish Water). By working collaboratively, it is possible to assemble the skill and data sets required for such research.

The ESRI will continue to operate as a research institute which examines a broad spectrum of issues over the coming five years. Our objective is to specialise in research topics which are important on the island of Ireland, where we have specific expertise, and where there is no obvious duplication with other publicly-funded research centres. One of the Institute's great strengths is its multidisciplinary approach to research and we will work actively to promote wider multidisciplinary engagement with universities and other research centres.

Research Area Coordinators will continue to play a major role in identifying the key research priorities from research literature and policy documents, and in engaging with relevant stakeholder representatives.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

2.1 Develop Work Programmes for Each Research Area

- Undertake research on emerging issues identified in each research area.
- Target potential funders/funding consortia for each research area.
- Explore further opportunities for extending the multidisciplinary focus of research.

2.2 Develop Research Infrastructure

- Develop team members/skill sets to meet the evolving requirements of each research area.
- Organise access to key databases to support the research strategy.

2.3 Develop Strategies for Maximising Major Research Funding Opportunities

- Establish a systemic approach to applying for Horizon 2020 funding.
- Explore new funding opportunities from Irish Research Councils – e.g. IRC/HRB/SFI.
- Identify new sources of philanthropic/charity research funds.

2.4 Develop and Implement Processing and Storage Capabilities for Large Datasets

- Collaborate with the CSO and other bodies in organising access to new data sets.
- Invest in IT infrastructure and resources to support programme requirements.

4.3 Collaborations

Collaboration with policymakers helps researchers to gain insights into policy issues and processes, thereby ensuring that their research is relevant and useful. It also means that policymakers get greater benefit from the knowledge generated by their investment in research. A further benefit is researcher access to high quality administrative data, thereby reinforcing the quality and relevance of their analysis.

Collaboration with other researchers contributes to research excellence. It enhances research teams, with collaborating researchers bringing different skills to the table. This facilitates knowledge transfer, higher quality analysis and stronger networks. Where the teams are international, it draws in expertise from a wider research community and facilitates comparative analysis.

The ESRI-TCD Strategic Alliance, signed in 2010, has created several new research initiatives and increased engagement of ESRI researchers in graduate supervision and teaching.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

3.1 Explore Opportunities for Further Engagement with Government Departments and Agencies

- Facilitate and promote joint work with public sector analysts.
- Coordinate systems for knowledge transfer (e.g. expertise on use of models).
- Provide internships and placements for public sector analysts.
- Develop protocols for accessing administrative data.

3.2 Develop New and Existing Modes of Interaction with Policymakers

- Develop processes for organising briefings, presentations, seminars and roundtables.
- Contribute expertise to policy formation (submissions, taskforce participation, etc).

3.3 Extend Researcher Collaborations

- Begin new international collaborations with a focus on accessing opportunities in Horizon 2020.
- Increase the number of joint publications with collaborators on the island of Ireland.
- Extend collaborative relationships within and outside the social sciences.
- Continue to engage in postgraduate teaching and supervision.

3.4 Deepen the Institutional Relationship with TCD

- Develop longitudinal research projects and extend training/up-skilling as joint venture under *the Centre for Longitudinal Studies in Ireland*.
- Broaden the level of multidisciplinary engagement with TCD researchers.
- Extend research synergies in relevant policy areas.

4.4 Dissemination

Publications are the main instrument through which Institute researchers disseminate their research findings. These take different forms. The Institute's own publications, especially its *Research Series*, provide detailed analyses of complex policy topics. Publications in peer-reviewed journals on related topics tend to be more academically focused and are important for ensuring research quality. Researchers also produce *Research Bulletins* to locate the findings in these academic journals in an Irish context. The Institute's *Quarterly Economic Commentary* now includes *Research Notes*, which provide shorter analyses of current issues.

The institute also produces thematic books from time to time, the most recent being *Using Evidence to Inform Policy*, published by Gill & Macmillan in 2013.

Dissemination to the policy community and a wider audience is contingent on both increasing public awareness of the Institute's ongoing research projects, and the accessibility of research analysis and findings to the media and broader society.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

4.1 Increase the Quantity and Quality of Publications

- Increase the number of publications in higher impact journals.
- Increase the rate of academic publication arising from commissioned research projects.
- Explore opportunities for broadly-based ESRI publications, including edited volumes, on key policy issues.

4.2 Improve Access to Research Output using New and Emerging Technologies and Media

- Re-launch the web interface to provide a better platform for accessing information online.
- Revamp the ESRI Newsletter to enhance engagement and to encourage stakeholder feedback.
- Extend the use of social media to maximise engagement with multiple stakeholders.

4.3 Develop the Institute's Communication Strategy

- Communicate research findings directly to targeted audiences via old and new media and web interface.
- Broaden the target base for public seminars.
- Increase investment in staff communication skills to ensure research findings are accessible to a wide audience.

4.5 Human Resources

Performing to a high level as a policy researcher is both challenging and rewarding. Successful researchers require both strong personal commitment and a sustained ability to remain open to critique. For researchers who have an interest in policy, opportunities to engage with the community that shapes decisions bring considerable fulfilment.

The Institute recognises that its staff members are its most important asset and that all its staff need to engage actively in the implementation of its research agenda. Given its research breadth, the Institute's current funding model means that its resourcing policy must balance the capacity to transfer skills across different research areas with specialist knowledge in those areas. Researcher commitment to their personal and professional development, supported by the Institute, is key to their mobility across a range of research domains. The Institute's support staff members will be assisted in maintaining and developing their skill sets, and must continue to be flexible in accommodating changing business practices across the full range of Institute activities.

The Institute's HR strategy helps it to respond to major external and internal changes, to foster a flexible team-based working environment, and to support staff members in their capacity to perform to their best level, within the current industrial relations environment.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

5.1 Attract and Retain Talented Staff

- Develop search and hiring practices that reflect a changing labour market.
- Improve models for career development.

5.2 Invest Strategically in Staff Development

- Ensure all managers have appropriate management and leadership skills.
- Organise delivery of appropriate learning and development initiatives to enhance employee contribution and organisational performance.
- Facilitate staff development through mobility, e.g. by creating opportunities for secondments to, and from, other institutions.

5.3 Support the Institute in Achieving Research Excellence

- Complete implementation and further development of the Institute's performance management systems.
- Implement succession plans for all key positions.

4.6 Business Processes

In developing its business practices, the Institute works closely with other agencies in the non-commercial state agency sector, and takes into account funding and organisational developments on the public-sector reform agenda. It is also informed by developments in the private and community sectors that are relevant to its business model.

The need to reduce costs and increase efficiency has already promoted major improvements in business processes over the past five years, contributing significantly to reducing the Institute's cost base. The improvements are reflected in the greater use of ICT, a more coordinated management of data resources, and better management of human resources and individual projects and programmes. Further developments are needed to manage scarcer skilled resources, increased volumes of data and the associated complexities of data protection. Processes will also need to adjust further following the transfer of the *Health Research and Information Division* (HRID) to the *Healthcare Pricing Office* (HPO) during 2014.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

6.1 Implement a More Strategic Approach to Allocation of Resources

- Invest in an improved Management Information System
- Refine tendering practices and improve documentation
- Improve capacity to manage increasingly complex projects.
- Review the Institute's internal structure and cost base periodically (e.g. in context of transfer of the HRID to the HPO)

6.2 Expand the Current Risk-based Approach to Managing Projects and Resources

- Continue to review and develop the Institute's Risk Management System
- Refine the Institute's Business Continuity Programmes

6.3 Ensure the Effectiveness of the Institute's Governance

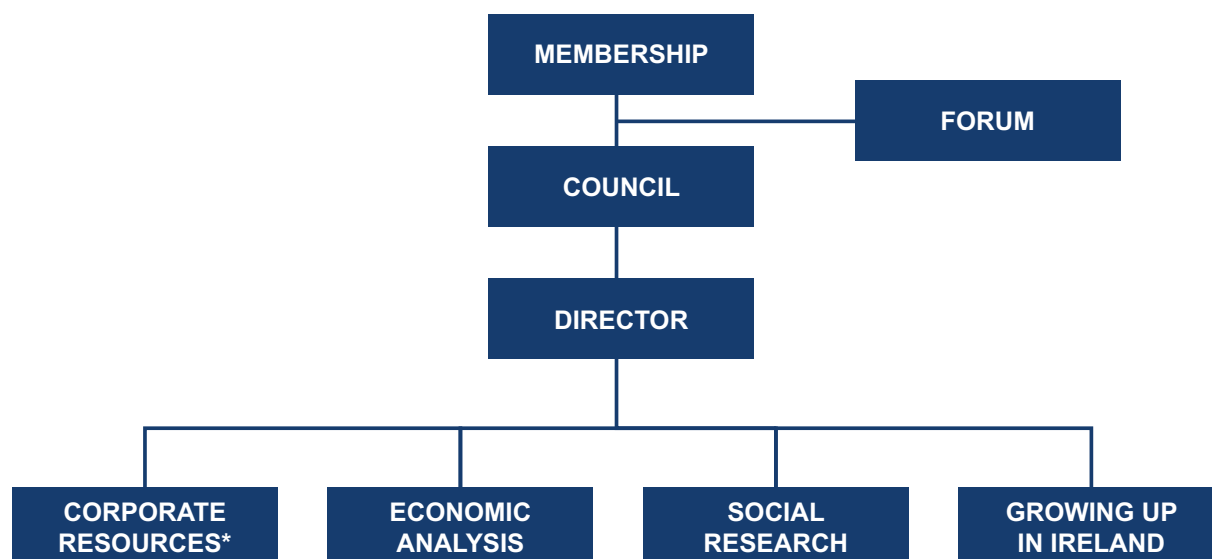
- Develop protocols to ensure that the Institute's independence is not undermined by changing forms of funding.
- Establish a robust and transparent system to monitor the implementation of this strategy, reporting to stakeholders via the *Annual Report*.

5. OVERSIGHT

The implementation of this next Research Strategy will be overseen by the Institute's Council. This will be based on twice-yearly reports to the Business and Operations Committee, a sub-committee of the Council. The reports will cover the research agenda across the twelve research areas, as well as the implementation of the six sets of strategic actions.

Each year's progress on the implementation of the actions and the specific focus of research projects will be reported publicly via the Institute's *Annual Report*, together with any new actions that are agreed by the Council, in response to the changing financial or policy environment.

ESRI GOVERNANCE 2014



*Corporate Resources also provides services to the *Health Research and Information Division*, pending legislation creating the *Healthcare Pricing Office*.

The Institute enjoys academic independence and is answerable ultimately to its Members, currently over 300 companies and individuals. The Council is the effective board of directors of the Institute, elected by the Members at the AGM. It represents a cross-section of ESRI Members: academia, civil service, state agencies, business and civil society. Council Members operate in a personal capacity and do not represent their organisations or professional groups.

The ESRI Forum is a group of Members with a particularly close relationship to the Institute whether as former Council Members, stakeholders, clients or key policymakers, who act in an advisory capacity.



THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE HEALTH INEQUALITIES BROADBAND E-COMMERCE

Whitaker Square, Sir John Rogerson's Quay, Dublin 2

Telephone +353 1 8632000 Fax +353 1 8632100 Email admin@esri.ie Web www.esri.ie