

Chairperson: Prof. David Riley

Please reply to:

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Mr John Halligan, TD
Minister of State
Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation
23 Kildare Street
Dublin 2

24th September 2017

Re: Funding for Basic Research

Dear Minister

The Institute of Physics in Ireland has previously been in contact with you in relation to the funding of basic research. We very much welcome the Laureate Awards programme which was introduced last year by the Irish Research Council (IRC) and the Advanced Laureate Awards programme which was introduced this year. This is an important first step in addressing the critical situation for the funding of basic research since the withdrawal of the Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Frontiers programme in 2012.

As the government is finalising its budget for the coming year we are anxious to ensure that any continuation of the Laureates programme or other proposed programme for basic research has a sufficient budget to be effective.

We would suggest that funding for basic research should be of the order of €20 million annually and that this budget should be pegged at a level of around 12% of the current SFI annual research budget.

As we have noted in previous meetings and correspondence with you, physics is an essential field of knowledge, underpinning progress across all other sciences and engineering and contributing significantly to the economy. However, there is a crisis in the funding of physics research in Ireland: researchers nationwide in fields including, but not limited to, astrophysics and particle physics cannot access funding for their research – even the funding necessary to present results at international conferences (travel, subsistence and conference fees). Without additional support physics research in Ireland, and ultimately the research, innovation and growth that it underpins, faces a precarious future.

A small amount of funding would make a very large difference to physics researchers in Ireland.

The Institute of Physics in Ireland (IOP) would like to suggest a proposal to address this situation:

- A small travel fund of the order of €0.5M annually. One easily implementable solution to the current problem of many STEM PhD supervisors having no travel funds would be to double the annual €2500 that IRC funded PhD students currently receive and allow supervisors to use up to half it. This is based on €5000 per physics researcher per annum for around 100 recipients. This would require no additional administration. It would have the additional benefit of promoting Ireland and Irish research as supervisors networking is key to securing an Irish presence in international projects.

Such a fund would be of enormous benefit to Irish physics, supporting the basic research that is essential for the future of Ireland and allowing Irish researchers to network and leverage external sources of research funding.

If you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact the IOP at the above address.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Riley', written in a cursive style.

Prof. David Riley
Chair IOP Ireland