



## Consultation on the National Strategy for Higher Education Guidance Document

### Respondent's Details

Name:	Dr. Ambrose McLoughlin
Position (if applicable):	Registrar/CEO
Organisation (if applicable):	Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland
Address:	18 Shrewsbury Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4
Telephone:	(01) 218 4027
Email:	<a href="mailto:registrar@pharmaceuticalsociety.ie">registrar@pharmaceuticalsociety.ie</a>
Date:	19 June 2009

**Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of your organisation?**

Personal [            ]

On behalf of organisation [  ]

Information in relation to this submission may be made available to any person who makes a request under the Freedom of Information Act, 1997 as amended in 2003.

The Strategy Group are now inviting submissions for the first stage of the consultation process in respect of the development of the vision and objectives for Irish higher education. Accordingly, stakeholders are invited to submit

- The three most significant changes that they would wish to see made to Irish higher education,  
and
- The barriers or obstacles which they would identify to the achievement of those objectives.

In light of the above, you are invited to submit your views on this first stage of the process using the form above.

Where submissions are being made, the Group requests that they would be limited to no more than 2,000 words. Submissions should be made electronically no later than Friday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2009 to [hstrategy@education.gov.ie](mailto:hstrategy@education.gov.ie) or to

Ms. Edel Cunningham  
National Strategy for Higher Education  
Department of Education and Science  
Marlborough Street,  
Dublin 1  
01 – 889 2261

# Submission from the PSI to the National Strategy for Higher Education Group

---

## 1. Introduction

The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) is the statutory regulator of pharmacists and pharmacies in Ireland. The PSI carries out this function in the interests of public health and patient safety. As a statutory regulatory body, the PSI welcomes the opportunity to present its views to the Higher Education Strategy Group as part of the first stage of the consultation process and in respect of the development of the vision and objectives for Irish higher education (HE) on the following designated areas:

- The three most significant changes that the PSI would wish to see made to Irish higher education, and
- The barriers or obstacles which the PSI would identify to the achievement of those objectives.

Through its statutory function as the accrediting body for the education and training of pharmacists, the PSI is cognisant of the major challenges facing the HE sector today. As outlined by the European Commission, such challenges include issues that range over increased demand for higher education, the internationalisation of education and research, the need to develop effective and close cooperation between universities and industry, the benefits of inter-professional working, the reorganisation of knowledge, and new expectations, for example, an increasing need for scientific and technical education, transferable skills and opportunities for lifelong learning) (Commission 2003, pp. 6-9). The requirement for compulsory continuing professional development, which is part of lifelong learning, opens up an entirely new spectrum within higher education and the responsibilities of such institutions.

## 2. The three most significant changes that the PSI would wish to see made to Irish higher education

### (i) *Diversification of the funding base for HE*

The PSI is of the view that a more cost-effective use of resources must be established for the HE sector in Ireland. Accordingly, this will require an evidence-based and diversified funding model which must be flexible enough to accommodate the range of specialisations within the sector. While performance is one such source of evidence, it will be vital to establish measures that will reflect the range of functions and activities of the HE sector, such as research, teaching, scholarship and service to the community.

While society benefits generally from the existence of a healthy and well-performing HE sector (and its function as a public good is argued accordingly), those who derive a direct economic benefit from HE should also be required to contribute directly to its functioning.

The PSI would also advocate greater investment in partnerships, relationships and networks that move beyond HE institutions as territorial blocs.

*(ii) Coherent linking of HE outputs and outcomes with Government economic and social policies*

The growth of institutions and systems towards mass higher education places a strain on existing institutional structures and resources with universities overstretched to realise the wide range of functions and activities with which HE is involved, such as research, teaching, scholarship, and service to the community. There is also pressure on the HE sector to meet expectations regarding its role and its contribution to society and the individual as well as the tension created by the requirements of external accrediting bodies, for example, the Royal Colleges, who oversee aspects of training in professional schools. As a result of the sector's multiplicity of functions, there must be a mechanism to ensure that Government's socio-economic requirements are aligned with the HE sector's outputs. This must happen through a variety of channels but needs to be driven by coordinated, high-level Government policy-making.

The HE sector, and universities in particular, need to have the flexibility and the resources to change without having to await system-wide reforms, subject to inherent ground rules relating to funding sources and value for money.

*(iii) Strengthening of the role of practice research in the field of knowledge production*

The HE sector needs to widen its research focus to meet the needs of practice-based (or applied) research, such as the action research carried out in clinical pharmacy settings. By its nature, practice research fits with the categorisation by Gibbons *et al.*'s (1994) concept of Mode 2 research, i.e. transdisciplinary research that takes place in a more heterogeneous and flexible socially distributed system than disciplinary research ('Mode 1' as per Gibbons *et al.*), which is institutionalised, mainly in universities. In order to maintain the position of the HE sector as one of the most important drivers of the knowledge economy for the common good, the PSI considers it essential that framework structures be established that will connect those in practice with the HE sector. It is clear that the research funding agencies will also play a role in furthering this objective. Key performance indicators will also need to be adjusted accordingly to accommodate other forms of knowledge production.

### **3. The barriers or obstacles which the PSI would identify to the achievement of those objectives**

▪ *The HE Sector*

In view of the particular characteristics of the HE sector, it is vital that the sector can adapt to change and has the institutional capacity and the ability to respond to the changes required in a timely manner. As such, the PSI is concerned that a major obstacle to the achievement of the above-mentioned obstacles could come from within the HE sector itself.

Gibbons *et al.* (1994, p. 151) note that universities have changed more in the past few decades than in the previous three hundred years and that while we should not underestimate their capacities for change, their capacities to resist change are also formidable. Gibbons *et al.* further

point out that even though some higher education institutions show a capacity for change, the needs of markets and users are changing faster than the capacities of most institutions to respond. An egalitarian system needs to be found to more adequately address the inequities that currently exist in Ireland in terms of access to third level education. Investment needs to be made in the curriculae in second level education to enable a seamless transition to the third and fourth level sectors. The PSI would urge that this be factored into any future planning scenarios for the HE sector in Ireland.

- *The role and mission of the HE sector*

The literature on HE points to a major debate that has been going on for the past decade as to the idea of the university and its role in society, with some arguing that there is no longer a clear sense of what the university stands for (see, for instance, Barnett 2000, p. 14). This debate around the role of the university can be extended to encompass a debate about the role of the HE sector in general. The PSI is of the view that there appears to be a lack of understanding by key stakeholders as to the purpose of HE in Ireland. This lack of understanding can lead to ambiguity as to mission, role, purpose, etc. The development of a clear and shared mission for the HE sector in Ireland needs to be considered and planned at the highest levels and implemented across the sector.

- *Strategic planning*

In view of the levels of uncertainty facing governments worldwide, this brings to the fore the need for government to be even more strategic in its goal-setting and planning. The lack of strategic planning for particular sectors at government policy-making level impacts on the ability of the HE sector to respond. Accordingly, this leads to an absence of clarity within the HE sector as to how government requirements can be met. A failure to engage in evidence-based and joined-up policy development for sectors that are strategic to the future development of the Irish economy will create barriers to the achievement of the objectives as outlined above. There needs to be a real commitment to cross-sectoral working in government departments to set national priorities for all of health. Due acknowledgement needs to be given to the psycho-social determinants of health. Moreover, barriers of professional self-interest as well as the significant profits of multinationals and their influence on professionals and governments, need to be made transparent and addressed.

- *Lack of educational research and development across disciplines*

The current low levels of applied educational research across disciplines, particularly at undergraduate level, will impede the achievement of the above-mentioned objectives. Outdated teaching and learning practices will not serve the needs of the knowledge society with its focus on lifelong learning and, in particular, the development of competent professionals and the maintenance of that competence. Regulatory bodies and the public alike place increasing emphasis on continuing professional development and the HE sector is not resourced to respond adequately to this challenge.

## References

- Barnett, R. (2000) 'Reconfiguring the University' in Scott, P. (ed.) *Higher Education Re-formed*. London: Falmer Press pp. 114-129
- Commission of the European Communities (2003) *Communication from the Commission: The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge* [COM (2003) 58 final]. Brussels: Commission of the European Communities
- Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzman, S., Scott, P. & Trow, M. (1994) *The new production of knowledge: The dynamics of science and research in contemporary societies*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.