

## Press release

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# Minister publishes independent report on supports for PhD researchers in Ireland

From [Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science](#)  
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Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris has today published the first report of an Independent National Review of State Supports for PhD Researchers.

In November 2022, Minister Harris appointed Dr Andrea Johnson and David Cagney to undertake an independent review of current State supports for PhD researchers.

Following extensive consultation and analysis, the Co-Chairs provide recommendations on the following:

- financial supports, with particular regard to stipend levels
- issues encountered by PhD researchers coming to Ireland from outside the European Union/ European Economic Area
- improving PhD graduate outcomes

Speaking today, Minister Harris said:

“I am pleased to receive this independent report about how we can better support PhD researchers in Ireland.

"I would like to thank Dr Johnson and Mr Cagney, as well as all stakeholders who have so constructively engaged with the process.

"This marks an inflection point in our thinking on many critical issues for PhD researchers and how we can better support them to contribute to the realisation of Impact 2030's vision."

The Co-Chairs have prioritised pressing challenges facing PhD researchers in terms of stipend levels and the particular issues being encountered by PhD researchers coming to Ireland from outside the EU or EEA. They have therefore concentrated on these in their first report. With its publication today, they will now focus on how best to progress making recommendations on the outstanding elements of the terms of reference in their concluding report.

Impact 2030, Ireland's national research and innovation strategy, sets the ambition of Ireland becoming a global leader in nurturing, attracting and retaining talent to drive research and innovation in our higher education and research system, enterprises, communities and public services.

In order to advance this and to foster a consistent research student experience, the Co-Chairs undertook an extensive stakeholder consultation process, with over 750 written submissions received and 35 stakeholder meetings held with PhD researcher groups, higher education institutions, research funders, trade unions, enterprise representative bodies and relevant international counterparts.

In the report, the Co-Chairs recommend an increased stipend level, with an optimum target of €25,000.

They acknowledge the potential ramifications of any such change on public finances and recognise that significant additional work will be needed in order give effect to such a recommendation.

Speaking upon submission of their first report to the Minister, Dr Johnson and Mr Cagney said:

"We were delighted to be invited by the Minister to undertake this independent review.

“Our PhD researcher community is a vital element of Ireland’s research talent pipeline; they are our future researchers and innovators across all parts of society and the economy.”

This first report provides a rich picture, at a point in time, of a range of important issues that now need to be considered by all stakeholders.

Any budgetary implications of recommendations will be dealt with through the normal budgetary processes.

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## Full PhD review report

Read the full report below.



### PhD Review - First Report

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## Notes

The Review Terms of Reference comprise examination of:

- current financial supports for PhD researchers

- the adequacy, consistency and equity of current arrangements
- the status of PhD researchers (employee/ student) including a review of international comparators
- impact on the funding of research programmes of any adjustments to current supports
- graduate outcomes, including return on investment
- visa requirements and duration for non-EU students

Because of their particular complexity, the following issues will require deeper analysis prior to final recommendations being made:

- consistency and equity of approaches in how PhD researchers are supported, for example, those coming from underrepresented groups
- the status of a PhD researcher, that is, classification as either a student or an employee

The Co-Chairs will prepare a final review report to consider these outstanding issues. The matter of status will, in particular, require significant examination of light of its deep complexity, for example, with regard to the Employment Control Framework.

In their first report, on the basis of available evidence and stakeholder urgency, the Co-Chairs, make the following recommendations.

## Financial Supports: Stipends

Based on their extensive stakeholder consultation, review of international comparators and analysis of all available data, the Co-Chairs recommend that the stipend offered in Ireland be increased significantly, within an optimum target of €25,000, subject to funding availability. They advise that increases should take effect from the start of the 2023/2024 academic year, but no later than 1 January 2024. They further recommend that the stipend is adjusted thereafter in alignment with appropriate indices that reflect ongoing changes to the cost of living.

They acknowledge the potential ramifications of any such change on public finances and recognise that significant additional work will be needed in order give effect to such a recommendation, noting the complexity also arising from the multiplicity of different funding sources and channels involved.

## Particular challenges facing non-EU/ EEA PhD researchers

The report recommends that the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, engages with the Departments of Justice and Enterprise, Trade and Employment in order to mitigate the challenges identified, with particular regard to those stemming from administrative arrangements rather than legislative requirements.

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