



The Department of Environment, Climate and Communications Research and Innovation Survey — Public Consultation

Fields marked with * are mandatory.



**An Roinn Comhshaoil,
Aeráide agus Cumarsáide**
Department of the Environment,
Climate and Communications

Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications Research and Innovation Strategy — Public Consultation

The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications has set out a vision of a climate neutral, sustainable, and digitally connected Ireland. This will involve leading ambitious climate and environment action across Government and society together with a fundamental shift in sustainable resource use and a transformation of our energy system while at the same time delivering world-class connectivity and cyber security. The Department has identified research and innovation as important enablers of its goals, and is one of a group of five Government Departments which invest significantly in research and innovation. Impact 2030, the national research and innovation strategy, outlines a strong role for the Department in delivering on Strategic Objectives in Climate, Environment and Sustainability (including Energy), and in Digital Transformation (including cyber security). During 2023, the Department is now developing its inaugural Research and Innovation Strategy.

Please complete this survey by 5:30 pm on Friday 11th August.

Note 1: There are no mandatory consultation questions. Fields can be left blank if you do not wish to answer a particular question.

Note 2: Responses to each of the consultation questions is limited to 2000 characters.

Note 3: Copying and pasting text into the boxes directly from Microsoft Word may cause user experience issues. To avoid this, it is recommended to 'paste as plain text'.

Note 4: You can download a PDF copy of your completed survey after you have submitted it.

* Please enter your name

Text of 5 to 200 characters will be accepted

* Please enter your email address

* Please enter your occupation

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please enter the name of that organisation.

200 character(s) maximum

Job Title (if applicable)

What gaps do you see in the Department's current research and innovation activities? How should we address those gaps in the Department Research and Innovation Strategy?

2000 character(s) maximum

When it comes to questions like climate change, energy use, and broader pollution, the science is often well understood. There is certainly more scope needed for environmental monitoring and development of solutions, and this work should continue to be supported. What seems to be lacking is a sense of how the many solutions we have are, or are not, being adopted and implemented. That would apply to individuals and households, as well as communities, businesses, and local and national government. Why is the uptake of solar PV so slow, even when it makes so much financial and environmental sense? Why are the environmental and climate impacts of purchasing decisions not considered or discussed? The climate impacts of buying a new large SUV (whether EV or ICE) are terrible! Much better to buy a smaller car, or a cargo bike instead.

So questions around the transition to sustainability are crucial, and researchers in the social sciences are vital in this regard. Economic, sociological, and psychological research around sustainability must be a key part of research funding, alongside research in engineering and science, such as I do.

What actions can the Department take to identify future trends in the areas under our remit?

2000 character(s) maximum

For many years, the sorts of funding calls from the EPA (a potentially important funding source for my research) have focussed on extremely narrow topics that primarily help the EPA carry out its role. This is hardly research, and such topics are limited by what EPA personnel themselves see and are aware of. This is a great loss, because the wider research community could be using its broader (or at least different) insights to show the EPA what topics and trends should be studied further. That is, while there could be some scope for targetted projects that essentially serve the EPA (or SEAI etc.), much more scope should be given to open-ended topics that allow the research community to (well) do research. I am pleased to say that recently the EPA is allowing more open research calls, and I encourage them and other agencies to continue this trend to get the greatest impact and insight from the research community.

Are there specific thematic areas relevant to the Department's remit which you would like to see more research and innovation activity in? How can this be achieved?

2000 character(s) maximum

I have highlighted the social sciences above, and particularly economics, sociology, psychology. I also believe that much more research is needed on communicating environmental messages to the public as well as on behaviour change research.

Have you views on the impact of disruptive technologies such as AI, Quantum and 6G as part of the digital transformation agenda and the implications of these technologies for the Department?

2000 character(s) maximum

These have some potential, to be sure. Technical solutions (like EVs etc) have an important role to play in a transition to a sustainable future. However, there is NO silver bullet, and I would be concerned that looking for a silver bullet (AI etc.) would waste time, energy and resources, to the harm of our environment and at significant cost to the State. So funding for these sorts of technical solutions should be balanced and restrained.

How can the Department better communicate its research and innovation needs?

2000 character(s) maximum

More open-ended research projects will help inform the Department about the most important needs in innovation and research. Thematic research funding topics could be helpful to indicate the sorts of information the Department is seeking. But again, I would try to keep such themes relatively open and create space for genuine research and meaningful contributions from the research community.

How can the Department work more effectively to source evidence from the national research and innovation community to support its work in policy development, policy implementation, and the uptake of new technologies?

2000 character(s) maximum

How can the Department engage more effectively with all stakeholders in the national research and innovation system? If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please state how the Department could more effectively engage with your organisation.

2000 character(s) maximum

Should the Department seek to grow its capacity to carry out in-house research? If yes, how can this be achieved?

2000 character(s) maximum

Some level of in-house research capacity could be helpful for small-scale research questions (and would be more important in e.g., EPA & SEAI), but in general I think the bulk of research work should be carried out in universities.

Are there examples internationally of Government strategies on research and innovation in climate, communications / digital, circular economy, cyber security, energy or environment that we should examine? If so, can you provide details?

2000 character(s) maximum

I am not current with other national research strategies.

Are there any other matters you wish to raise in relation to the development of the research and innovation strategy?

2000 character(s) maximum

I think much harm has been done to the Irish research community through funnelling a large proportion of research funding to a small number of research clusters. For those not in such clusters, whether because of topic mismatch, timing, or just dumb luck, the consequences for their research careers can be very negative. Because success breeds success, researchers outside such clusters could be sidelined in research funding and outputs for the rest of their careers. This is both demoralising and a massive waste of talent. I am not convinced that such large research clusters are, on the whole, more effective than individual research projects, and their impacts across the broader research community can be very negative.

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