

# An Irish slice of EU science funding

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Sir, – Ireland’s poor success rate in winning grants from the European Research Council (Business+Technology, August 16th) comes as no surprise to many of us in the Irish scientific community, given recent warnings from a number of international funding agencies. What is of particular concern is that new Government policy, which is driving Science Foundation Ireland’s adoption of Forfás’s research prioritisation themes, may compound Ireland’s underperformance in Europe’s flagship science funding scheme.

At the recent Euroscience Open Forum held in Dublin in July, numerous Nobel prizewinners, the head of the European Research Council (ERC), and the European Research Commissioner, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, all emphasised the importance of maintaining investment in frontier research. Indeed, the commissioner highlighted the crucial importance of investment in fundamental scientific research to maintain the EU’s economic competitiveness.

At the same time, Helga Nowotny, head of the European Research Council, warned that redirection of funds to commercially-focused research rather than basic research threatens scientific excellence in Ireland, and expressed fears that both young and experienced researchers will abandon the country as a result. Prof Nowotny highlighted that there is a direct correlation between the percentage of GDP spent on research and success at the European Research Council. If Ireland fails to fund basic research, ERC funding will be cut off from Irish scientists, which would be a major failure on the part of the Government.

We therefore call on the Government and SFI to continue to invest broadly in fundamental research and not to restrict their support to narrow prioritised themes. Without this investment, it will be difficult for Ireland to secure a higher proportion of the €80 billion to be spent on research in the next EU Framework programme. This is an opportunity that Ireland cannot afford to miss. – Yours, etc,

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