



**Opening Statement to the Joint Committee for Education, Further and Higher
Education, Research Innovation and Science October 24th, 2023**

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Cathaoirleach and members of the Committee,

I would like to thank the Committee for the invitation to meet with you here today to discuss the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science's Public Service Performance Review indicators.

I am Dr. Deirdre Lillis, Assistant Secretary with responsibility for the Research and Innovation Division in the Department. My Division also encompasses the units with policy responsibility for International engagement and for our Evidence for Policy function.

This is a particularly timely session as the Department is nearing completion of a review of our performance and equality indicators. That review acknowledges the evolution and significant advances in the Department's agenda and will ensure that we provide a clear focus on our performance rather than just activity.

The Evidence for Policy Unit in the Department is undertaking this review, during which they have been very cognisant of the helpful work undertaken by your colleagues in the Parliamentary Budget Office(PBO).

In reviewing our PSPR indicators we are focusing on the link between funding and outcomes. That is the key dynamic that is being assessed in this process. This is a focus for the Department as we are working to improve the evidence available for policy making by connecting policy makers with researchers in our universities, by implementing new science advice structures and appointing a Government Science Advisor, investing in solving national grand challenges in climate, digital and other key areas, and enhancing the impact of the public investment in research and innovation so the most people can benefit. We are working to ensure that we can provide the best possible information so Ireland can make the best policy decisions.

The review of our PSPR which is underway will also address our indicators in terms of Equality budgeting. This involves providing greater information on the likely impact of budgetary measures across a range of areas, including income, health and education, as well as how outcomes differ across gender, age, ethnicity and so on. The Department is very much focused on ensuring that further and higher education is accessible and equitable; as such, we are hopeful that the adoption of an equality budgeting framework



will be of assistance in anticipating potential impacts in the budgetary process and put equality outcomes to the fore in our reporting.

This initiative is in line with the Department's approach to gender, where the Parliamentary Budget Office has previously noted that our indicators are well developed, notwithstanding the need for improvements in relation to several other factors, including socioeconomic status, disability and ethnicity. The review process I am referring to will also act as the vehicle for these areas to be addressed.

The Public Service Performance Report we're discussing today includes detailed metrics from the Department's activity in 2022. Across the outputs and impacts, and each of the high-level goals we have performed strongly, exceeding or meeting the targets across the number of people enrolled in apprenticeships, as full time-higher education students, undergraduates, postgraduates as well as a range of other targets.

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science marked the third year since its establishment this summer. In that time the Government have overseen a significant reduction in the cost of third level education while also taking the necessary steps to bring about a sustainable funding landscape for the tertiary sector. With respect to the sector with which I am most familiar, Research, Science and Innovation, we are implementing the objectives of Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy. We have established the Civil Service Research Network which will connect policy makers with researchers in the university sector to maximise the return on our public investment in research. In addition we are establishing new science advice structures and improving our engagement with international organisations. The Department is also finalising draft legislation for consideration by the Oireachtas that would see the establishment of a new research and development agency by amalgamating SFI and IRC which will for the first time put all researchers on the same footing, bringing our an Arts and Humanities and STEM research communities together. For the first time, this new agency will have an explicit function to enhance evidence for policy from our investment in research. All of this combined helps us achieve our ambition that the best possible information informs policy decisions.

I understand the Committee has interest in a number of issues across the Department's work ranging from apprenticeship, green skills to supports for students to name just a few.

I am sure that the Committee may want to discuss these or indeed other matters in more depth, and myself and my colleagues are of course happy to assist the Committee in its deliberations to the greatest extent possible.