

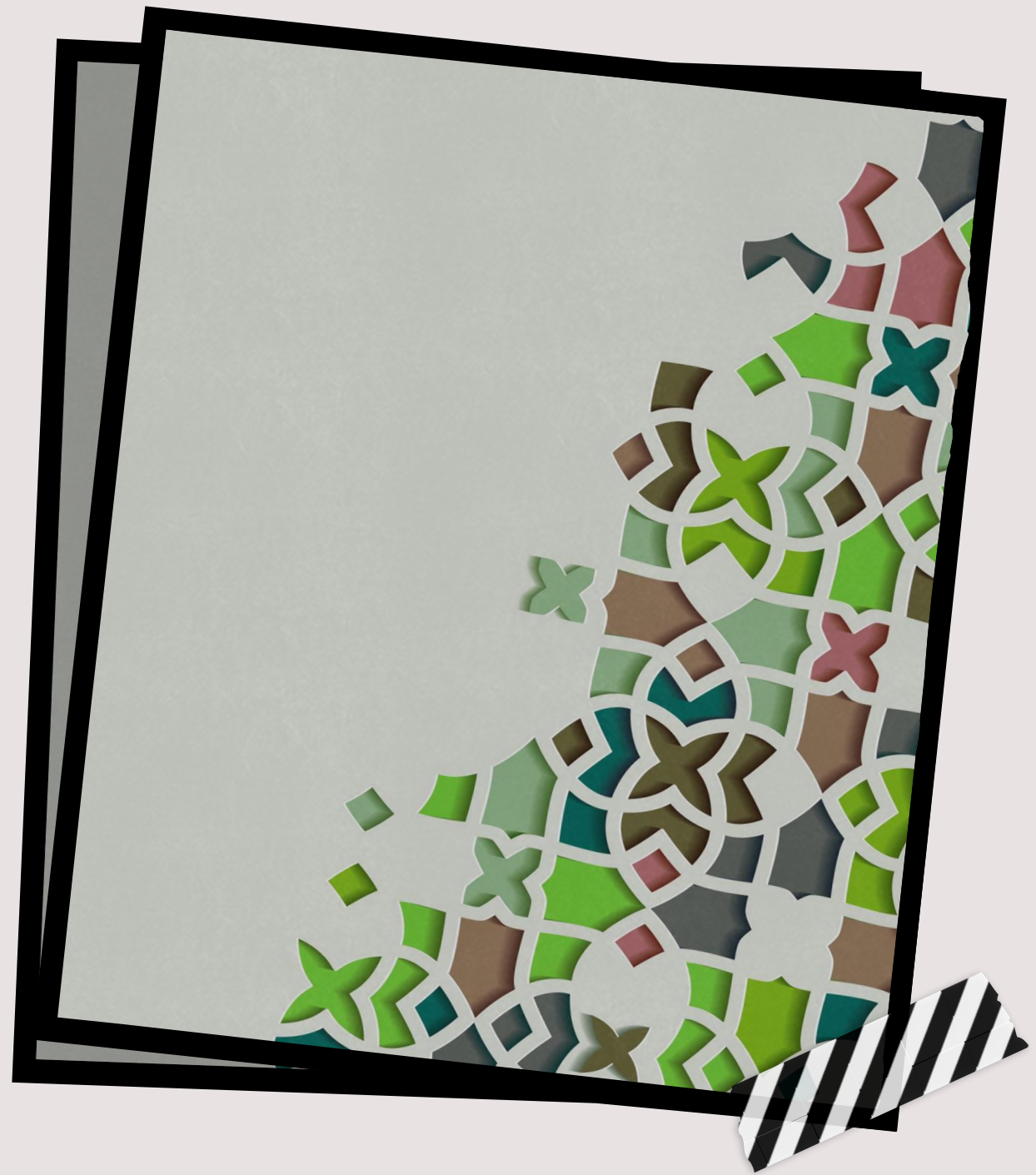
Academic

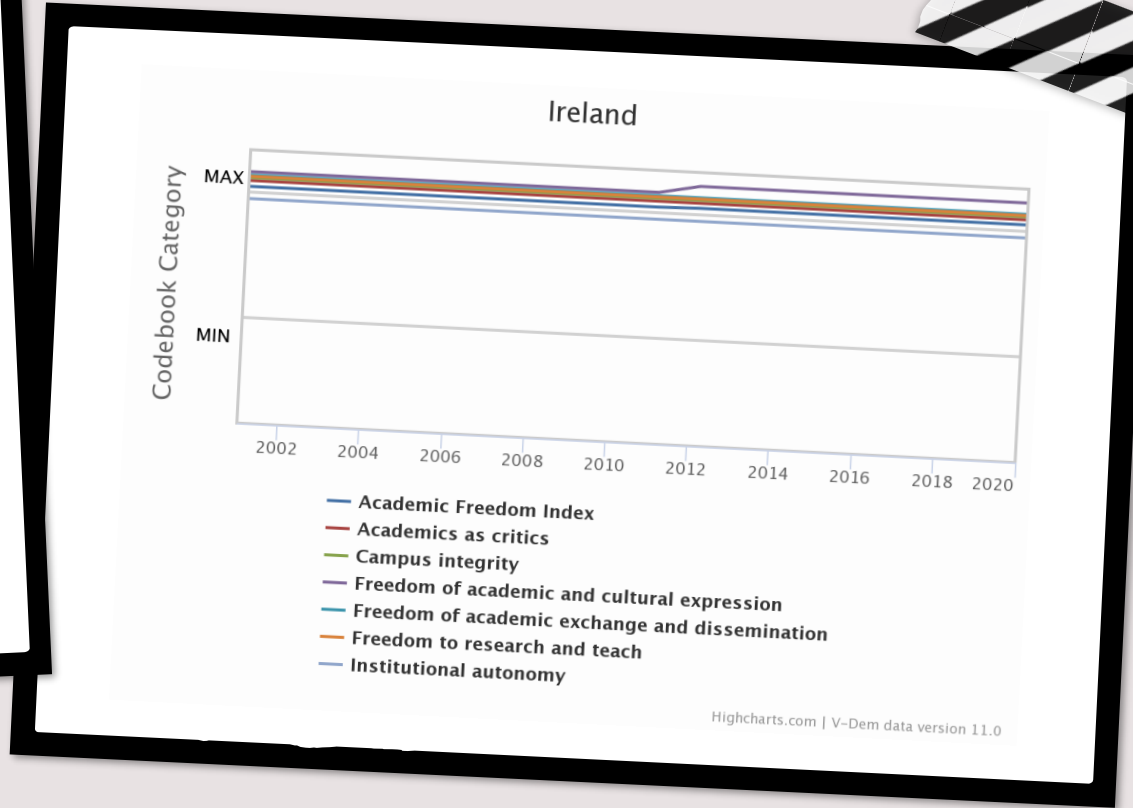
Freedom in

Ireland

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Why Ireland?



Identified deficits

Reduction and restriction of public money in HE since 2008

Shift toward HEIs implementing state policies centered on economic growth, and an emphasis on HEIs providing value for (public) money

increasing level of oversight and extensive regulatory frameworks affecting HEIs

institutional autonomy is a “gift” from the state which institutions must “earn”

Rise of precarious employment

Reduction of tenure



Legal

protection of

academic

freedom

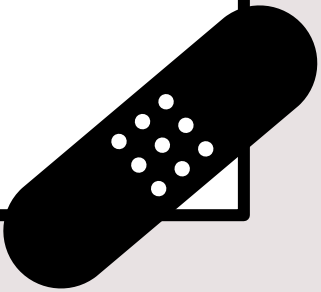
In performing its functions, a university shall have “**the right and responsibility to preserve and promote the traditional principles of academic freedom**” in both internal and external affairs, and is entitled to regulate its affairs in accordance with “**its independent ethos and traditions**” as well as with academic freedom. (The Universities Act of 1997)

Legislation does not explicitly provide protections for institutional autonomy in the same clear manner as for academic freedom



Freedom to research and teach

- **Freedom to research** – including the process of investigation, choice of methodology, and venues for publication – **does not appear to be restricted** in a manner that would violate the principles of academic freedom
- **Ethical** and other **limitations are set** primarily **at the institutional level** by ethics committees comprising academic staff. This could facilitate introduction of limitations. Yet, no evidence.
- Irish scholars can **design** their **teaching curricula** and teach their courses without state interference in terms of topics, materials, and methods.
- **No** evidence was found of official **state censorship** of Irish academics. Even though the government can prioritize certain disciplines and research over other.
- **The extent of state control over funding and the allocation of funding for national priorities is a cause of some concern, particularly as regards the connections between funding and state priorities**
- **Self-censorship is not visible** in the Irish context, except in very mild forms.





Institutional autonomy and governance (I)



- **High level of centralization**
- **Autonomy as a gift from the state to HEIs**, for which they must ensure their accountability in return (Department of Education and Skills “National Strategy for Higher Education 2030”)
- The legislation regulating Irish public HEIs sets clear **requirements for the establishment, composition, and operation of governance structures**. However, government-selected representatives are a small proportion of the overall number
- The government’s reform proposals aim to **reduce the size of governing boards** to 10–15 members, with an external majority (criticism: it would leave little to no place for elected staff or student members)
- The HEA has detailed policies in place to **oversee HEI finances**.
- State expenditure on HE more than halved between 2009 and 2012, from approximately €202 million to €87 million. In parallel to **cuts in state funding**, there has been a shift toward HEIs obtaining more funding from student fees
- **According to an EUA review, out of the 29 countries and regions in Europe, Ireland ranks second-lowest in terms of staffing autonomy**. The Employment Control Framework (ECF) instituted a moratorium on certain hiring, firing, promotion, and pay decisions in the public sector
- HEIs’ promotion and tenure processes are largely transparent and based on merit. However, the low level of **female representation** in the higher echelons of academia does raise questions regarding gender bias in promotions.
- Concerns have been raised about the casualization of contracts in the HE sector, precarious employment, and these academics’ opportunity to earn a living wage



Institutional autonomy and governance (II)

The proposed reform of the HEA act will likely result in significant changes to HE in Ireland.

*(e) to respect institutional autonomy while holding institutions to account for high performance [...];
(j) to respect the Academic Freedom of higher education institutions and the academic staff of HEIs*
Department of Education and Skills, “Outline of the Legislative Proposals for the Reform of the Higher Education Authority Act, 1971,”

Concerns: overcontrolling, micromanagement, erosion of academic freedom principle



***Efforts to
promote
academic
freedom***

- trade unions and associations promoting the rights of academics, including in relation to workplace relations (IFUT, IUA, TUI, SIPTU)
- Academic activism, raising awareness, organizing conferences, actively practicing academic freedom in contested situations (case of Southampton-Cork conference in 2016, and then Trinity College Conference in 2017)
- No evidence of promotion from state's side



Challenges to fundamental academic values

- Demand of accountability → Restrictions of institutional autonomy
- Restrictions of institutional autonomy → decrease of student participation, threats to academic freedom, limitations of the scope of social responsibility



Effect of COVID-19 on Irish universities

- Increase of pressure on precarious workers (shortening the contracts, not changing conditions of the contracts, etc.)
- Increase of pressure on female workers
- Insufficient efforts from the institutional side to adjust the working conditions to new pandemic requirements
- Windows of opportunities for higher presence of state in HEI decision-making

!! There is strong need to re-calibrate HE policies to make them more human-centered
(Shankar et al 2021)



Opportunities for collaboration

Despite the challenges related to managerial approach and increased control of HEI, freedom of teaching and research in Ireland stays at the highest level.

Irish academics have experience of resilience and mobilizing for protection of free speech.

Irish institutions self-accredit degrees within universities which opens the window not only for new innovative programs, but also joint degree opportunities

