

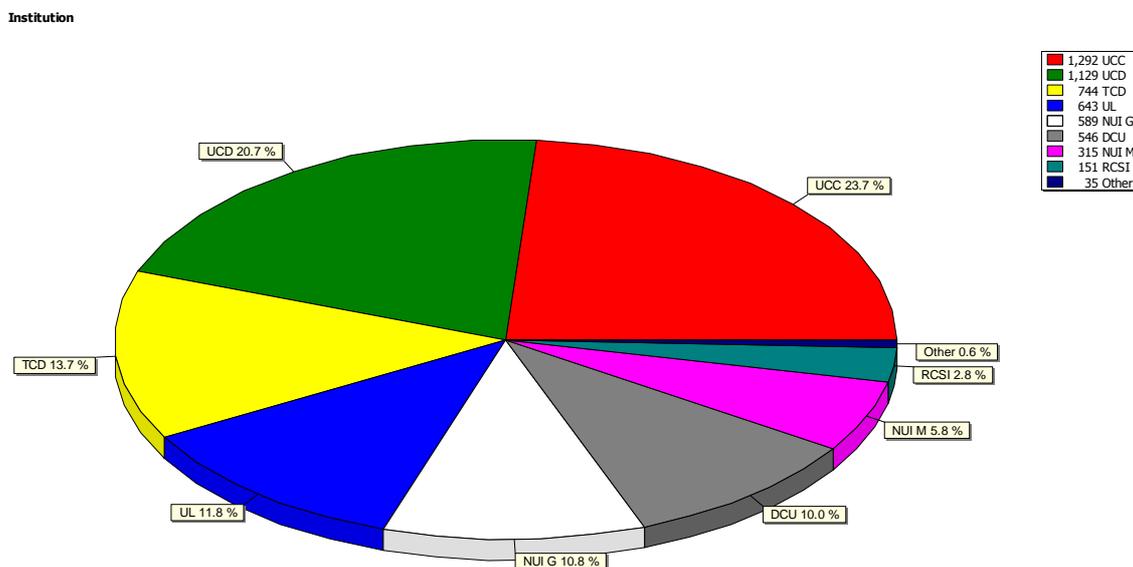
IReL Impact Survey: summary of findings, April 2009

The IReL Monitoring Group conducted a survey of researchers at the seven Irish universities and RCSI from 25 March to 9 April 2009. The survey sought to capture the impact of the Irish Research e-Library (IReL) on research, the nature of usage and any suggestions for improvements. It built upon a similar survey in 2007 and facilitated comparison of data between the two years. This document summarises the key findings from the 2009 survey.

Note: where tables are used, the most commonly selected response is highlighted

Demographics

1. The survey achieved a **response rate** of 37%, with 5464 respondents nationally. This represented a doubling of the response rate achieved in 2007, as well as major increase on the previous number of respondents, 2266 (excluding RCSI).
2. The distribution of responses per institution was as follows:



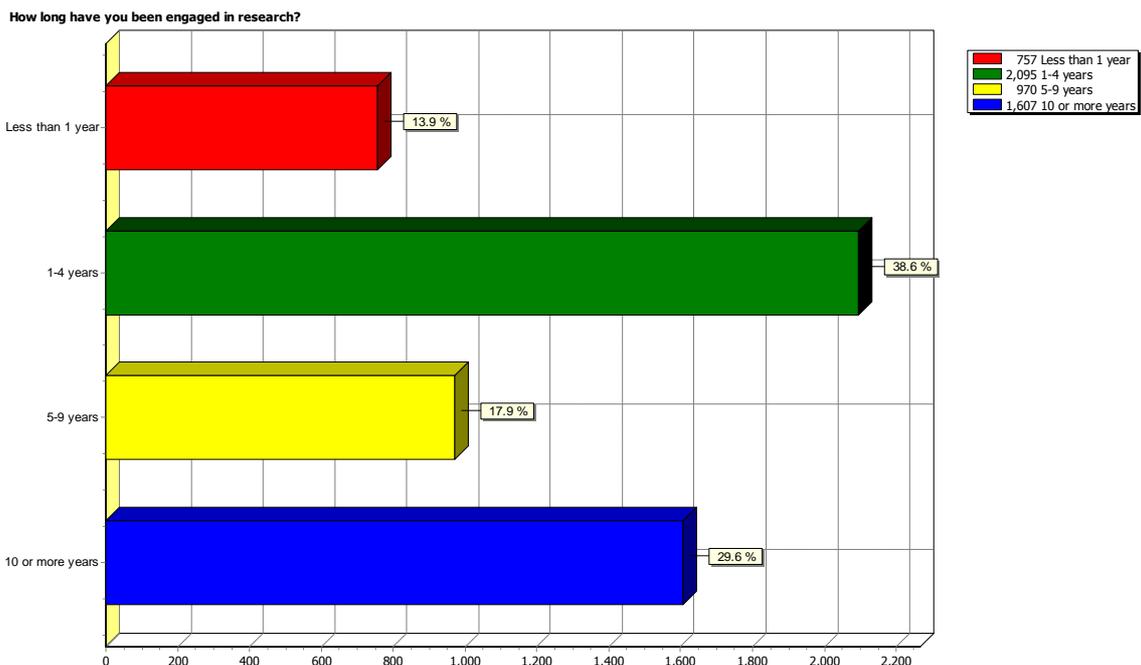
3. Response **by discipline** showed a balance of 56.5% Science Technology and Medicine (STM) and 38% Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS). The latter figure was almost same as in 2007 but the drop in the STM percentage corresponded with the 5% “other” response (the “other” category was introduced in 2009 and was used largely to indicate a more specific discipline, mostly in the sciences, eg chemistry, nursing) :

| Response | Count | Percent |
|---------------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Agricultural Sciences | 67 | 1.2% |
| Arts/Humanities | 909 | 16.8% |
| Biological and Medical Sciences | 1224 | 22.6% |
| Business/Commerce | 341 | 6.3% |
| Computer Sciences | 344 | 6.4% |
| Earth, Atmospheric and Ocean Sciences | 151 | 2.8% |
| Engineering | 538 | 10.0% |
| Law | 172 | 3.2% |
| Physical Sciences and Mathematics | 728 | 13.5% |
| Social Sciences | 631 | 11.7% |
| Other | 301 | 5.6% |

4. The respondent population comprised 54.1% staff and 45.9% students, similar to 2007 but with a 2% shift in favour of students; research office staff were included for the first time:

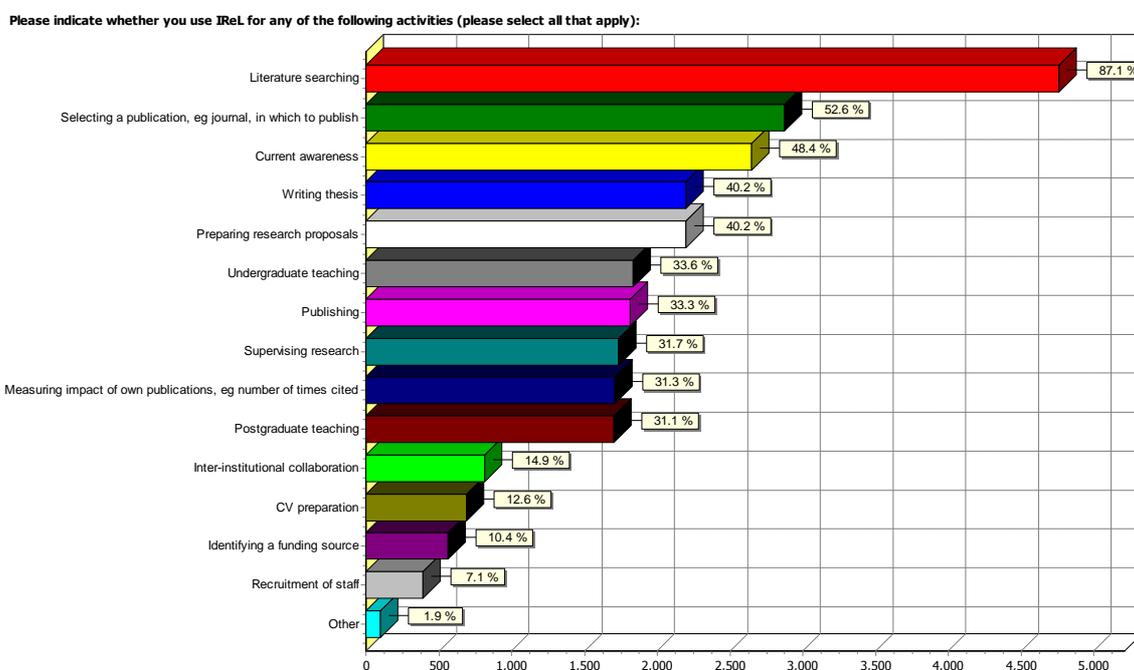
| Response | Count | Percent |
|------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Staff: research-only | 640 | 11.8% |
| Staff: research and teaching | 2257 | 41.5% |
| Staff: Research Office | 43 | 0.8% |
| Student: PhD | 2165 | 39.8% |
| Student: Research Masters | 331 | 6.1% |

5. In terms of experience 47.5% had been researchers for more than five years and 52.5% had been engaged in research for up to four years. This represented a 10% swing in favour of the more experienced grouping.



Using IReL

6. Researchers use IReL for a range of purposes:

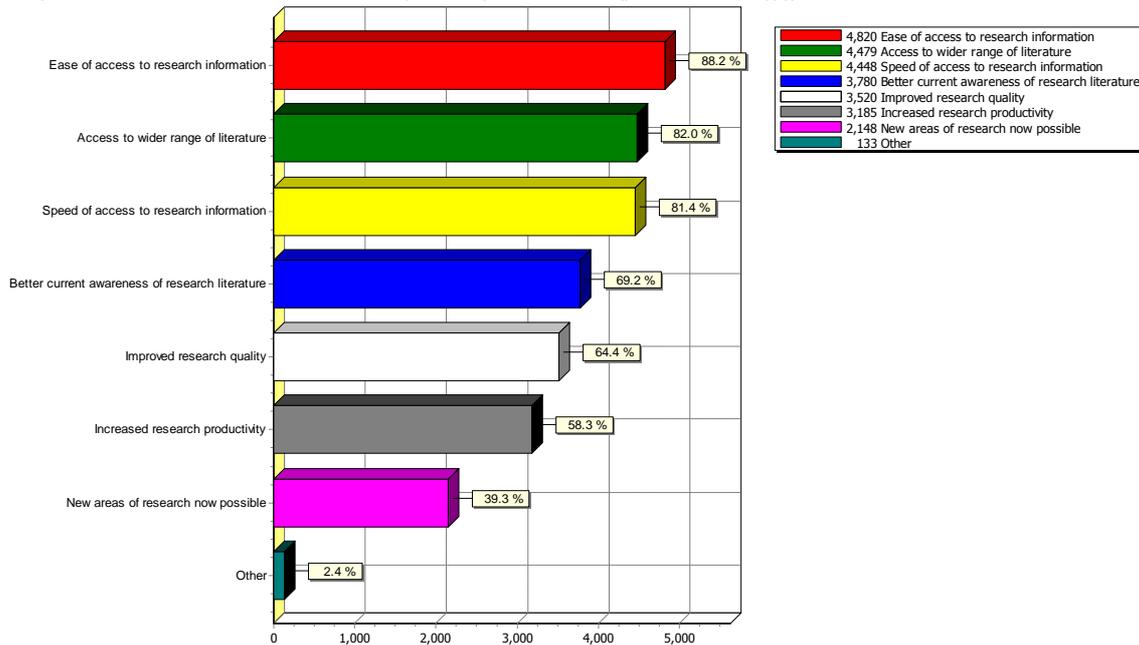


Relative to 2007 the top 6 activities remain unchanged, although the first three (literature searching, deciding where to publish and current awareness) show increased percentages of between 4.7% and 8.5%. Publishing has increased by over 5% and moves from tenth to seventh in the list. Also on the increase are measuring the impact of own publications (+2.7%) and inter-institutional collaboration (+4.1%), while almost 400 respondents indicated the use of IReL in staff recruitment, a new category in 2009.

Only four activities registered a percentage decrease, in each case minor, compared with 2007. These are writing thesis (-0.2%), undergraduate teaching (-1.7%), supervising research (-0.6%) and CV preparation (-1.1%).

7. IReL has impacted very positively on research in a number of ways according to researchers, as shown in the chart on the following page. Over 80% of respondents cite easier and faster access to research information or access to a wider range of literature. Around two-thirds of respondents note better current awareness and improved research quality. Over 3000 respondents pointed to increased research productivity and 2000 indicated that new areas of research are now possible. Responses in the “other” category included environmental savings on travel and paper, easier assessment of research impact and support in attracting researchers.

The provision of access to electronic resources via IReL has impacted on my research as follows (please select all that apply):



“Essential that this access is maintained if Ireland is to be a SMART economy!”

“Access to the most up to date scientific research is a necessity not a perk in modern day academic research.”

“IReL has transformed the way in which I do research. It has meant that I have the same access as researchers in larger, better funded universities.”

“IReL has transformed research support in Ireland. It is indispensable.”

“IREL keeps my research in Ireland, without access to literature I would leave the country”

“Electronic access has revolutionised my research capacity”

“The loss of IReL would destroy my research”

“Without it we will simply NOT be able to compete successfully on an international playing field.”

“I am constantly amazed at how one can take another step in research where only a few short years ago the research would have come to a cul de sac.”

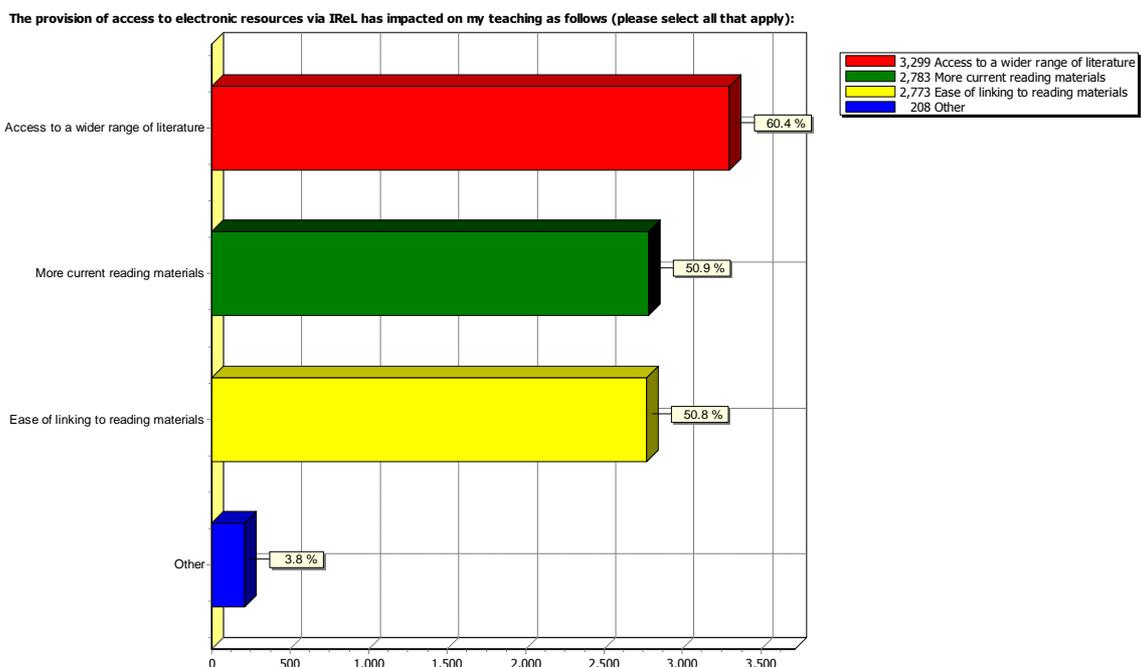
“I am in a newly established department and without this resource I would not be able to access research articles locally”

“As I live and work 1 1/2 hours from university, I couldn't do my MBS p/t by research without this facility.”

“Could not function without it”

“I had worked in the UK for 35 years but their reach and coverage is nothing like IREL

8. IReL also delivers benefits for teaching:



As in the case of research, access to a wider range of literature is cited, while over half of the respondents also noted the provision of more current reading materials and easier linkage to course reading.

“encourages undergrads to employ secondary material in essay writing”

“it has revolutionised teaching by broadening the critical scope and awareness of my students”

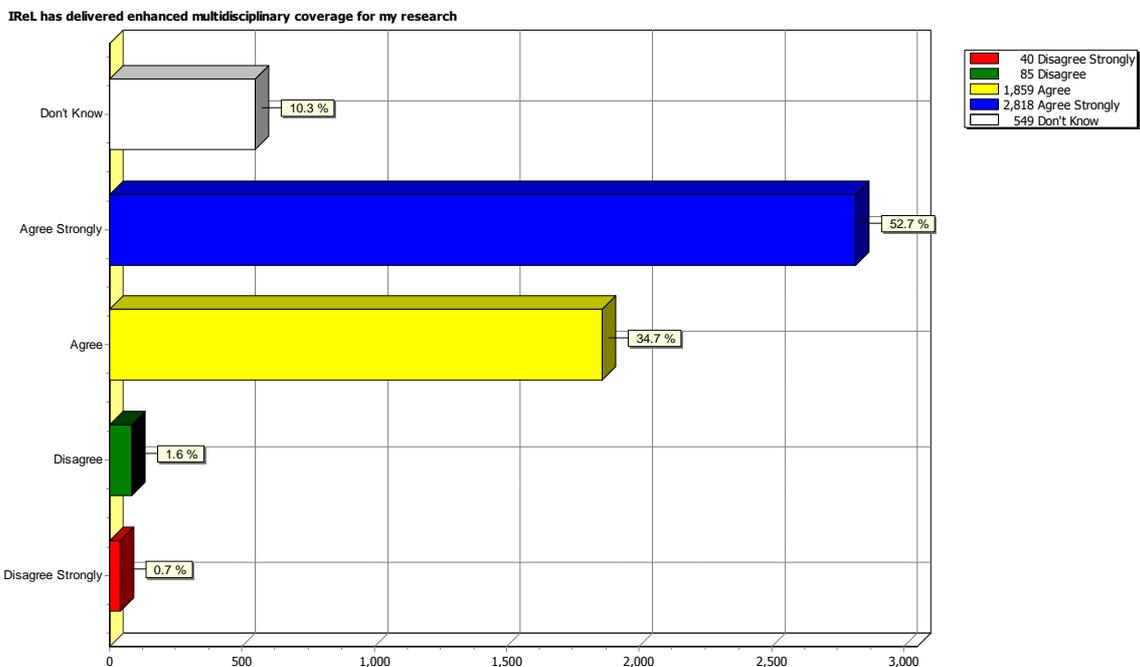
“my teaching is impossible without this. It means that all students have access, rather than a class of 70 fighting over one journal”

“it would be almost impossible to maintain teaching quality to distance learning students without these resources”

“it has made my teaching more evidence based and resulted in better research-led teaching”

“if this resource were cut I would feel obliged to point out to all my students that the responsible authorities had let them down badly”

9. The percentage of respondents in agreement that IReL has delivered **enhanced multidisciplinary coverage** for their research is now 87.4%, up by almost 12% on 2007. Over half of respondents agree strongly, compared with 29.1% in the previous survey.



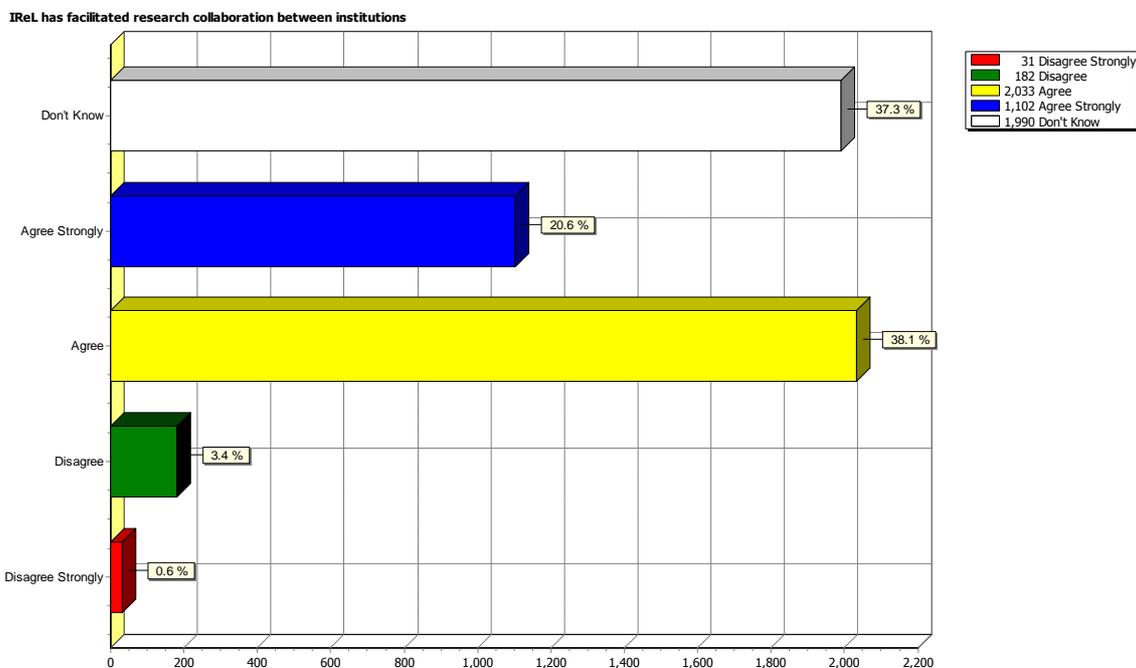
“It has made following research on a broad front feasible, something which is central to the development of an effective research culture in Ireland”

“Atmospheric Science is by its nature multidisciplinary. IRel is essential for this key aspect.”

“My PhD involves a novel interdisciplinary perspective so this capacity is vital for my work”

“This cannot be disputed. The range of literature proved by the IRel system has opened minds to many new possibilities”

10. There is 15:1 agreement, among those respondents holding a definite view, with the statement that IReL has facilitated **collaboration between institutions**, compared with a 4:1 ratio in 2007 when the “don’t know” response was 9% higher.



“Access to this resource has assisted in preparing joint funding proposals, in my own case”

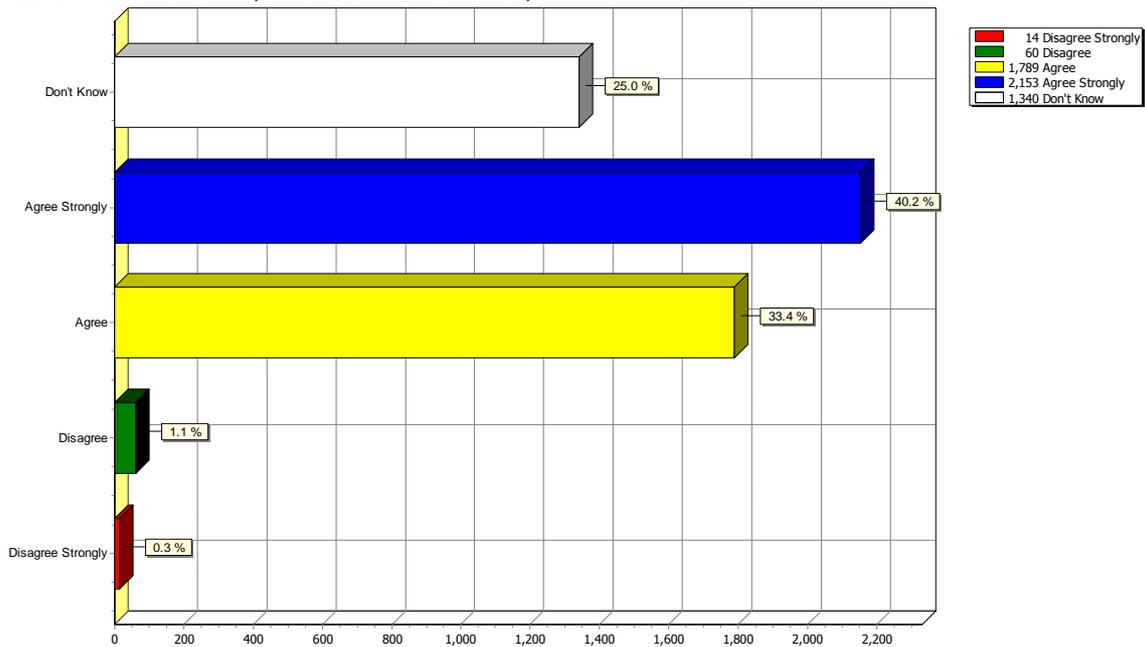
“It has put my group in my institution on a level par with colleagues elsewhere; now we can know everything they know and can be full partners in collaborations.”

“Identification of collaborators in Ireland and overseas has been made easier. I have 3-4 such links in place”

“Electronically-sourced literature is the lifeblood of academic conversations and networking.”

11. Ninety eight per cent of respondents with a definite view agree that IReL has contributed to increased **competitiveness of Irish research internationally**. This figure is up by 4% on the corresponding figure in 2007 when the “don’t know” response was almost 10% higher.

IREL has contributed to increased competitiveness of Irish research internationally



“It contributes to a higher standard of publications”

“You need prompt access; Getting a copy even a few days later is a very poor relation.”

“This is a no-brainer. Having access to all the same information as our competitors means that we have caught up with and in many cases overtaken them. With the resources issue gone, it’s just a question of who has the best ideas.”

“It would be impossible to compete on the international stage without access to IREL”

“When recruiting research staff, IReL is one factor that can really impress.”

“IReL is by far the wisest and most important funding decision taken in Ireland for the third level sector. It truly enables research in Ireland.”

“A large number of countries do not offer the level of access that IReL provides - it gives Ireland a competitive edge and I believe will attract international students of a higher calibre.”

12. Over 3500 individuals took the opportunity to comment on how a **discontinuation of IReL** would affect their research. This in itself is a reflection of the strength of feeling on this issue, as is the terminology used in the comments. For example, the word “disaster” or its variants featured on almost 200 occasions, while over 40 respondents referred to a return to the Dark Ages or the Stone Age and 15 used the term “unthinkable”

“Discontinuation means research criteria will be limited to few journals and that will affect the quality of research.”

“It would be major set back. The continuation of IReL is indispensable for my research, at the pace I want/need it to go.”

“This is unthinkable. IReL provides a world class service, without which credible international research in Ireland would be severely compromised. IReL also facilitates improvements in teaching, especially 'research-led teaching' which enables us to combine hard-won gains in Irish teaching and research to great effect.”

“Interdisciplinary research would become impossible again.”

“It would put us back in the "stone age" and make Irish research a laughing stock. We can only compete internationally if we have access to knowledge.”

“Without access to the latest research and ideas, I would doubtless end up wasting a lot of time and my research output and indeed my career would slow.”

“Access to all scientific journals, in all fields, is ESSENTIAL to carrying out serious research. Compared to the real cost of doing research (euro 500M - 1B per annum ? in Ireland), IReL is cheap.”

“It would mean that I could not compete internationally. This would restrict access to international funding and also would reduce chances of leading international projects.”

“Discontinuation of IReL would in fact mean that I would be unable to continue my studies”

“It would seriously affect the productivity of my research, and reduce the value for money for the Irish Taxpayer”

“The convenience of having access to articles on-line enhances my ability to respond efficiently to new research grant calls, in particular.”

“IReL is my primary source for articles, and neither library nor personal subscriptions could make up the gap if it were discontinued.”

“Having easy-quick access to latest research is the lifeblood of an academic. Removing this would set us back 10-20 years.”

“It would be a devastating blow and a return to an era when it could take 4 weeks rather than 4 minutes to find a journal article - thus erecting a serious impediment to my international competitiveness.”

“Discontinuation of IReL would possibly have the single biggest negative impact on my ability to carry out research.”

“It would make Ireland peripheral to the research community. I would have to leave and relocate to a less peripheral country with better access. It was a key factor in basing my research team in Ireland as opposed to the UK.”

“It would be a major drawback, and all the more regrettable as it takes time for a resource to be fully appreciated and readily utilised - it is only now coming into its own.”

“IReL has been the most smart, practical and concrete manifestation of a commitment to a Knowledge Economy that I’ve seen. Unlike other initiatives in that area, IReL is unique because it raises ALL boats in teaching and research.”

“Please let's not even contemplate this. If it is discontinued from a research base we would be like third world economy.”

“It would set us back to pre-internet times. Smart economy? Knowledge economy??!”

General

13. The final question of the survey asked respondents for any general comments they wished to make regarding IReL, eg current service, future development, quality of coverage. A deeper investigation of suggestions for improved coverage should be undertaken, but the tendency was to offer some positive comments on IReL’s contribution generally.

“It is imperative for the development of a research led economy that we have ongoing access to a wide range of international journals such as IRel provides”

“Quite simply, it is essential for the future of Ireland's economy!”

“Would like to see greater access to a wider variety of journals and especially back issues.”

“An excellent facility-please maintain and improve it!”

“It is probably the only area in which Ireland comfortably and visibly outstrips its international competition- the immediate provision of a MASSIVE range of online information, the best I have encountered. In addition to keeping my own work at the on the boil, IReL has been instrumental in allowing us to attract high-level researchers and is a real plus for the nation's research effort. I can't rate its importance highly enough.”

“IReL is vital to my teaching and research, and we have come to rely on it greatly since it began.”

“The current service has made it feasible to undertake research during termtime when it is not possible to travel.”

“I know it might be too hard but if they can supply more e-books, it would be more benefit for my research.”

“I think IReL is one of the best "spends" of the recent research investment, in that it is a genuinely "enabling" investment, promoting increased activity, competitiveness and quality across all research personnel, from senior PIs to postgraduates and even undergraduates, and also for administrative staff.”

John Cox
23 April 2009