

## VISION 2004-2008

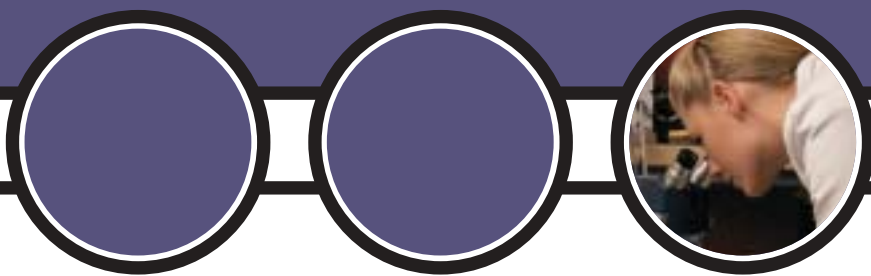
People, Ideas and Partnerships for a  
Globally Competitive Irish Research System





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## Overview

In 1999, Ireland initiated the largest investment in scientific research and engineering in its history by founding Science Foundation Ireland (SFI). Ireland thereby joined the growing number of countries that have recognised that major investments in these activities are required to keep modern economies competitive. SFI and its strategic orientation are central to Ireland's goal of becoming a leader in the global knowledge-based economy.

Ireland's commitment to this goal builds upon ten years of unprecedented growth and development, which has been achieved through partnership with the European Union, strong historical ties to the United States, the skills of its well-educated population, and focussed Government policy. At the same time, science, technology and knowledge-driven enterprises have become increasingly important to economic success in a global society. To ensure that Ireland continues to benefit from its competitive advantages, the Government, through the National Development Plan 2000–2006, made an unprecedented national commitment to support scientific research, technological development and innovation. In 2000, the Government established SFI as a sub-group within Forfás: The National Policy and Advisory Board for Enterprise, Trade, Science, Technology and Innovation. In July 2003, SFI was established on a statutory basis under the Industrial Development (Science Foundation Ireland) Act, 2003.

SFI supports creative and talented people, bold and sophisticated ideas, and strong and effective partnerships. By investing strategically in these areas, SFI promises to significantly enhance Irish science, engineering and economic growth, and bring Ireland distinction for its sustained research excellence. With this document, "People, Ideas and Partnerships for a Globally Competitive Irish Research System: 2004-2008," SFI carries its strategic vision forward.

SFI's initial focus is on fields that underpin biotechnology and information and communications technology. These fields and interdisciplinary links amongst them promise more than any others to drive scientific and economic advancement in the decades ahead. In this context, Ireland's affiliation with leading industries in related fields gives it special competitive advantages.

Since research competitiveness depends above all on great research skill and energy, SFI invests primarily in the target fields that ensure Irish institutions are able to retain talented scientists and engineers within the country, attract them from around the world, and develop new scientists and engineers with strong research skills. SFI also helps build new centres and institutes of excellence, and ensures that researchers have the equipment, laboratories and other infrastructure essential to a world-class research environment in the priority areas.

From 2004 onwards, SFI assumed responsibility for a related initiative, the Basic Research Grants Programme operated for many years by Enterprise Ireland. SFI will develop this scheme so that Irish scientists, engineers and institutions in all fields have expanded opportunities to contribute to Ireland's economic competitiveness.

SFI's final focus is on bringing forward and supporting initiatives that will enable Ireland to capitalise economically on its growing research base. Scientific knowledge changes rapidly, and opportunities for exploration continue to emerge. The SFI Board has urged SFI to contribute ideas to the national dialogue that can help to establish Ireland as a leader of innovation and discovery.



# 1. The Vision and Goals of Science Foundation Ireland

## 1.1. Vision

Through strategic investments in the people, ideas and partnerships essential to outstanding research in strategic areas, Science Foundation Ireland will help build in Ireland research of globally recognised excellence and nationally significant economic importance.

## 1.2. Mission

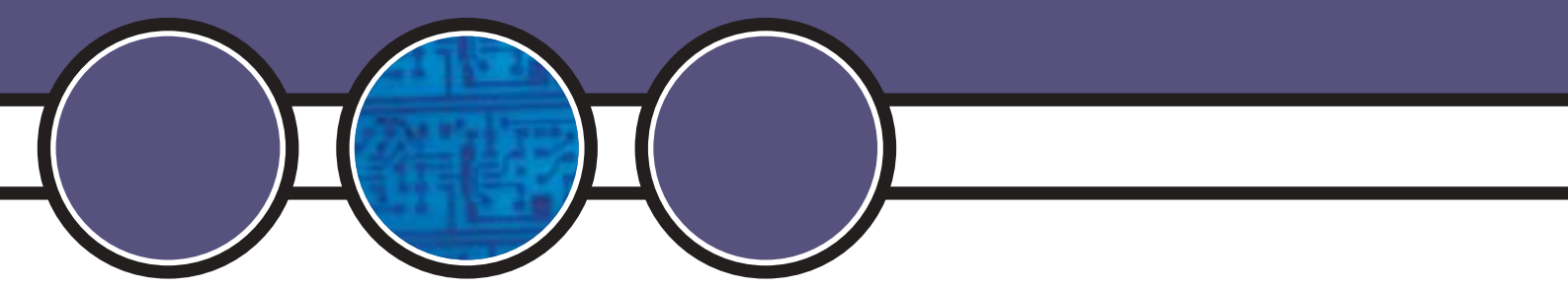
SFI will build and strengthen scientific and engineering research and its infrastructure in the areas of greatest strategic value to Ireland's long-term competitiveness and development.

## 1.3. Strategic Focus: To fulfil this vision and mission, SFI will focus on investments in the target areas that

- i. **Develop Human Capital:** Research and development depend above all else on the talent, ideas and energies of outstanding individuals. SFI will build programmes, fund educational initiatives, provide resources, and support infrastructure that enable Ireland to educate, develop, recruit, and retain outstanding, internationally competitive scientists and engineers pursuing research in areas compatible with Ireland's ambitions for leadership in a knowledge-based economy.
- ii. **Support Strong Ideas:** Innovation requires bold ideas, creative vision, a passion for achievement, and the highest levels of rigour and discipline. SFI will seek out and support individuals and ideas with the greatest potential to bring lasting excellence to research and innovation within Ireland.
- iii. **Promote Partnerships:** Effective research and development require a combination of resources and talents to drive ideas forward rapidly. SFI will, within its strategic remit, seek out and support effective collaborations and partnerships with agencies, institutions and industry in Ireland and around the world that can best advance Ireland's research, technological and economic competitiveness.

## 1.4. Specific Goals for 2008: SFI's strategic investments will produce results vital to Ireland's future. Specifically, through these investments, between 2004 and 2008, SFI will

- i. **Recruit** to Ireland at least 50 researchers or research teams whose accomplishments, potential and recognition by international peers place them amongst the top tier in their disciplines. Collectively, these researchers will be engaged in a portfolio of creative science and engineering research encompassing the pursuit of long- and short-term innovations in areas of biotechnology (BioT) and information and communications technology (ICT) essential to Ireland's future.
- ii. **Fund** the development and expansion of Ireland's research infrastructure, core facilities associated with its grants and awards, and an overheads cost structure that advances the goal



of building a modern Irish research infrastructure. Achieving these objectives will contribute significantly to Ireland's success as an outstanding location for scientific and engineering related to national technological and economic priorities.

- iii. **Initiate** centres, institutes and teams that establish valuable research links between Irish research institutions and both Irish- and foreign-owned companies engaged in BioT or ICT research, including by attracting or substantially increasing the research and development (R&D) investments in Ireland of at least ten foreign-owned multinational firms and by producing at least five significant research collaborations between research institutions and indigenous companies.
- iv. **Support** research activities that initiate the education and training of a stream of post-graduate students and post-doctoral students who bring ideas from the funded research teams and centres into universities, research laboratories and industrial activities in Ireland.
- v. **Provide** support for and, by working with other relevant State agencies, enable the development of a technology-transfer system that brings maximum economic benefit to Ireland through leading-edge intellectual property resulting from its investment in research and technological development and innovation.

**1.5. Metrics of Success: The SFI Board will assess the Foundation in the context of these goals and ensure that SFI is increasing Ireland's international distinction and recognition for research excellence. Specifically, the Board will assess the impact that SFI has on Ireland's strengths in the following dimensions of the strategically chosen fields:**

- Researchers in Ireland employed in the underpinning disciplines, including principal investigators, research fellows, postdoctoral researchers, and postgraduate students.
- Articles published in refereed international science journals.
- Patents and licenses filed by researchers.
- Number of commercial start-ups and multinational and indigenous industrial R&D investments considered valuable to the research infrastructure.
- Breadth and number of Irish scientists and engineers who have earned membership in elective international academic societies associated with the key disciplines.

SFI will work with its fellow agencies to develop and implement, by the conclusion of 2005, a system of tracking developments in these areas. This system will assist the Board and the Government in evaluating changes in Irish science and engineering productivity, especially as influenced by SFI investments.

**1.6. Operational Philosophy**

SFI will be responsive, consultative and credible in its operations. It will serve as a determined advocate of two areas of emphasis, science and engineering, and contribute thoughtfully to programmes that make possible a competitive knowledge-driven economy. In carrying out this work, SFI personnel will conduct themselves with integrity, fairness and exemplary levels of service.

## 2. The Background to the Establishment of SFI

### 2.1. The Rationale for SFI

Ireland's sustained economic growth and prosperity will depend upon establishing a culture of scientific and technological innovation, a high level of research and development, and a globally competitive knowledge-based economy. In this context, in February 2000 the Government established Science Foundation Ireland as part of the €2.5 billion investment allocated to Research, Technological Development and Innovation (RTDI) in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006. This allocation is the largest-ever research investment in Ireland's future economy by the Irish Government, and SFI is a central player in this strategy. SFI has been established within the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment ("the Department"), a sign of SFI's central role in leveraging research excellence for positive economic impact. The Government specifically approved the establishment of SFI on the basis that the Foundation would assist in re-positioning Irish-based industry higher up the economic value chain. Such re-positioning is essential to provide sustainable, high-quality, well-paid jobs for Irish citizens.

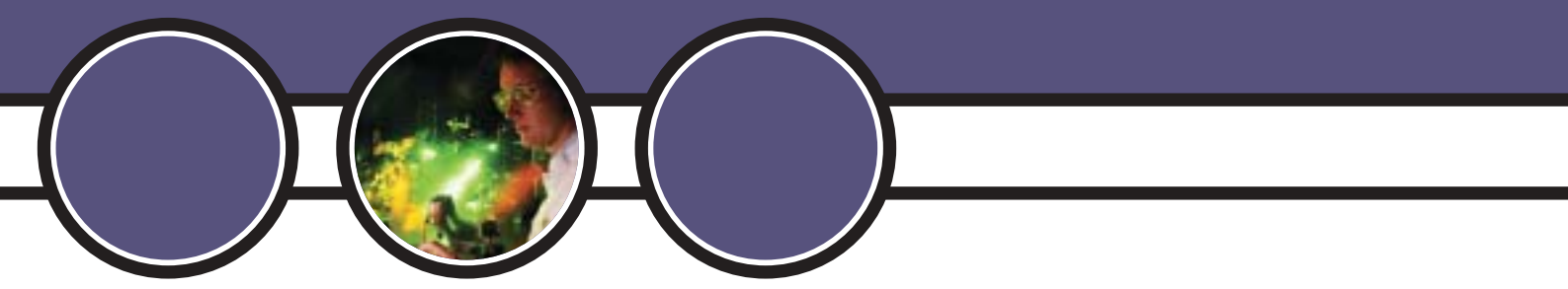
The Technology Foresight Advisory Group on Implementation of SFI further specified, in its report of July 2000, that SFI should invest in funding research that

- Is of intrinsic excellence and acknowledged internationally.
- Is of a sufficient scale and critical mass to facilitate, promote and sustain intellectual interchange and discourse amongst those engaged in the research in Ireland and top-class researchers internationally.
- Strengthens the scientific foundations on which to develop high-productivity, high-technology, market-driven, knowledge-intensive investments, including start-ups, in Ireland's industrial and services sectors.

Research of this kind will strengthen the Irish economy, attract and develop companies within Ireland, produce skilled professionals in areas of national technological urgency, expand indigenous technology-based enterprises, and establish in Ireland research and educational opportunities widely recognised as entrepreneurial and innovative.

### 2.2. The Emphasis of SFI

In the past decade, Ireland has earned a worldwide reputation for its ability to attract investment by multinational companies that are leaders in the knowledge revolution, including some of the most successful companies in computer and software design, communications technology, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices. Further, numerous countries have proven that a focus on excellence in strategic areas enables outstanding researchers to solve scientific challenges rapidly and catapult programmes to global distinction.



With this background and the Government's objectives in mind, SFI has placed its initial emphasis on fields that underpin BioT and ICT. Research in these areas is defined by investigators and includes such disciplines as mathematics, chemistry, physics, materials, biology, biochemistry, bioengineering, computer science and engineering, and electrical engineering. Research in these disciplines constantly creates new opportunities within industries where Ireland has competitive advantages. More than that, in these and related areas, successful indigenous companies, including those operating in both the domestic and international markets, have become increasingly important contributors to Ireland's technological competitiveness.

The pace of technology and discovery also increasingly opens the pathway to research that may be the most promising of all – research that brings together the life sciences and information technology for what is often called computational biology. For this reason, SFI will encourage and support cross-disciplinary research in the priority areas.

To complement these strategic investments, the Department has also charged SFI with responsibility for other State investments in basic research, most notably the Basic Research Grants Programme (BRGP) previously operated by Enterprise Ireland (EI). SFI is developing plans to support a range of science and engineering fields through BRGP, including fields that extend beyond the ICT and BioT disciplines and that include highly promising interdisciplinary programmes.

### 2.3. SFI Progress to Date

Following consultation with the research community throughout Ireland and the approval of the SFI Board, SFI has established a flexible grants and awards portfolio for investing in research that occurs within Ireland. This structure includes

- SFI Fellow Awards and Investigator Programme Grants to support individual scientists and research teams. SFI Fellows will be investigators of particularly distinguished international reputations.
- SFI Fellows-Research Professorships to assist the third-level sector in attracting outstanding scientists and engineers to Irish higher education institutions from outside the State.
- SFI Centres for Science, Engineering and Technology: Campus-Industry Partnership (CSET) Grants to link academic and industrial researchers together on high-end research programmes.
- The E.T.S. Walton Visitor Awards to support leading scientists and engineers who visit Ireland for research for up to one year.
- The Basic Research Grants Programme to support all areas of high-quality, novel exploratory research in the third-level sector.
- SFI Workshop and Conference Grants to support significant international scientific meetings in Ireland.



- President of Ireland Young Researcher Awards to attract to Ireland and support Irish researchers within five years of completing their Ph.D.
- The Science Teacher Assistant Researchers (STAR) supplements, to support second-level teachers in conducting research in Irish laboratories during the summer period.
- Industry Supplements Programme to fund collaborative projects with industry that are directly related to and enhance existing SFI peer-reviewed programmes.

The criteria for grants focus on the following attributes, which are elaborated upon in SFI's calls for proposals:

- Quality of the idea
- Quality of the recent track record of the researcher
- Strategic relevance of the research.

By mid-2004, SFI had awarded funding commitments amounting to almost €368 million over the next five years for more than 180 projects comprising more than 850 individuals, research teams, centres, and visiting researchers. The award recipients include outstanding researchers from Ireland, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, England, Germany, Japan, Russia, Scotland, Slovakia, South Africa, Switzerland, and the USA.



## 3. Achieving the Strategic Focus

### 3.1. Strategic Goal: Develop Human Capital

The greatest challenge facing Ireland's R&D goals is building its most important resource, the human talent that drives discovery, innovation and prosperity. In its specific role within the R&D system, in the target fields SFI will improve the development of human capital by:

- i. Generating and supporting initiatives focussed on individuals with the capacity to significantly advance Ireland's research excellence.
- ii. Using international peer review to assess research proposals and the track record of applicants. This review process provides both a recognised metric of excellence and valuable feedback to the research community.
- iii. Working with Irish universities and institutes of technology to seek out and bring to Ireland researchers and research teams in science and engineering that are acknowledged as world leaders in their fields. In cases where SFI and an institution judge that such individuals could be especially important to Ireland, SFI will help expedite the hiring by basing its support on the quality of the researcher and his or her ideas rather than on specific proposals.
- iv. Providing support for expatriates and students from other countries who are interested in establishing science and engineering careers in Ireland; other countries have had great success with similar initiatives, and developing programmes that will boost interest in science and engineering careers amongst Irish women, who represent the largest proportion of third-level Irish students. In this latter effort, SFI can also capitalise upon EU programmes that assist in improving the gender balance in science and engineering.
- v. Working with its fellow Irish research-funding agencies – notably the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the Health Research Board (HRB) – to develop an infrastructure that offers productive and globally competitive research environments. While SFI will focus its infrastructure investments on equipment vital to the research it supports, in highly select cases where a laboratory dedicated to research would be unique and essential, and could not be built by other means, SFI will stand prepared to fund its construction. In all infrastructure investments, SFI will collaborate with its fellow agencies to ensure that wherever possible SFI funding for infrastructure leverages and extends, rather than duplicates, related investments.

Improving Ireland's breadth of science and engineering talent will also require attention to the Irish education system as a whole. In nations around the world, young people are showing declining interest in science and engineering careers. Some nations have responded not only by trying to build this talent from within, but also by trying to attract talented scientists and engineers from other countries. Similarly, it is widely perceived that Ireland must more successfully engage students in science and technology careers. This perception applies

particularly to engineering disciplines that shape wealth generation in a country. SFI will therefore work with the education and research community on initiatives to help primary and secondary schools nurture interest and talent in science and engineering. Through its STAR supplements, for example, SFI will provide opportunities for secondary school teachers to learn more about science and engineering and bring that knowledge to their students. Further, SFI will

- Pursue activities that make clear to students the personal and financial rewards of science and engineering and related careers and offer undergraduates research opportunities.
- Work with its fellow institutions and agencies on initiatives that communicate to the public the role of science and engineering in Ireland's educational and economic advancement.
- Support researchers that it funds so they can fulfil their responsibility to inspire new generations of Irish scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs; and strengthen the valuation of science, engineering and innovation within their third-level institutions and across the State.
- Develop incentives that inspire SFI-funded researchers to become valuable partners with industry in the judgment of Irish industry leaders and researchers.

### 3.2. Strategic Goal: Support Strong Ideas

Prior to the allocations for RTDI under the NDP 2000-2006, researchers in Ireland were dependent largely on the EU Framework Programmes, the Wellcome Trust and other European initiatives for the larger grants necessary to support research activities. Such grants, typically won sporadically, do not foster the emergence of a sustained critical mass of research competence. This lack of core research funding has left researchers in Ireland with inadequate opportunities to establish globally competitive research programmes. In the strategic areas, SFI will seek to maximise the benefits of EU membership for science and technology in Ireland in consultation with other research funding agencies.

SFI will contribute to Ireland's success in these areas in the target fields by

- i. Focussing select investments on distinguished research at institutions where globally competitive programmes seem most likely to emerge. Ireland's strategic areas of expertise must be leveraged to build economically and scientifically important R&D capacities quickly and efficiently.
- ii. Requiring that proposals for SFI funding explain, where appropriate, how the envisioned research would be strategically relevant to Ireland's economic, scientific or engineering future.

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- iii. Working in consultation and collaboration with partner agencies to develop policies that strengthen Ireland's R&D system. Many of Ireland's research facilities and policies require substantial adaptation to meet the new competitive and economic challenges. SFI has initiated Ireland's development of a system for funding the overhead costs associated with building the research infrastructure in third-level institutions. It has also encouraged the creation of a cohesive framework for managing intellectual property (IP) rights that will protect third-level and industrial partners while facilitating, rather than interfering with, the development and exploitation of IP.

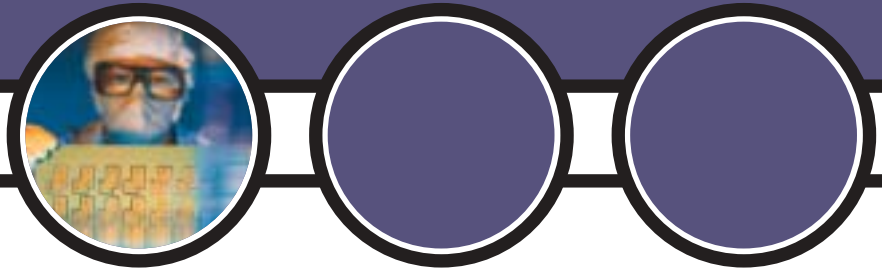
### 3.3. Strategic Goal: Promote Partnerships

With Ireland's new commitment to research and innovation, institutions and agencies that are benefiting from this support have been called to cooperate for national benefit as never before. Small in comparison with larger countries' R&D investments, Ireland's RTDI investments are large on a per-capita basis in the strategic areas. By leveraging these investments through a collaborative approach to research, Ireland can compete on a global level. Already, Ireland has an extensive network of research-oriented public enterprises, including universities, institutes of technology, and research agencies. In addition, there is high interest in R&D amongst numerous companies that have made Ireland a base for manufacturing and services operations during the past 20 years and amongst the growing number of indigenous technologically oriented companies. This range of State and private research performers suggests the potential for alliances that build on Ireland's competitive advantages. Indeed, across the disciplines in which Irish institutions pursue active research programmes, a few have already earned global recognition.

SFI continues to involve the academic community as it builds the SFI awards and grants structure. It also continues to work with IDA Ireland to attract R&D from multinational companies based overseas, and with EI to encourage start-up R&D-oriented companies within the country. SFI is also pursuing opportunities to work closely with the HEA and HRB on research investments. Such shared activities can be of great value to Ireland's research-based competitiveness.

Amongst other initiatives in this area, in the target fields, SFI will

- i. Invest in research most likely to attract strategically valuable support from government programmes in other countries.
- ii. Give SFI-funded investigators incentives to create new collaborations with industry, including through supplements to existing grants that help foster valuable new partnerships for Ireland.



- iii. Promote and support partnerships that give researchers in Ireland access to science equipment or facilities in other countries that are critical to their work in the target fields.
- iv. Make research efficiency and technology-transfer essential requirements of CSET grants. SFI has involved fellow agencies in the strategic review of CSET proposals so that these grants reflect a thorough assessment of the value that proposed centres could have to Ireland. SFI will likewise work with the funded researchers and industrial partners in these centres to ensure that the collaborative work in which they are engaged best facilitates the strongest possible contributions from both parties to the underlying research and any potential commercialisation of outcomes.
- v. Raise the profile of Irish science and engineering across the world to attract interest in partnerships and further investments in Ireland, most notably amongst fellow EU nations and the US, where Ireland's reputation in these fields is growing and where SFI is well positioned to further enhance this profile.



## 4. The Focus of the SFI Divisions

### 4.1. Information and Communications Technology

- i. **Definition:** ICT involves all disciplines that underpin the study of physical components, systems, networks, storage, transmission, software, and applications as well as the underlying fields of mathematics, computer science, physics, chemistry, materials science, and electrical engineering.
- ii. **Need for ICT Focus:** Research in ICT has transformed the economic and even social and cultural activities of the world through such innovations as the computer, e-mail, cellular phones, satellites, and digitised information. As a result, ICT has become a lynchpin of industrial activity, commerce, communication, logistics, and databases that manage economic activities around the world. In some respects, ICT is at the core of the knowledge society, for scientific and engineering research today nearly requires use of the systems and processes that ICT research has generated.

By focussing on R&D in the fields that underpin ICT, Ireland can efficiently leverage relationships it has already formed with such industry and play a competitive role in defining and shaping economic activity and technological advancement worldwide.

- iii. **Strategic ICT Focus:** The mature nature of the ICT industry has made commodities of many of the research challenges of the 1980s and 1990s. Advances in information processing have been paralleled by equally dramatic advances in the communication and storage of information, linking the knowledge of mankind into a global information web. In the first decades of the 21st century, researchers will confront the greatest challenges and opportunities for technological and economic advancement in the following areas:
  - Novel adaptive technologies for distributed networking of people, machines and sensors and other devices.
  - Software engineering for improved reliability, security and predictability of all software-based systems.
  - Machine learning and semantic web technologies and image-processing to extract information from massive data sets, and enabling adaptive systems and significant applications of the future.
  - Network design and network management to allow a range of new applications and novel services.
  - Novel components and component integration that result in significantly enhanced system performance and reduced operating costs.
  - Quantum effects and nanotechnology breakthroughs in device design and information processing.

These areas are consistent with the challenges noted within the Technology Foresight report, and SFI will review them on an annual basis.

SFI's staff will engage the community regularly to identify promising new areas of ICT opportunity that might best advance Ireland's knowledge-based future. Already, Ireland has three new areas of globally competitive strength as a result of the extraordinary talent base forming at the CSETs in nanotechnology, intelligent software and constraints.

As the ICT industry rebounds, Irish researchers in these and other fields will likely have increased opportunities to attract the support of industrial leaders who face rising competitiveness for research personnel or are investing once again in potential long-term developments from academic laboratories. Such circumstances could present Ireland with opportunities to benefit considerably as the market for ICT services, products and innovation returns.

#### 4.2. Biotechnology

- i. **Definition:** BioT involves all disciplines that underpin the study of such areas as gene expression, protein synthesis and characterisation, DNA, RNA, genomics, biosensors, drug delivery, and bioremediation.
- ii. **Need for BioT Focus:** Research in BioT disciplines will affect healthcare, pharmaceuticals, environmental management, agriculture, marine science, medical devices, consumer goods, and food and drink businesses. Research and technologies in these areas are widely expected to be key drivers of global and national economies in the decades ahead. Indeed, research in BioT promises to play as pivotal a role in social and industrial development over the next few decades as physics and chemistry did following World War II. In Ireland alone, industries in these fields have played a significant part in Ireland's economic growth during the past 20 years. For example, Ireland is now home to the operational bases of nine of the top 10 largest pharmaceutical companies in the world. Combined with the recent emergence of indigenous BioT start-up companies, such relationships give Ireland a crucial opportunity to become a successful innovator and knowledge-generator.
- iii. **Strategic BioT Focus:** Progress in genomics, proteomics, bioinformatics, and structural biology will create major research and economic opportunities over the next two decades. Success mapping the human genome, for example, promises to offer possibilities to diagnose and treat disease and illness as never before. Such developments support the Technology Foresight report's assertion that strategic research advantages in BioT will bring the State highly important long-term benefits. SFI believes that especially significant results will develop for the Irish R&D enterprise by 2008 through the Foundation's focus on these areas:



- Agri-food
- Cell cycle control
- Enabling technologies
- Medical biotechnology/biopharmaceuticals/Therapeutics
- Microbiology
- Neuro/developmental biology.

SFI will engage the community regularly to identify promising new areas of BioT opportunity that might best advance Ireland's knowledge-based future, and inform selected commercial enterprises of Irish BioT research strengths and help communicate such excellence to the world scientific and industrial communities. Since there are special opportunities in the BioT area to provide researchers with central equipment and facilities, SFI will encourage suppliers and developers of new BioT equipment to use Ireland to test upgrades and breakthroughs in equipment design, which could offer cost-effective access to the equipment.

Ireland is fast becoming an exciting place to carry out research in the areas that underpin BioT. Opportunities continue to develop and expand for collaborations with leading research scientists both in industrial research centres and start-up companies. Such prospects and the likely global value of discoveries in these fields suggest how important research in fields underpinning BioT could be to Ireland's future.



## 5. Outlook

Over the first three years of its operation, SFI has created a competitive portfolio of grants and awards, begun funding hundreds of outstanding researchers, established its collaborative approach, and implemented its strategic vision to accomplish the work ahead and establish SFI's reputation for excellence. In the next four years, SFI will aggressively advance this strategy as it strives to meet its important responsibilities to Ireland and the scientific, engineering, academic, and industrial communities in accordance with the objectives set out by the Irish Government.



## 6. Acknowledgements

This plan has depended upon the contributions of the SFI Board and staff and the wider industrial and scientific research community. The SFI Board, which was appointed in Autumn 2003, has been especially important to the refinement of this strategy. SFI has adopted and will continue to follow a consultative process in making its investments. SFI is one crucial element of the national commitment to innovation that has the potential to benefit all of Ireland's citizens. SFI will remain a strong partner in developing and maintaining research capabilities in Ireland that are known across the country and globally for their value, breadth and excellence.



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