



INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
STATEMENT OF STRATEGY 2026-2030



Introduction

The Institute of International and European Affairs is Ireland's leading international affairs thinktank, with an interactive membership drawn from the public and private sectors, academia, and civil society. We are an independent, not-for-profit organisation with charitable status, offering insight and analysis of key European and international policy trends. Our purpose is to inform, guide, and help shape key strategic decisions by government, business, and civil society, and to enrich the public debate.

The IIEA is a trusted space for independent, unbiased analysis and informed engagement. We bring together policy-makers, business, civil society, academics and analysts in order to research and share diverse perspectives and insights on key European and international developments as they affect Ireland.

Through our extensive programme of events and publications we identify and amplify current European and international trends and priorities, informing the work of policy makers, and enriching the public debate on Ireland's role in the EU and on the global stage.

The increasing complexity of international affairs requires a clear focus and a keen understanding of current and emerging challenges. The IIEA provides space for policy-makers, business leaders, academics and commentators to interact, to constructively influence policy direction, and to make informed and durable decisions on the critical policy challenges of today.

Context

The IIEA was established in 1991¹. The nature and pace of European integration was a central pre-occupation for the IIEA in its early years. However, as time progressed the scope of the IIEA's work expanded. By 2015 the IIEA had greatly expanded its remit, having added "International" to its title. In his Chairman's Statement to the Annual Report 2015, Brendan Halligan noted that that report marked "both the 25th anniversary of the Institute's formation and the retirement of the team that created it". He went on to observe that:

"...each era is beset by its own unique problems and the challenge for a think-tank is to recognise when one era supersedes another and then to respond accordingly..." Remaining relevant was always the essential task and this could only be achieved "through constant renewal".

Brexit and the Covid 19 pandemic both posed serious threats to Ireland and to its economy. Currently, the global environment of the mid-2020s is marked by heightened geopolitical turbulence and volatility. At the same time there is increased complexity associated with evolving EU policy (digital regulation, green transition, industrial policy, security and defence), and a slower policy response to the climate emergency.

All these trends point to a compelling need for an ambitious and informed IIEA to respond to an intensified demand for trusted, neutral analysis.

This is therefore an appropriate juncture at which to set out the changes we will make to strengthen and grow the IIEA and to secure its financial sustainability – always with the objective of deepening our relevance and value to members and stakeholders, and to the wider public².

1. The official launch took place in North Great George's St on 23 April 1991. For an excellent account of the establishment and progress of the IIEA see Brown T, 'Vision and Reality – A history of 25 Years of The Institute of International and European Affairs 1989-2014', IIEA, September 2016.

2. In preparing this Strategy we have been greatly assisted by the research conducted on our behalf by the Amárach agency. That exercise, which consisted of both desk research and interviews with key stakeholders, provided many insights and observations on our work, on perceptions generally of the IIEA and its purpose, on our strengths and weaknesses, and on our overall value to members.

Building an IIEA that is fit for purpose and future-proofed

The Board and leadership recognise key strengths of the organisation including the:

- unique convening power and long-standing reputation
- high calibre of our speakers and contributors
- track record in providing trusted, independent, and informed analysis
- many high-quality publications across multiple topic areas
- dedicated, committed and hard-working staff, our modernised technical and creative resources, and our wholly owned premises
- extensive voluntary input through our board and through the range of expert working groups helping to drive our output
- extensive international contacts and networks through association with governments, international bodies and peer think-tanks
- contribution of our many valued and members - public, corporate and individual - who bring their own insights and expertise to bear on our work.

Notwithstanding these positives there are clear challenges facing the organisation including the:

- need to better communicate our central mission and purpose
- need for a clear proposition that drives value to members and financial contributors
- need to ensure that we connect with a wide and diversified audience and avoid any perception of bias in favour of any group or sector
- uncertainty associated with our funding stream, undermining the capacity and ability to plan long-term.

Our programme and our proposition to members

The IIEA's agenda is wide and becoming ever wider. Given our limited resources, we cannot address every potential international issue affecting Ireland. But we do have a commitment - and a responsibility - to address the critical questions of the day as they affect decision-makers in this, and in the period ahead.

Having a clearly defined programme, grounded in a renewed statement of our core purpose, will allow us to make a crisper proposition to members and stakeholders.

Most importantly, it will assist us in attracting new members and in retaining our existing members in a way that values them - not simply as financial contributors - but collectively as a key resource for the work of the IIEA itself.

Clarity on our mission/purpose and programme will ensure that we can convey a compelling proposition to members and prospective members - one that makes clear the utility and value to them of engagement with the IIEA.

Who we are - and why

Our mission

Our mission is to promote understanding of the European and geopolitical context for decision-making by policy-makers, organisations, and individuals, thereby helping to inform and shape Ireland's strategic direction and future.

Our guiding principles and values

The IIEA is independent of all interests, whether public, private, or otherwise. It does not itself adopt or express any institutional position on the topics it covers.

The IIEA is committed to the fundamental principles of democracy, justice, human rights and the rule of law - principles which lie at the heart of the European Union.

The IIEA is committed to excellence in its own research, and in that which it commissions from external authors.

The IIEA strives at all times to maintain the high standards of professionalism and integrity which are central to our reputation.

The IIEA is committed to providing its members with a stimulating environment for engagement with speakers and contributors, and a space for the respectful exchange of diverse opinions and ideas, in the interest of the public good.

The IIEA is committed to a collaborative approach with funders, sponsors and stakeholders while always fully observing our independence of all interests.

The IIEA is committed to transparency in its funding and governance.

The IIEA is committed to diversity and equality, and to providing its staff with a welcoming and stimulating place to work.

A strategy to strengthen and grow the IIEA

The IIEA's mission and values are the bedrock upon which we will drive the organisation for the next five years, ensuring it is both fit for purpose and future-proofed for the period ahead. Our five-year strategic objective is to consolidate and strengthen the IIEA as Ireland's pre-eminent international affairs think-tank, while building on our capacity to serve our members in line with the ambitious financial targets set out in this Strategy.

We will achieve this by developing and implementing a plan that will focus on five key objectives:

- rationalising and innovating with the IIEA programme
- building IIEA impact and public profile
- enhancing our engagement with members so that they derive maximum benefit from their engagement
- upgrading and modernising our operating model, including our human, intellectual and technological capacity
- setting out a financial plan to ensure the continued viability and sustainability of the IIEA.

Objective I:

Our programme - rationalise and innovate

Our output (events, roundtables and publications) consists of (a) grant-aided work where typically there is a written agreement as to content; (b) sponsored work where again there is an agreement as to content; and (c) work generated in-house which is not linked to sponsorship or grant funding.

We value highly the financial support we get from sponsors. However, in order for the IIEA to continue to be a space for independent thinking and exchange it is essential that we make space for ideas and output that is not dependent in any way on direct financial support. We will build the capacity of the IIEA to generate ideas in-house - from our staff, our working groups, and our member base.

To better structure our work both internally and for stakeholders, we will introduce a Programme of Priorities, to be set out at the beginning of every year. This will summarise our planned work in accordance with four broad topic categories as follows:

- 1. EU (Future-proofing Europe project³); geopolitics; UK; island of Ireland.**
- 2. Economics and regulatory (trade, digital, infrastructure, finance and pharma).**
- 3. Security, defence and resilience; justice and home affairs.**
- 4. Climate; energy; migration; development (Irish Aid).**

We will keep these under review to ensure that we cover the most important existing and emerging topics for Ireland and its international relations and that we continue to examine the critical questions of relevance to our members and partners.

The outputs under each category will continue to comprise events and roundtables, policy explainers/ blogs/rapid briefs, and research papers. We may aim to have fewer events than in recent years to allow us to be more judicious in what we choose to do, while always leaving room for coverage of unexpected developments. We will also plan for a small number of high-profile events, to be considered 'marquee' in terms of effort and spend, profile of the event, or final output. These events may be with a sponsor, grantor or as part of a structured programme. It will also include at least one event or conference on a theme chosen and identified by the IIEA as part of our "in-house" programme on critical current questions.

The IIEA working groups have long been at the heart of the IIEA's activity and they will continue to help drive our events and publications in their respective areas of expertise. They will also, along with our staff, bring forward proposals for the "in-house" projects on critical questions.

Objective II:

Strengthen our impact

Our principal target audiences are government and legislators, business, researchers and civil society generally. We are always keen to understand our stakeholders' needs and interests and to ensure that our programme is relevant to them.

We will develop strategies to attract new audiences, especially from younger demographics. We will continue to give priority to diversity and gender balance throughout all aspects of our work.

We will ensure that communications is always built into project work at the outset, placing a strong and continuing focus on who we want to reach, and on how best to communicate with them. The overarching objective here is to enhance our reputation as the "go-to" place for expertise on international developments affecting Ireland.

3. Funded by Dept Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Objective III:

Enhance member value and engagement

We will make changes to how we promote membership of the IIEA and to how we engage with existing and prospective members. We will ensure that there is a clear statement and understanding of the value to them of IIEA membership.

Value proposition

At a time of unparalleled international turbulence, membership of the IIEA offers a unique opportunity - not otherwise available in Ireland - to listen, interact, and engage, with peers, policy-makers, and wide range of individual experts, analysts and decision-makers.

The IIEA convenes across sectors, helping to boost policy formulation, interpret policy content and likely direction, and deepening members' understanding of current and impending international developments that may affect them, their organisation and wider national life.

- Members may attend and participate in set-piece keynote and panel events – often with leading international speakers.
- Members may attend focused roundtables exploring deeper, narrower content relevant to their particular sector.
- Membership of the IIEA affords an opportunity to support, and to participate directly in discussion, debate and analysis of international developments as they affect Ireland.
- Members hear from speakers, but they also contribute to the discussion in an interactive way - including at pre-event lunches observing the Chatham House Rule.
- Members have the opportunity to sponsor work with the IIEA on a theme of particular importance to the member or its sector.

We will look at better ways to engage with members, and to collect data and feedback on an ongoing basis - including in relation to our events and publications, and the members' own suggestions for work we can do to enhance our value to them.

Objective IV:

Ensure the organisation is fit for purpose

The more we can build our research and production capacity and ensure the IIEA is an attractive place to work, the more we will be able to offer to members and to stakeholders.

We will work to develop an enhanced career path for our staff and continue to recruit at graduate and intern entry level. We will also examine how we can leverage the extensive network of IIEA alumni across the public and private sectors.

We place considerable emphasis on our independence as an institute. We will introduce a Code of Conduct which will set out clear guidance and direction for our staff and volunteers – in support of our fundamental values of independence, integrity, transparency and professionalism.

We will work to integrate our processes, data, and use of technology, following an audit and review. We will also review our organisation structure, staffing and skills to ensure delivery of this Statement of Strategy.

We will keep our governance processes under constant review in order to ensure that we maintain high standards of management and board oversight at all times.

The IIEA's finances have always been subject to a certain amount of volatility. We will review our systems to maximise efficiency and timely payments and also explore other potential sources of income. Our ambition to grow our membership and project income will assist in providing for financial stability and the replenishment of the IIEA's cash reserves, and to guard against future downturns. We will continue to give the highest priority to strong financial control across all our income and expenditure processes.

The Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) is Ireland's leading international affairs think tank. Founded in 1991, its mission is to foster and shape political, policy and public discourse, in order to broaden awareness of international and European issues in Ireland and contribute to more informed strategic decisions by political, business and civil society leaders.

The IIEA acts as a forum for informed debate, analysis and discussion. Views expressed in the Institute's publications, and in presentations at its events, are those of the authors alone and do not represent the views of the Institute, which is fully independent. The IIEA is a not-for profit organisation with charitable status.

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