



**School of Business**

**Research Seminar Series 2021-2022**

***“Transparency Trade-Offs in the Operation of National Public Private Partnership Units: The Case of Ireland’s National Development Finance Agency”***

**Dr. Gail Sheppard – School of Business**

**Date: Monday 25, April 2022**

**Time: 2pm – 3pm**

**Venue: MS Teams**

**Paper Abstract**

Since 2002, the Irish National Development Finance Agency [NDFA] has performed key functions in the procurement of Public Private Partnership [PPP] in Ireland, which is considered an exemplary European PPP practitioner. With this arrangement, Ireland follows a global pattern where national or provincial PPP units, which are frequently organised as arm’s length bodies, manage the partnership-based procurement of infrastructure projects. This paper examines how the operation of the NDFA, as Ireland’s PPP unit, has affected various aspects of transparency and accountability. Based on a series of interviews with senior public and private sector PPP practitioners, we note a level of depoliticisation of Irish PPP occurred through processes of agencification, as the NDFA initially acted as advisor and then increasingly took on a lead role in PPP procurement. Our interviews suggest this had a varied impact on different aspects of transparency of Irish PPP, with levels of transparency varying from: a) weak in the areas of initial PPP decision-making, contract information and publication of benchmarking exercises, to b) strong in the area of bidding process transparency, and c) mixed in terms of bureaucratic burden and resultant bureaucratic process transparency. We suggest the current approach to PPP procurement could adversely affect the long-term sustainability of Irish PPP but conclude that existing transparency deficits are not insurmountable.