2021 Call | Providers' Frequently Asked Questions

(24th February 2021)

(******Indicates questions added since the previous update)

Accessing SkillsDirect

My login details from last year are not working. How can I login to skillsdirect.hea.ie?

You will need to register again for the new year and create a new password. At the bottom of the page, you will see 'Click here to read the Call requirements and to Register'. If you are the first person to register for your institution, you will act as the administrator for your institution. You can then add colleagues from your institution as users.

Can two people in our institution get logins for the Skills Direct portal for the Springboard+ & HCI submissions?

The first person to register from an institution is assigned the role of 'administrator'. Other people from that institution can be added; however, they must be added as a user by their administrator. If your institution has already been registered, then the user is not allowed to register but should ask their administrator to register for them.

Where can I access our proposals from 2020?

You can access your 2020 proposals through the 2020 SkillsDirect Portal. You will need to login with your details from last year.

Similarly, you can access your 2019 proposals through the 2019 SkillsDirect Portal and by using your login details from 2019. If you have forgotten your details from either year, you can reset them by clicking "Forgot Username or Password". This will not affect your 2021 login details.

Submitting a Proposal

Where can I access the call document for 2021?

The call document can be accessed [via the HEA website](#).

Is there a recording available from the January 27th Springboard+ briefing?

Yes, the full recording is available to [download and watch via this link](#).

How is the 10% fee for employed applicants calculated?

The 10% fee is automatically calculated through the SkillsDirect proposal form and is based on the total cost to run the course.

If a full-time ICT course was approved last year for 3 years, do we need to submit it again as a proposal for 2021?

No, these programmes do not need to be submitted again. In line with the Human Capital Initiative funding of ICT proposals in 2020, successful courses funded under the ICT stream received funding for 3 years subject to satisfactory uptake of course places. The HEA will be reviewing the registration rates of these courses. Courses must have filled to 70% of the original approved number of places for funding to be approved again for 2021/22.

For ICT courses, will we need to indicate that we would like to claim the second year funding or is this just automatically given if we meet the 70% fulfillment?

Yes, providers will need to confirm that they will run the course for a second year if they have met the 70% threshold. The HEA will contact the providers directly when registration numbers have been reviewed. This applies only to ICT courses.

For ICT courses, will we receive the exact same funded places we were given under the Springboard+ 2020 call or will this be reduced?

If places on ICT courses filled to at least 70% of the original approved places, then the same number of places will be approved for 2021/22.

**We didn't receive a letter saying that we were approved for three years of funding, but did apply for three years funding. Would this mean that we still need to go ahead and submit proposals again for 2021?

No. ICT courses approved in 2020 were approved for 3 years in principle subject to monitoring. There is no need to reapply, as long as they filled to at least 70% they will be reapproved. Registration numbers are currently being examined and providers will be contacted in this regard.

**If we submit an application for a 1-year FT ICT Skills Conversion Course in SB 2021 will we be applying for 3 years worth of funding – or just for one year?

The 3-year funding for ICT courses relates only to proposals submitted under the 2020 Call. Proposals submitted under the 2021 call will only be considered for 1 year funding.

Can endorsements from industry representatives be submitted via YouTube links?

In the interest of accessibility and fairness, we do not recommend including links to video endorsements. These should be uploaded as a pdf to the SkillsDirect form.

Where contact hours differ per semester, should we detail the contact hours per semester or give an average / max?

Question 20 asks for the contact hours per weeks and only accepts a numerical value. You should put the average amount there and outline any semester difference in the course description.

Are there details on what the credit-bearing project should entail or examples of previous projects that were accepted?

This is up to individual providers to decide, as appropriate to the course, the intended student cohort(s), and the course contents.

**To whom should the industry letters of support be addressed, the programme owner or Springboard?

Letters can be addressed to Springboard+, but we will also accept letters addressed to programme owners. The most important thing is that the letter content is not generic and clearly outlines why they believe the course should receive funding.

**Does the total cost Section 5) relate to the entire course or to an intake?

The total cost refers to the entire course, so should take into account all of the intakes if there is more than one.

Course Funding Eligibility

Will micro credentials be considered for Springboard+ funding?

A minimum of 10 credits overall is required in order for a course to be eligible for funding.

Two-year part-time ICT skills conversion courses must lead to an award of at least 60 credits in total.

Do programmes have to be validated by QQI in advance of submitting a Springboard+ proposal?

You must have already put in a request to QQI but the validation does not have to be approved before you submit a Springboard+ proposal.

However, Springboard+ funding will not be approved and students cannot join the course without the QQI validation being confirmed first. September 10th is the deadline for receipt of QQI confirmation.

Are industry validated awards at level 6 acceptable as certification?

It is critically important that courses are validated through an appropriate body. A list of these are outlined on page 6 of the 2021 call. Accreditation from an unlisted body will not be accepted.

Is it possible for a course to have part funding of additional places via Springboard+ and part funding under HCI Pillar 3 (i.e. 1 course but different participants funded under separate initiatives)?

Yes, it is possible to submit a course developed as a result of HCI Pillar 3 project outcomes to Springboard+. It is not however possible to apply for the additional places funding approved as part of the HCI P3 project funding for that or any other Springboard+ course. This is clearly set out in the HCI Pillar 3 Call Document below:

5.7 Additional Places
Please note that funding for additional places is only available for EU domiciled learners. Additional places on courses where funding is provided through Springboard+, Pillar 1 or Pillar 2 of the HCI are not eligible to be included for additional places under Pillar 3 even if impacted by the approved project outcomes. The budget allocated in a submission for additional places cannot be increased outside the overall project budget in the event that the project yields more additional places than anticipated.

Are placements mandatory in order to get Springboard+ funding?

A work placement is mandatory for 1-year full-time ICT skills conversion programmes and a work placement or credit bearing project is required for the 2-year part-time ICT skills conversion programme.

For all other courses, placements are not mandatory, but must include a dedicated job readiness/job preparation component (i.e. distinct and specific credited module(s) on enhancing job readiness).

A work placement may not be required for a participant who is in employment. However, if a work placement is sought or deemed suitable for a participant in employment, this is encouraged.

Given the complications caused by COVID-19, what alternatives are there to arranging a placement?

If a placement is not possible to arrange, it is up to the course provider to find an appropriate alternative (e.g. a distinct and specific credited module(s) on enhancing job readiness) and outline this in their proposal.

**We will be offering a minor award which will be a Springboard+ course. The course will be 12 weeks only. Will we be required to offer a work placement or credit bearing project for short minor awards?

Yes, work placements or credit bearing projects are required regardless of course duration or award type. As outlined in section 2.1.3 of the Call document all proposals *must include a dedicated job readiness/job preparation component (i.e. distinct and specific credited module(s) on enhancing job readiness). Details of this provision will be required as part of course proposals.*

Is there a maximum class size permitted under Springboard+?

While there is no limit set by Springboard+ on class sizes, the programme budget for 2021 has been approved by DFHERIS and it is anticipated that the process for course approval will be very competitive. Even in the case where a proposal is successful providers may not be given approval for all of the places sought. Providers should be mindful that all students would need to meet the eligibility criteria of the programme, including residency requirements. The size of the class should also allow for sufficient student supports to be in place and to ensure high quality delivery of course content.

Will proposals that offer a blended/online delivery for the one-year ICT Skills conversion courses be preferred, given the Covid-19 situation?

No. ICT skills conversion courses are sought on a one-year full-time *and* two-year part-time basis. We anticipate that there will be demand for both types of courses so Providers should consider the national skills requirements alongside the needs of their region in meeting this skills gap.

How many letters of support are required per programme? Is there a minimum recommended number?

There is no set number of letters of support that are required to be submitted. This is a judgement call for the provider who should consider the value the letters will add to the proposal.

Will student testimonials assist in supporting applications or are they unnecessary?

This is a judgement call as to whether the testimonials will add value to the proposal.

Is there any provisions for QQI Minor Awards to be accepted under Springboard Funding in future calls?

QQI Minor Awards are accepted under Springboard+.

Re the point "Courses at Level 6 in a defined advancement to Level 7 will be particularly welcome under Springboard+ 2021", can you clarify what this means? A full Level 6 award that would allow for progression onto a Level 7 award would be 120 credits and would take 2 years to deliver.

In terms of provider consideration of Springboard+ proposals which facilitate progression from one level to another of the NFQ, the intention here is that providers would consider developing progression opportunities for Springboard+ participants to progress upwards on the NFQ from different levels of special purpose awards as opposed to full awards given the number of credits gained on completion of a Springboard+ programme is usually less than 60 or 120 credits.

Can we factor the cost of subsidised software and equipment for students into the course fee?

If there is software critical to the running of the course (i.e. required by students to successfully complete / by the provider to successfully deliver the course), then this can be factored into the proposal. It should be clear that this is critical to the successful running of the programme.

Can a programme previously funded by another HEA funding mechanism (i.e. July Stimulus funding call) be funding under 2021 Springboard call?

You can make a proposal for such a course for the current round of Springboard+ However, should Job Stimulus funding become available again and the course is being funded for another cohort through Springboard+, then you will not be able to submit for Job Stimulus funding.

Does the job readiness component have to be credit-bearing? Is this a change in this year's call?

This is outlined in point 2.1.3 of the call document and has not changed since last year's call.

Applicant Eligibility

Are ICT part-time programmes still only for employed applicants or can unemployed applicants apply now too?

ICT part-time programmes are still only for employed applicants. Any changes to this will be communicated to course providers.

Are there plans to open the Springboard+ programme to applicants seeking international protection (i.e. asylum seekers)?

Applicants seeking international protection in Ireland are not currently eligible for Springboard+ courses. Any changes to this will be communicated to course providers upon further guidance from the Department of Education and Skills.

Which documents can someone provide to demonstrate they are self-employed if they do not have access to an accountant or solicitor?

Self-employed applicants who do not have access to an account or solicitor can submit their most recent Chapter 4 Notice of Assessment. Applicants can download this as a pdf from their Revenue account online.

Is there a minimum age requirement for applicants?

While there is no official minimum age requirement for Springboard+ courses, it is unlikely that a recent school leaver would meet all of the existing eligibility

requirements of the programme as well as the academic requirements of an individual course.

An Irish applicant who does not have a passport/drivers licence. What other form of ID is acceptable by Springboard to prove nationality?

We will accept a Public Services Card issued by the Department of Social Protection or any other official documentation that establishes the identity of the applicant such as a Birth Certificate.