

**July Stimulus – Higher Education Initiatives**

**Introduction**

On the 24th July 2020 as part of the Government’s announcement on the July stimulus package an additional funding allocation of €47.5m was provided for Higher Education skills-related programmes as outlined in Table 1 below. The initiatives to receive funding were identified by the Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) following discussions between them, the Irish University Association (IUA), Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) and the HEA. The DFHERIS set the criteria for the initiatives and requested that the HEA allocate the funds to the HEIs.

**Table 1. DFHERIS July Stimulus Higher Education Skills-Related Programmes**

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| **Detail of Measure** | **2020 Allocation**  | **Places** |
| **Springboard+ and HCI Pillar 1** An additional 2,000 places across Springboard+ and HCI Pillar 1, to be provided from additional places on already approved courses, and courses that met the criteria for funding under Springboard+ 2020/HCI Pillar 1 but were not able to be funded under the previous funding allocation.  | €10m |    2,000 |
| **Postgraduate Skills Provision** An additional 2,650 places will be provided across the full range of existing part-time and full-time postgraduate taught programmes.  Expenditure will be optimally configured to address the skills needs of the economy. | €22.5m |    2,650 |
| **Modular Skills Provision** Shorter, more focused courses/modules that can be offered in a flexible manner and allow people to gain important skills without taking a considerable period away from the labour market.   The modular courses will be accredited in such a way as to provide building blocks to a full qualification should the student so wish.  Each module will also be stand-alone so that participants can acquire skills and put them into practice immediately in the workplace.   | €15m |       2,500 FTE |

The following provides a summary of an agreed approach developed by the HEA in consultation with the DFHERIS.

1. **Springboard+ and HCI Pillar 1**

Additional Springboard+ and HCI Pillar 1 funding will be provided through the allocation of additional places on already approved courses, and courses that met the criteria for funding under Springboard+ 2020/HCI Pillar 1 but were not able to be funded under the previous funding allocation. Institutions have already been informed of their additionality in relation to new courses and these courses are currently being offered through the springboard+ application system. The HEA will be in contact with institutions regarding additional places on oversubscribed existing courses in September.

1. **Postgraduate Skills Provision and Modular Skills Provision**

Funding for (i) Postgraduate Skills Provision and (ii) Modular Skills Provision will be allocated based on submissions received from individual HEIs as outlined in Section 1, Section 2, and Appendix 2 of this document. Collaborative and sectoral submissions will also be considered.

The deadline for receipt of proposals for both Postgraduate Taught Programmes (Full and Part Time) and Modular Skills Provision is **4pm on Friday 11th September 2020.** Completed applications should be emailed to **skills@hea.ie**

In the case of **Postgraduate Skills Provision** – the following institutions are eligible to apply;

* HEA designated HEIs are eligible to apply (See Appendix 1).
* Privately funded HEIs whose quality assurance procedures have been approved under the 2012 Act (re-engagement process) by the 31st December 2019 are eligible to apply. (See Appendix 1 for those currently approved). A letter from the QQI confirming the above will be required prior to the commencement of the course and allocation of funding.

In the case of **Modular Skills Provision** – institutions who were eligible to apply for funding as part of Springboard 2020 can make an application.

For further information please contact skills@hea.ie

27th August 2020

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| **Section 1****Additional Places on Existing Full and Part Time Taught Postgraduate Skills Provision Courses** |

1. **Initiative Details**

Total funding of €22.5m will be provided to create 2,650 additional places across a broad range of **existing** validated full and part-time taught postgraduate programmes.

In order to be eligible to be considered for funding the postgraduate programme must focus on one of the following skills areas.

**Skills/Discipline area**

The ISCED fields and subfields that will be eligible for funding will be:

* Business and Administration, Business Information Systems, Data Analytics, Data Scientists, Financial Analysis (041)
* Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and Statistics, Environmental Sciences, Biochemistry, Chemistry, Biopharmaceutical Sciences/Technology (05)
* ICT (06)
* Engineering, manufacturing, and construction including Building Information Management and Sustainable Building (07)
* Health and welfare including Medical Technology (09)
* Social and behavioural sciences (031)
* Tourism and Hospitality (1013, 1015)

Many of these will serve not only the requirements of the new economic model envisaged by the Programme for Government but also specific economic and social needs arising from COVID19.

**It is important to note that programmes already funded through Springboard, ICT Skills Conversion and HCI Pillar 1 are not eligible for funding under this Call.**

**Additional places funded through this call on existing courses will not receive any funding through the RGAM. The full cost of provision of places on these courses (max duration of 12 months) is provided through this fund.**

1. **Funding**

A maximum of €9,000 per place. Only **existing** validated full and part time taught Higher Diploma, Post Graduate Certificate, Post Graduate Diploma and Post Graduate Courses will be considered for funding of additional places. Existing courses are those currently running in the HE sector or due to commence in 2020/21 (courses awaiting validation are not eligible).

The duration of eligible courses should be no more than 12 months and programmes should have a minimum of 30 credits.

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| **Again, it is important to note that programmes already funded through Springboard, ICT Skills Conversion and HCI Pillar 1 are not eligible for funding under this Call.**  |

1. **Eligible cohort**

Eligible participants are listed below in order of priority for recruitment purposes;

* **Returners**

Returners are those who are not in receipt of a payment from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection but who have been out of the work environment for a number of years due to childcare or other caring obligations. They have a previous history of employment but may require upskilling, reskilling or cross-skilling to transition back to the workforce.

To be eligible the applicant must have been:

* A Homemaker or on other caring duties for a minimum period of 9 of the previous 12 months prior to their application
* Ordinarily resident in an EU/EEA/UK/Swiss state for at least three of the five years preceding their entry to the programme
* In addition, the applicant will need to provide supporting documentation to confirm their status as a Homemaker.
* Applicants must swear a declaration before a Commissioner for attesting to their status.

It should be noted that acceptance on to a postgraduate course does not confer any entitlement to DEASP payments or childcare supports. Returners will not pay any course fees.

* **The Employed**

Applicants who are employed will need to meet the residency requirements, i.e. that the applicant has been ordinarily resident in an EU/EEA/UK/Swiss state for at least three of the five years preceding their entry to the programme.

This category of applicant will also be required to provide a copy of their most recent ‘Employment Detail Summary’ or other relevant revenue documentation.

Applicants will be required to pay 10% of the course fee.

#### **Formerly Self-employed**

To be eligible those who are formerly self-employed must provide a letter/statement from Revenue confirming that the applicant is no longer trading or a similar letter from the applicants (former) accountant should be sufficient.

Alternatively, a participant can swear a declaration stating that they are no longer self-employed. Applicants will be required to pay 10% of the course fee.

* **Recent graduates**

Full and Part time Postgraduate courses are open to recent graduates. However, to participate in these courses, 2020 graduates will be required to pay 10% of the course fee.

Eligible participants must have at least a level 8 qualification or equivalent prior to acceptance onto a course. Exact academic eligibility requirements will be determined by individual providers and may depend on the nature of the course. Providers will be required to have a Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) policy in place.

Eligible Applicants must be ordinarily resident in Ireland and must meet the nationality and EU residency rules as aligned to Springboard as detailed here <https://springboardcourses.ie/faq>

1. **Application Process**

Funding for additional places on relevant **existing** Postgraduate Courses will be allocated based on submissions received from individual HEI’s as outlined in Appendix 2 of this document.

Please note when completing Appendix 2 Institutions must rank courses based on the institutions preference for funding as it may not be possible to fund all applications made under this call.

Based on the available budget, the HEA will review the information provided by applicants and will allocate places and associated funding on the basis;

* Of the relevance of courses to listed subject fields/skills needs
* Institutional ranking of courses
* Geographical spread

Ideally courses which receive funding should commence in Semester 1 in the academic year 2020/21.

**It should be noted that this is not a programme evaluation process as the programmes must be existing validated courses.**

The HEA will issue letters of award in September setting out the list of courses with details on associated numbers of places approved for funding. HEI’s will be responsible for the recruitment of students to their approved programme places.

1. **Reporting**

Institutions will report on places filled to the HEA in November 2020. It is important to note that information on the categories of participants as set out in Section 3 above will be required by DFHERIS and the HEA and therefore HEI’s will be responsible for collecting this information and returning such information in the required reporting mechanism.

1. **Funding**

Funding will be provided as follows.

A first allocation of 70% of funding will be provided on commencement of course and the remaining balancing instalment will be provided on report of numbers in November 2020.

It is important to note that the allocation of funding will be subject to audit in 2021 including verification with SRS data and if there are any unspent allocations these will be recouped from the HEI directly back to the HEA.

HEIs who are not in a position to submit data via the SRS will be required to submit independently audited reports of student registration data for the base entry year and the target entry years.

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| **Section 2****Modular Skills Provision** |

1. **Proposal**

Total funding of €15m will be provided for shorter, more focused courses/modules that can be offered in a flexible manner and through blended or online learning to allow people to gain important skills without taking a considerable period away from the labour market.

The modular provision should be accredited in such a way as to provide building blocks to a full qualification should the student so wish.  Each module will also be stand-alone so that participants can acquire skills and put them into practice immediately in the workplace.  The modules can be at any level on the NFQ including enabling non-traditional learners to engage with higher education.

Please note eligible courses/modules should have no more than 30 credits, be already validated by QQI or an appropriate QQI recognised Irish HEI, be delivered in a part-time mode in either blended or online format, and allow learners to progress onto a full qualification on the NFQ if they so wish. Ideally modular skills provision to be funded under this initiative should already be part of an existing validated award on the NFQ thus enabling participants to gain credit towards a full award.

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| **It is important to note that courses approved under this call will not receive any funding through the RGAM.** |

1. **Skills/Discipline area**

Modular Skills provision should allow people to gain important labour market relevant skills without taking a considerable period away from employment.

1. **Funding**

Modular Skills provision will be funded based on the number of credits provided. Appendix 3 sets out the 2020 ECTS amounts per 10 credits (as per ISCED Codes) referenced in SB+ 2020. This is provided for costing reference purposes.

It is important to note that existing courses offered in Springboard+ (10 – 30 credits) are not eligible for funding under this call.

1. **Eligible cohort**

Eligible participants will include the unemployed, returners, those in employment and formerly self-employed.

Eligibility and other requirements in respect of modular skills courses will align with Springboard+ eligibility criteria.

Further information on eligibility can be found here <https://springboardcourses.ie/eligibility>

Eligible Applicants must be ordinarily resident in Ireland and must meet the nationality and EU residency rules as aligned to Springboard as detailed here <https://springboardcourses.ie/faq>

1. **Application Process**

Funding for Modular Skills Provision will be allocated based on submissions received from individual HEI’s as outlined in Appendix 2 of this document.

Please note when completing Appendix 2 institutions must rank courses based on the institutions preference for funding as it may not be possible to fund all applications made under this call. Submissions for modular provision funding should be accompanied by a short description (max 300 words) for each course/module outlining (i) how it will facilitate participants to obtain labour market relevant skills, (ii) details of the proposed recruitment process (see Appendix 4).

Based on the available budget, the HEA will review the information provided by applicants and will allocate places and associated funding on the basis;

* Of the relevance of courses to acquiring labour market skills
* Institutional ranking of courses
* Geographical spread

Ideally modular provision should commence in Semester 1 in the academic year 2020/21.

The HEA will issue letters of award in September setting out the list of approved modular provision with details on associated numbers of places approved for funding.

HEI’s will be responsible for the recruitment of students to these programmes.

1. **Reporting**

Institutions will report on places filled on these modular skills programmes to the HEA in November 2020. It is important to note that information on the categories of participants as set out in Section 3 above will be required by DFHERISS and the HEA and therefore HEI’s are responsible for collecting this information and returning such information in the required reporting mechanism.

1. **Funding**

Funding will be provided as follows

A first allocation of 70% of funding will be provided on commencement of provision and the remaining balancing instalment will be provided by the end of Q4 based on a report of numbers.

It is important to note that the allocation of funding will be subject to audit in 2021 and if there are any unspent allocations these will be recouped from the HEI directly back to the HEA.