Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Enhancement Fund 2025

Call for Applications

Call for Applications

The HEA's Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is launching the second call for applications under the EDI Enhancement Fund 2025. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are now invited to submit proposals for funding.

This Call is managed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA). Following a competitive process based on this call for applications from HEIs, the HEA will approve funding to support EDI initiatives to be implemented nationally.

Timeframe:
- Call for applications issues to HEIs – **6th March 2025**
- Deadline for applications – **12:00pm, 30th May 2025**
- Announcement of outcome – **Q3 2025**

Background

The HEA's Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality was established in 2019 to ensure sustainable acceleration towards gender equality in Irish HEIs by providing centralised support for institutions, sharing of good practice, and funding for innovative organisational and cultural change initiatives nationally. In 2020, this was transformed into the Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to include all aspects of equality, diversity and inclusion.

The Centre is pivotal in enabling the sharing of good practice, joint initiatives and co-operation between HEIs, and in developing a better understanding of the impact of interventions taken and determining the areas of future focus. The Centre provides centralised support for HEIs to help to embed an institutional culture of equality, diversity and inclusion.

From 2020 to 2023, the Centre ran the Gender Equality Enhancement Fund to facilitate cross-sectoral gender equality initiatives that respond to the recommendations of the HEA National Reviews of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions (2016 and 2022) and/or Gender Equality Taskforce's recommended actions as a means to achieve national transformation. In 2024 this fund was expanded to address the wider policy areas that the HEA and HEIs are addressing in work to advance equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education.

Objective of the Call

The primary objectives of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Enhancement Fund are:

- to encourage **innovative approaches** to addressing gender inequality, ending sexual violence and harassment (ESVH) and addressing racial and ethnic inequality across HEIs;
- to encourage **cross-sectoral collaboration** as a means to achieve national transformation;
- to support the achievement of **national policy objectives** as set out in the following reports and policy frameworks):
  - 2nd HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish HEIs;
  - Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive: Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions;
  - Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education Institutions Implementation Plan;
  - Race Equality in the Higher Education Sector Report;
  - HEA Race Equality Implementation Plan;
  - Anti-Racism Principles for Irish Higher Education Institutions.

Please see Appendix 2 for further background information on the above reports and policy frameworks.

Call Priority Areas

Applications for funding under the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Enhancement Fund can be made in four priority areas. The total funding available for each priority area is indicated in brackets. Applicants may apply for up to **€75,000** per proposal. A **maximum of €75,000** will be awarded to successful applications.

1. **Advancing gender equality in higher education (€250,000)**
   a. Supporting and advancing the recommendations of the HEA Second Review of Gender Equality in Irish HEIs.
   b. Athena Swan Ireland capacity building activities.

2. **Ending sexual violence and harassment in higher education (€100,000)**
   a. Supporting and advancing the outcomes of the ESVH Framework, Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive: Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions; and the actions of the Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education Institutions Implementation Plan; specifically
   - Initiatives with a specific focus on high-risk groups and/ or smaller or hard-to-reach groups. These may include, but are not limited to, female staff and students, gender and sexual minorities, individuals with a disability, ethnic minorities and early career researchers.
   - Initiatives that aim to support and strengthen the skills of practitioners and / or champions working on preventing and responding to SVH in their institutions.

3. **Advancing race equality in higher education (€100,000)**
   a. Supporting and advancing the recommendations of the report Race Equality in Higher Education.
   b. Supporting and advancing the actions of the Race Equality Implementation Plan.

    c. Supporting and advancing the implementation of the Anti-Racism Principles for Irish HEIs.

4. **Advancing awareness and understanding of intersectionality and multi-dimensional approaches to equality, diversity and inclusion. (€75,000)**
   a. Supporting and advancing the recommendations of the Second Review of Gender Equality in relation to intersectionality.
   b. Supporting effecting change in a way that centralises an intersectional approach to equality issues.

Proposals in all priority areas may also build on and significantly progress an existing initiative, or support a new strategic and innovative initiative, that demonstrates particularly strong potential to support sectoral advancement towards achieving the outcomes of the national EDI policy framework.

Project types
Each application must indicate the type of project or initiative proposed within the priority funding area:
   a. Training and capacity building;
   b. Research;
   c. Supporting sectoral collaboration and networks;
   d. Campaigns and awareness-raising;
   e. Institutional policy development / review / dialogue.

Application Procedure
Applications should be submitted using the application form by email to EDI@hea.ie by **12:00pm, 30ᵗʰ of May 2025**.

In submitting an application, all partner HEIs will be deemed to have accepted the conditions outlined in this and any subsequent clarifications from the HEA regarding this initiative and to have agreed to be bound by them. Furthermore, signing of the application by the Vice President/Director of EDI (or heads of institution) reflects acceptance of the award and a commitment to provide the necessary support for the programme of activity. All applications must be signed by the **Vice-Presidents/Directors of EDI** of the collaborating institutions or their authorised nominee.

HEI Eligibility
1. Eligible higher education institutions under this initiative are those listed in Appendix 1.
2. Proposals must be collaborative and involve at least **three** eligible higher education institutions. Wider participation of HEIs is encouraged, but applications must demonstrate the commitment and contribution of all institutions participating in the project. Collaboration with students or student representative bodies is permitted.
3. All proposals must nominate a lead institution for administrative and financial purposes.
4. As per Appendix 1, eligible institutions can act as lead or partner in proposals. Eligible institutions may make **up to two submissions** as lead applicant, **a maximum of one submission per priority area**. More than one submission from the same lead institution in a priority area will not be accepted. More than two submissions from the same lead institution overall will not be accepted.

5. Relevant non-HEI organisations may be included in proposals as partners in addition to the three eligible HEIs.
6. HEIs from outside of Ireland may be included in proposals as advisory partners in addition to the three eligible HEIs.
7. Applications are welcomed from all staff members (academic, research, professional, management and support staff) of the relevant higher education institution. Staff intending to submit applications should contact the office of the Vice-President/Director of EDI in their institution. All applications must be signed by the Vice-President/Director of EDI in each participant institution. Undergraduate or postgraduate students may participate in projects under the supervision of the project lead.

Terms and conditions

1. Projects must be completed within 18 months of HEIs receiving initial funding. Award holders may request extensions to this timeframe in exceptional circumstances. Requests for changes or extensions must be submitted to the HEA in advance, and these will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
2. In the event where the funding envelope in one call priority area is not fully allocated, the HEA reserves the right to reallocate funding to another priority area if there are highly ranked proposals.

Budget and eligible costs

A **maximum of €75,000** will be awarded to successful applications. Project budgets may incorporate in-kind contributions/co-funding.

Funding for successful projects will be provided in 2 stages: 80% of the budget awarded will be provided at the outset of projects, with the remaining 20% will be provided upon receipt of the final project activity and expenditure report.

- Costs may include buy-out costs for staff already employed in the institutions hosting the project. No further funding will be made available during the course of a project to cover increases in salary costs.
- Salary costs may be sought for staff recruited onto a project. The staff employment and/or buy-out costs should be in accordance with institutional norms.[1]
- Consumables and travel costs.
- Costs may include fees, consumables, travel and maintenance grants/stipends for graduate students and post-doctoral salaries which facilitate participation in the project. As the projects are of a maximum of 18 months duration, applicants must document the confirmed source of funding beyond the project lifetime for graduate student fees and stipends/maintenance.
- Postdoctoral and Research Assistant salaries must begin no lower than at the first point on the Irish Universities' Association salary scale or an equivalent.
- Inter-institutional visiting researcher's costs may also be included once clearly justified.

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[1] HEIs should take into account the findings and recommendations of the *Second Review of Gender Equality* in relation to precarity.

- Costs may be sought for third parties or consultants whose skills are crucial to the completion of the project (i.e., a digital archivist, public engagement practitioner, etc.). The necessity of these skillsets for the delivery of the project must be demonstrated in the application and steps should be taken to capture and share learnings with the HEI project partners.
- Requests for costs for community participants should align with institutional norms.
- Costs for small equipment (e.g. laptops) may be included but justification must be provided illustrating that the equipment is absolutely necessary to carry out the project and that such a facility is not available to the project through other means. All costs for equipment must clearly pertain to the proposal submitted to the EDI Enhancement Fund. Costs for equipment that are not fundamental to an approved project will not be permitted.
- Modest institutional overheads may be included up to a maximum of 25% of pay costs (full-time personnel or full-time equivalency basis). Where a staff member is not working full-time on the project, overheads may be calculated on a pro rata basis. Research student stipends and equipment should not be included as pay for the purpose of overhead calculation. Institutions may submit a flat rate for overheads at the time of application, provided this does not exceed 25% of pay costs.
- Other costs required must be specifically identified and justified, e.g., fieldwork, data collection, archives, open access publication, access to national infrastructures, etc.
- Costs to fund estates, room rental, or office space within or outside of an institution are not allowable expenses.
- Costs cannot be sought for seed funding to support further funding calls or sub-projects.
- No additional funding over and above agreed allocations to successful projects will be made available by the HEA.

Assessment Panel

The HEA will establish an Assessment Panel to evaluate the applications received. The Assessment Panel will comprise members with expertise in the relevant areas. In establishing the Assessment Panel, due regard shall be given to gender balance.

The Assessment Panel will consider the extent to which the applications meet the criteria of the 2025 Call as outlined in this document.

All applications will be assessed solely on the basis of the material provided to the HEA at the time of submission.

The HEA's decision on the award of funding under this Call is final.

Assessment Criteria

In accordance with the objective of this initiative as outlined above, the following criteria will be used to assess proposals. A minimum threshold will apply in respect of each of the assessment criteria. Only proposals which score 500 marks (50%) or above will be considered for funding. Meeting the minimum threshold is not a guarantee of funding.

Assessment Criterion	Details of Assessment Criterion	Maximum Score	Minium Qualifying Threshold
1. Alignment with national higher education policy frameworks for EDI	Alignment with recommendations of the reports and publications listed in this call document. Alignment with relevant national policy objectives as set out in the Policy Frameworks, Reports and Implementation Plans listed in this call document. A strong rationale supported by the latest data and evidence, including reference to national data, surveys etc where relevant.	200 marks	100 marks
2. Innovation and impact for higher education sector EDI work	Innovation in specified area of funding. Innovation and potential impact of proposed project outcomes, supported by evidence and/or data. Plans for embedding the project learnings into future EDI work or plans for sustaining the project beyond the period funded by the EDI Enhancement Fund.	200 marks	100 marks
3. Project Design and Description	Clear description and timeline of activities, deliverables, outputs. Articulation of anticipated SMART outcomes (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timebound). Clear description of how the project will be managed and the role of each institution in the project. Carefully considered methodologies and target group selection, supported by evidence. Risks are carefully considered and appropriate mitigation strategies put in place. Incorporation of measures to track and measure outcomes and capture learning. Overall quality of the proposal.	300 marks	150 marks

4.	Benefit to HEI Stakeholders nationally	Benefit to HEI Stakeholders nationally. Potential for replicability and wider sectoral impact. Innovative or pilot approaches and potential for learning. Strategic partnerships and collaboration.	200 marks	100 marks
5.	Value for money and impact of programme	Value for money and impact of the project. Costs are appropriately aligned with the expected outcomes of the project. A feasible and achievable initiative within the proposed budget and timeframe.	100 marks	50 marks

Reporting and monitoring

It is expected that a robust monitoring system will be developed and resourced, and that the project outcomes and expenditure will be appropriately tracked.

Institutions with successful proposals will be required to report to the HEA on progress, expenditure and the outcomes of funded projects within 18 months of the awarding of funding. Funding balances will not be allocated unless an interim report is submitted within the agreed timelines and accepted by the HEA.

Should an institution be successful for funding under this Call, institutions will be required, as per **S38(2) of the HEAA 2022:**

a) to provide financial and other information to the HEA CEO;
b) to use the funding in a cost effective and beneficial manner;
c) to operate according to standards of good governance;
d) to comply with the guidelines, codes and policies issued by the HEA under S143 of the HEAA 2022;
e) to comply on a continuous basis with the funding framework;
f) to comply with financial requirements;
g) to comply with the HEAA 2022 and regulations made thereunder; and
h) to comply with such other conditions as may be determined, with the approval of the HEA Board, by the HEA CEO.

The HEA reserves the right to terminate funding in circumstances such as, but not limited to, the following:

a) if progress is unsatisfactory,
b) if funds have not been used for the activities/research approved,
c) if work has stopped on the research project,

d) if reporting requirements are not adhered to,

e) if the project team or project contravenes institutional and/or national policies, or

f) if ethical approval is not granted where it is required.

Appendix 1: Eligible HEIs

Eligible institutions may make up to two submissions as lead applicant, a maximum of one submission per priority area. More than one submission from the same lead institution in a priority area will not be accepted. More than two submissions from the same lead institution overall will not be accepted.

Higher education institutions that are eligible to apply as a **lead institution or partner institution** under this initiative are included below:

- Atlantic Technological University
- Dublin City University
- Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Mary Immaculate College
- Maynooth University
- Munster Technological University
- National College of Art and Design
- Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, University of Medicine and Health Sciences
- South East Technological University
- Technological University Dublin
- Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest
- Trinity College Dublin
- University College Cork
- University College Dublin
- University of Galway
- University of Limerick

Higher education institutions and representative bodies that are eligible to apply as a **partner institution only** under this initiative are included below:

- Carlow College
- Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies
- National College of Ireland
- Irish Universities Association
- Technological Higher Education Association

Appendix 2: Reports and Policy Frameworks

Gender Equality

The Universities Act 1997 and TU Act 2018 (all as amended by the HEA Act 2022) require institutions to promote gender balance and equality of opportunity among students and staff, and the HEA Act 2022 requires the HEA to advance equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion in higher education.

The *[HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions* (2016)](#) was an important first step in highlighting the gender inequality that existed at senior academic levels in our HEIs.

In line with the recommendation of the 2016 Report the HEA, along with an external Expert Group, conducted a Second Gender Equality Review of Irish Higher Education Institutions. The Review was launched on 15th of March 2022. The review was undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders from the higher education sector and relevant civil society organisations, as outlined in the report. The recommendations of the Expert Group were informed by this extensive consultation process. Over the course of June, July and September 2022 the Expert Group met with several stakeholder groups to discuss progress made towards advancing gender equality since the first review in 2016 and to make high level recommendations. The Expert Group findings and recommendations were published in the *[Report of the Expert Group: 2nd HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions](#)* in December 2022.

Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment

The HEA is committed to ensuring a national institutional campus culture which is safe, respectful and supportive, and clear in the condemnation of unwanted and unacceptable behaviours. Preventing and responding to all forms of sexual harassment and sexual violence in Irish higher education is essential to ensuring a safe environment for all students and staff, in addition to ensuring academic and research excellence.

The Centre of Excellence for EDI supports and oversees the implementation of *[Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive: Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions](#)*, which was published by the government in April 2019, and is often referred to as the 'ESVH Framework', or 'the Framework for Consent'. The Framework articulates a holistic and progressive 'whole-of-system' approach to addressing sexual misconduct in HEIs. It sets out fifteen key outcomes which are clustered into four thematic areas focusing on: Institutional Culture, Institutional Processes, Institutional Policies and Targeted Initiatives. HEIs are required to report on progress in implementing the Framework to the HEA on an annual basis.

In October 2022, the '*[Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education Institutions Implementation Plan](#)*' was launched. The plan was developed to address the recommendations that emerged from the *[National Surveys](#)* of Staff and Student Experiences of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish HEIs conducted in 2020. The surveys aimed to monitor the experiences of students and staff in relation to sexual violence and harassment, in order to create a robust evidence base for further policy and funding decisions in relation to tackling sexual violence and harassment in HEIs. The ESVH Implementation Plan is intended to build on and complement the broad range of initiatives ongoing across the sector towards the outcomes set out in the national policy framework.

Race Equality

In 2021, the HEA Centre of Excellence for EDI ran the first National Race Equality Survey of all HEIs, the findings of same were included in the *Race Equality Report*, published in October 2021. The aim of the survey was to capture the lived experience of HEI staff in relation to race equality. For the purpose of the survey, race equality was defined as 'equal representation, equal experiences and equal outcomes of staff from minority ethnic groups.' In September 2022 following a period of consultation with stakeholders, including the National Athena Swan Intersectionality Working Group, the Centre of Excellence for EDI launched the *Race Equality Implementation Plan*.

On the 20th of March 2023, the HEA launched the *Anti-Racism Principles for Irish Higher Education Institutions* which aim to harness the power that Irish HEIs have as leaders of positive change in society to challenge racism and race inequality. The Anti-Racism Principles seek to embed a culture of race equality across higher education.