



PATH Strand 4

Phase 1 – Universal Design Fund

Supporting inclusive universally designed higher education environments for all students

Implementation Guidelines – Frequently Asked Questions

15 July 2022

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Introduction

Following the announcement of PATH 4 on 2 June 2022 by Mr Simon Harris TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the circulation of the PATH 4 Phase 1 guidelines by the HEA to HEIs, the HEA hosted an information event on 13 June which gave HEIs the opportunity to raise questions and seek clarification on both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of PATH 4. The HEA invited feedback and questions from HEIs in relation to the operation of Phase 1 of PATH 4. The issues raised are addressed in this FAQ document.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can the deadline for the submission of Phase 1 project plans be extended?

The HEA and DFHERIS have agreed to an extension to the submission date for Phase 1 project plans. **The new submission date is close of business Friday 14 October 2022.**

2. Can the Phase 1 expenditure deadline be extended?

As per the PATH 4 Phase 1 guidelines, PATH 4 funding must be spent by HEIs by 31 December 2023.

Phase 1 funding can only be used for activities outlined in Phase 1 project plans. Funding cannot be carried over into Phase 2.

3. Can HEIs collaborate and submit joint project plans for Phase 1?

Yes – under the PATH 4 Phase 1 guidelines, HEIs can choose to collaborate with each other in the development and implementation of projects.

Any joint project plan must identify a lead HEI for the project who will be responsible for reporting to the HEA. Any joint projects are subject to the same reporting requirements as projects plans submitted by individual HEIs.

In the case of all project plans, all funding allocated under PATH 4 Phase 1 must be reported on to the HEA.

4. What information is required in the Phase 1 project plans to be submitted to the HEA?

Each HEI's, or groups of HEIs', project plan is expected to provide a detailed description of the projects and activities it wishes to implement under PATH 4 Phase 1. There is no prescribed format for the project plan, but it must include the following:

- How the project plan aligns with the PATH 4 Phase 1 Implementation Guidelines
- How the project plan and PATH 4 Phase 1 funding aligns with or supports the HEI's overall strategic plan.
- Timeline for implementation of project plan up to 31 December 2023
- Budget and expenditure profile up to 31 December 2023

- Evidence that proposal supports a whole-of-institution approach to student success¹ and universal design across the institution
- Evidence of stakeholder and student engagement, including the input of relevant HEI staff (both academic and professional services staff)
- Proposed quantitative and qualitative outcomes
- Sign-off by President (in the case of a collaborative or joint project, the project plan must be signed off by the Presidents of all participating HEIs)
- A designated single point of contact or project lead who will be responsible for liaising with the HEA (e.g., addressing requests for clarification, submitting progress reports)

Where HEIs collaborate, the above points must be reflected in any joint project plan. A lead institution must be identified where HEIs are collaborating.

If HEIs wish to submit a call for proposals under PATH 4 Phase 2, their Phase 1 project plans may assist HEIs' readiness to develop inclusive learning environments for students with intellectual disabilities and HEIs are encouraged to use Phase 1 funding for this purpose. This may include evidence of prior planning and the establishment of appropriate project management structures for Phase 2. As Phase 1 funding must be spent by 31 December 2023 and Phase 2 is a competitive process, HEIs must ensure that no future liabilities beyond Phase 1 are created.

5. Can a project plan consist of more than one project?

Yes - a HEI's project plan can consist of more than one project or work package but such project plans must operate within the overall PATH 4 phase 1 funding allocated to the HEI.

6. What are the reporting requirements for Phase 1?

HEIs will be required to report to the HEA on the operation of the Universal Design fund. The HEA will provide HEIs with a reporting template following the approval of project plans. The points listed under question 5 will form the basis of reporting templates.

A report on PATH 4 Phase 1 projects will be due in Q1 2024. An interim update may be sought in mid-2023.

7. Is Phase 1 aimed at any particular group of students e.g., autistic students?

PATH 4 Phase 1 funding is intended to support inclusive universally designed higher education environments and to enable HEIs to prepare for greater engagement in Phase 2 for students with intellectual disabilities. This will support the embedding of Universal Design (UD) approaches and inclusive practices that will benefit all students.

¹ HEIs are encouraged to utilise the resources of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (NFETL) in relation to student success, including [the Seven Cs for Embedding Student Success: A Toolkit for Higher Education Institutions](#).

In developing project plans for Phase 1, HEIs should also be cognisant of the needs of autistic and neurodiverse students.

If HEIs wish to submit a call for proposals under PATH 4 Phase 2, their Phase 1 project plans may include plans for using the funding to assist HEIs' readiness to develop inclusive learning environments for students with intellectual disabilities.

8. What type of expenditure is allowed or not allowed under PATH 4 Phase 1?

The PATH 4 Phase 1 guidelines outline the types of projects and activities that can be supported by this funding.

Page 10 of the guidelines outlines the conditions of funding attached to PATH 4 Phase 1.

PATH 4 funding is not intended to be used on Universal Design measures which are already supported by other Exchequer funding – although this may be considered where the funding stream for these activities has been or will be exhausted. For example, projects or activities funded under the FSD Strategic Initiatives which have been completed or approaching completion may continue to be funded under PATH 4 Phase 1. Funding is for current expenditure. As per the PATH 4 Phase 1 guidelines, funding under PATH 4 may be used for campus accessibility improvements and small-scale capital works. Otherwise, capital expenditure should be considered under the Devolved Capital Grant, and not PATH 4 funding.

9. What is the link between Phase 1 and Phase 2 of PATH 4?

Phase 1 of PATH 4 will support the embedding of Universal Design (UD) approaches and inclusive practices in HEIs which will benefit all students, including autistic and neurodiverse students, and enable the building of capacity in HEIs for greater participation by students with intellectual disabilities in higher education.

Phase 2 will involve a three-year pilot to support additional course provision for students with intellectual disabilities and will inform future policy considerations for greater participation by students with intellectual disabilities in higher education.

If HEIs wish to submit a call for proposals under PATH 4 Phase 2, their Phase 1 project plans are expected to assist HEIs' readiness to develop inclusive learning environments for students with intellectual disabilities. This may include evidence of prior planning and the establishment of appropriate project management structures for Phase 2, e.g., a project coordinator post or function to progress planning for Phase 2. As Phase 1 funding must be spent by 31 December 2023 and Phase 2 is a competitive process, HEIs must ensure that no future liabilities beyond Phase 1 are created.

10. Can Phase 1 funding be used to fund existing course provision for students with intellectual disabilities?

Phase 1 Funding cannot be used to fund existing course provision for students with intellectual disabilities.

Phase 1 funding can be used by existing course providers to develop materials and support the sharing of their experience to benefit those who have no or limited experience in this space. This can include:

- Sharing experience in establishing programmes
- Training
- Developing agreed national quality assurance indicators

11. What further guidance is being provided in relation to the definition of UD and best practice in this area?

The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) of the National Disability Authority (NDA) has provided the HEA and DFHERIS with information on the policy and legislative framework for Universal Design and areas for HEIs to consider when developing their Phase 1 project plans. This information can be found in Appendix 1 to this document.

12. Will there be an opportunity to bring HEIs together to share ideas and best practice?

The HEA is hosting an information sharing event for HEIs on the morning of Wednesday 14 September 2022. It will focus on the sharing of best practice in Universal Design, experiences in the development of provision for students with intellectual disabilities and inclusive approaches that support autistic and neurodiverse students in higher education. Further details will be circulated in August 2022.

13. How will Phase 2 of PATH 4 operate?

Phase 2 of PATH 4 will be a competitive call for proposals for course provision for students with intellectual disabilities.

DFHERIS is leading the development of the policy framework for Phase 2 which will involve an extensive consultation process with HEIs and other stakeholders. This consultation process will address issues such as:

- Type of provision e.g., course duration, NFQ level, graduate outcomes
- Eligible expenditure
- Student supports
- Linkages with other parts of the education sector, representative organisations, employers
- Best practice

The consultation process is expected to commence before the end of 2022.

In relation to the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) and students' eligibility to access FSD-funded supports, there are currently no proposals to change FSD eligibility requirements.