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Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science



Infreastruchtúr don Nuálaíocht, Staidéir, Páirtíocht,
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INSPIRE

Research Infrastructure
Programme Outline

National Research Infrastructure Programme: INSPIRE

What is meant by research infrastructure?

Research infrastructure refers to the core facilities, technologies, and services that enable high-quality research and innovation across all disciplines in the higher education sector. Quality research infrastructure is naturally integral to the institutions' research performance. It also underpins their development of highly-skilled graduates, their research commercialisation function and ability to collaborate with industry, including SMEs and microenterprises to foster commercialisation of research to enhance Ireland's innovation performance.

What has led to the creation of this Programme?

The **Programme for Government 2025** includes a commitment to examine a funding stream for research infrastructure, along the lines of the original Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLTI) and grounded in the Government's wider prioritisation of research and innovation as "*key drivers of economic progress*".

The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science established an expert **Working Group on Research Infrastructure** in March 2025 to advance this commitment. The Group reviewed the good practices of the PRTLTI, national activity since then in this area and international good practice. The Working Group's report is being published today.

Underpinned by the expert Working Group's analysis and findings, a comprehensive research infrastructure investment programme formed an important part of this Department's submission to the **National Development Plan review** undertaken by the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation earlier in 2025. The resultant capital allocation of €4.55bn to this Department, over half of which will be invested in research and innovation, is enabling the creation of the INSPIRE Programme.

Published in September 2025, Ireland's **Action Plan for Competitiveness and Productivity** emphasises the contribution of research, innovation and skills to Ireland's future economic performance and resilience. Its first priority action is the establishment of a research infrastructure investment programme - as is now happening with today's launch of INSPIRE.

What is the purpose of INSPIRE?

While funding research equipment, INSPIRE is a strategic investment in Ireland's talent and innovation. It aims to:

- **Accelerate institutional strategies**, not only in relation to their research performance but also in terms of their development of highly-skilled industry-ready graduates, their collaboration and research commercialisation with industry, as well as their international reputation and role in regional development.
- **Advance national priorities**, having particular regard to Ireland's competitiveness and economic resilience, but also to its wider policy objectives including, for instance, climate action, digitalisation, and health and wellbeing.

INSPIRE Investment Principles

Subject to clear funding criteria and reporting conditions, the Programme will be open to all research disciplines and all higher education institutions. Key investment principles underpinning the Programme include:

- Alignment with institutional priorities and national policy objectives;
- Demonstrated institutional capability and readiness;
- Potential for collaboration, both across higher education institutions and with other sectors, particularly industry, including SMEs;
- Strong focus on utilisation, accessibility, and long-term sustainability.

INSPIRE Funding Streams

With an overall budget of at least €500m over the lifetime of the National Development Plan within a wider research infrastructure investment package of €750m (encompassing investment in Ireland's High-Performance Computing HPC capability and support for Tyndall National Institute), the Programme will comprise two broad funding streams:

- i. **Local Institutional Infrastructure:** equipment used routinely for both teaching and research purposes within a higher education institution, typically costing between €25,000 and €500,000.
- ii. **Shared Advanced Infrastructures:** costing in excess of €500,000, these refer to larger-scale more advanced equipment appropriately shared across a number of higher education institutions and also with external users.

The Higher Education Authority will lead on delivering the Local Institutional Infrastructure funding and Research Ireland will lead on awarding funding for Shared Advanced Infrastructures. The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science will drive consistency and cohesion across the work of its agencies in delivering this Programme.

Programme Phases

The Programme will be implemented in two phases, with Phase Two building progressively on Phase One. Phase One will:

- Establish a strategic baseline across the sector so that all investments under the Programme are grounded in a strategic and systematic approach to the delivery of its mission;
- Award funding to the institutions to address the urgent Local Institutional Infrastructure issues;
- Review Expressions of Interest in Shared Advanced Infrastructures, ensuring that any future investments through this stream are joined up and advance national enterprise and wider priorities.

Under Phase Two, funding for Shared Advanced Infrastructures will be competitively awarded on the basis of the strategic baseline for the sector

established in Phase One, international expert peer review and overall national policy priorities.

Central Access Portal

Strategic investment in public research infrastructure, as will be delivered under INSPIRE, will provide the platform upon which research can deliver innovation impact, through the creation of new high-potential spin-outs and impactful collaboration between existing companies across the country with the higher education research system.

Critically for this, a central equipment access portal will be built and actively managed so that all prospective equipment users outside the institution, as well as inside it, can see what is located where, how they can access it and how much it will cost them. This is particularly important to prospective industry users of Shared Advanced Infrastructures, enabling them to access equipment that they may not have in-house and which can help them to drive forward their innovation ambitions.

Next Steps

- In Q1 2026, the HEA and Research Ireland will simultaneously open INSPIRE Phase One for complementary applications from each higher education institution.
- As part of developing their Phase One submissions, the higher education institutions will collaborate with each other and consult with industry to plan suitable partnerships for potential Shared Advanced Infrastructures.
- Work will commence on the development of the central access portal.