



An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science



Research Infrastructure Programme Phase

One: Establishing the Strategic Foundation

Response to Queries
Updated 25/06/2026

HEA

An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas
The Higher Education Authority



Taighde Éireann
Research Ireland

Response to queries received via the INSPIRE mailbox (inspire@hea.ie)

1. If the institution does not have a separate standalone research strategy but it is instead clearly embedded within the institutional strategy and monitored through established governance processes, should the institution indicate that both an institutional strategic plan and a research strategy are being provided, where the institutional strategy incorporates research priorities?

Where an institution does not have a standalone research strategy but instead integrates research priorities within its approved institutional strategic plan, it is acceptable to submit the institutional strategic plan as the primary supporting document.

However, applicants should ensure that the submitted documentation clearly demonstrates the elements of the research strategy embedded in the institution's strategic plan, including strategic priorities, objectives, and governance arrangements.

The Phase One Submission Checklist (1.2 of the Application Form) is intended as a support to HEIs. It is not mandatory to complete the checklist and does not need to be included with submissions.

2. If an institution's strategic and/or research plans do not extend beyond 2027, what level of detail or formal assurance is required in respect of research strategy beyond the current plan period? For example, is a statement within the application sufficient, or is formal institutional confirmation required?

Where an institution's strategic plan does not encompass the 24-month implementation period for Local Institutional Infrastructure (i.e. up to the end of 2028), applicants may provide information within Section 3.1 (Strategic Statement) of the application outlining future anticipated research priorities and strategic direction.

Under Section 4 (Declaration and Endorsement), the signature of the HEI's President/Provost or equivalent will be considered as the formal institutional confirmation required.

3. Section 5.3 of the Call Document states that time-bound maintenance for INSPIRE-funded equipment is an eligible cost for the duration of Local Institutional Infrastructure projects. Can the HEA confirm whether the maximum duration of these projects is 24 months?

INSPIRE-funded Local Institutional Infrastructure projects are expected to be delivered within a 24-month period, within which funded infrastructure must be procured, installed, and operationalised.

Time-bound maintenance costs are eligible within this 24-month timeframe only.

4. Section 5.3 indicates that software costs essential to the initial operation of INSPIRE-funded equipment are eligible. Can the HEA clarify whether licences to software package/programmes not linked to specific equipment (annual or perpetual), where demonstrably critical research infrastructure, are eligible under this provision?

Specialist software packages/programmes that align with the objectives and criteria of the INSPIRE Programme which are considered critical research infrastructure, and which will support the advancement of the HEIs research priorities as set out in institutional strategies and research strategies are considered eligible. This would not encompass general software beyond the research mission of the institution.

HEIs are reminded that INSPIRE-funded Local Institutional Infrastructure projects are expected to be delivered within a 24-month period, within which funded infrastructure must be procured, installed, and operationalised. Expenditure of the funding awarded beyond this timeframe will not be permitted. Institutions must consider the sustainability of their proposals, and set out in their applications how ongoing costs, as applicable, will be met beyond the implementation timeframe.

5. Section 5.2 specifies a maximum INSPIRE contribution of €500,000 per individual item or infrastructure package under the Local Infrastructure component. Can the HEA confirm whether institutions may include infrastructure items exceeding this threshold (e.g. €750,000 total cost), where the additional funding (e.g. €250,000) is secured through confirmed internal or external co-investment?

The maximum INSPIRE contribution for Local Institutional Infrastructure is €500,000 per item or infrastructure package. All requested INSPIRE funding must not exceed the upper limit of the specified funding range in the letter of invitation. However, confirmed co-funding may be included beyond the institutional INSPIRE funding bracket.

Where co-funding is required, and obtained or already existent, this should be specified in the HEI's application and budget breakdown. However, where co-funding is required, but has not yet been secured or committed as co-funding, to complete infrastructure procurement, this will be deemed ineligible.

6. As outlined in the INSPIRE Governing Framework, funding of system-level or national infrastructures could be supported through a third pillar of funding. Our institution would like to indicate interest in hosting such infrastructure. Should we apply for this through the Phase 2 Expression of Interest?

Institutions wishing to host system-level or national infrastructures should request this infrastructure support as part of their Shared Advanced Infrastructure Expression of Interest. The deadline for submission is Wednesday 29th July.

7. The maximum value of individual items or ‘packages’ of infrastructure under Category 1 is €500,000, and the minimum under Category 2 is €500,000 – is this value exclusive or inclusive of VAT?

The values are inclusive of VAT.

8. Should an application be successful, any duplicate requests for the same infrastructure that are already under review in national, international, or institutional funding schemes, or already placed on a reserve list in these schemes, must be withdrawn from these other schemes to prevent double funding.” – Is the Reserve list for RI Infrastructures 2025 Call still active?

Yes, the reserve list for the Research Ireland Infrastructure 2025 Call remains active. Further information on the status and duration of the reserve list will be provided by Research Ireland in due course.

9. Are "routine" items (for example, laptops, desktop computers, or general-purpose storage) eligible where they are clearly justified as integral components of a larger research infrastructure package, for example essential to the operation, access, management or use of the proposed infrastructure package?

Yes, routine items may be considered eligible where they are clearly justified as integral components of a proposed research infrastructure package. Where general-purpose storage is required as part of a larger research infrastructure package, costs must be incurred within the 24-month timeframe as costs associated with Local Institutional Infrastructure beyond the 24-month timeframe will be the responsibility of the institution

10. Is the information requested in Section 5 of the Application form required for each Infrastructure Package, or for the overall ranked ensemble/portfolio of requests?

The information requested in Section 5 of the Application Form should be provided for the overall ranked ensemble/portfolio of Local Institutional Infrastructure requests.

Applicants should ensure that the response clearly reflects the strategic rationale, coherence, prioritisation, and expected outcomes of the portfolio as a whole. Additional details on individual packages should be provided in the Detailed Infrastructure Table (Appendix 1).

11. Is the Assessment described in Section 5.4 of the Call Document applied to each Infrastructure Package, or to the overall ranked ensemble/portfolio of requests?

Each infrastructure package will be reviewed, and an overall assessment will be made for the HEI application. The assessment panel reserves the right to exclude an individual package from any funding recommendations.

12. In the Host Tab, column J, Prioritisation, from the description of what we are to include in that column, are we correct in understanding that we should list our SAI Expressions of Interest in order of priority?

Prioritisation in this case is reflective of the prioritisation of the requested infrastructure within the institution's broader infrastructure ambitions, i.e. if only one infrastructure item or package is included, we still require detail on the prioritisation. However, if multiple items/packages are being requested, please include this detail for each and in order of priority in the table.

13. In the instructions for the Appendix 2 SAI Expression of Interest Template, it states that the Partner_User Tab should only be completed if the institution is not planning to lead on a Shared Advanced Infrastructures application in Phase Two. However, we are planning on both being a lead and a partner/user on differing infrastructures in Phase Two. Should we still complete the Partner_User Tab? Is participation at both levels allowed?

Yes, participation at both levels is allowed. Please complete both tabs if intending to be a Host and a partner/user. The information provided in the Partner_User tab will help identify common areas of need/interest for planning purposes.

14. Can we purchase multiple-year extended warranties or service contracts with the equipment during the capital investment procurement stage, whereby some of those extended warranties or service contracts will be executed outside the 24 month window (but all expenditure will be incurred within the 24 months).

Yes, for Local Institutional Infrastructure, costs of multi-year warranties or maintenance contracts may be included where the cost is incurred within the 24-month timeframe, where they form part of the procurement process and support the effective operation of the infrastructure. HEIs should note that staff costs, such as salaries and training costs, are ineligible for funding under INSPIRE Phase One. Any costs associated with Local Institutional Infrastructure beyond the 24-month timeframe will be the responsibility of the institution.

15. Section 5.3, under 'ineligible costs', bullet point 4, includes: "- Human resource costs (including salary and training costs related to operating the equipment)"

We will have to purchase training with new equipment, even if it is replacing old items, upskilling will be required for the tech support staff. Can we purchase training days/hours as part of the capital investment?

No, as per Section 5.3 of the Phase One Call document, training costs related to the operation of Local Institutional Infrastructure are not eligible. The human resource costs (including salary and training costs related to operating the equipment) are the responsibility of the institution.

16. On the 'Detailed Budget' tab of the Appendix-1-LII-Detailed-Infrastructure-Table-and-Budget-Template file: Columns G and I contain the text "Maintenance Costs Description (Refer to Section 5.2 of the call document) " and "Delivery & Installation Costs Description (Refer to

Section 5.2 of the call document)"

Section 5.2 of the call document contains no information on maintenance, delivery or installation costs. Can we get clarity on what 'maintenance' costs (e.g. service contracts, extended warranties, consumable replacements), and what 'delivery & installation costs' can be included?

Section 5.3 of the Call Document confirms that the following may be included as eligible costs, where appropriate:

- Time-bound maintenance for INSPIRE funded equipment (for the duration of INSPIRE Local Institutional Infrastructure projects only)
- Items of new or refurbished equipment that are rooted in institutional strategy and sufficiently justified, including VAT, transportation and installation (where necessary)
- Reasonable costs are acceptable for specific refurbishment or adaptation works required to install research infrastructure

All such costs must be directly related to the acquisition, installation, or initial operation of the funded infrastructure.

Applicants should ensure that any costs included under these headings are clearly justified and demonstrably linked to the infrastructure being proposed.

17. From the table and budget sheet: Can we get confirmation that for the purposes of the application columns H-K can be interpreted as follows:

- **Procurement Start: preparing quotations, tendering, supplier selection, procurement approval**
- **Procurement Complete: the purchase has been finalised and contracts/orders are confirmed**
- **Delivery / Installation: the equipment/software is delivered, installed, configured, calibrated, and tested**
- **Operational: the infrastructure is fully functional and available for research/training use**

Yes, the interpretation of the timeline columns H-K in the Detailed Infrastructure Table as outlined is appropriate.

Applicants should ensure that:

- Procurement Start reflects the date of initiation of the procurement process, including preparatory steps such as quotations, tendering, supplier selection, and procurement approval
- Procurement Complete reflects the point at which the purchase has been finalised and contracts or orders are confirmed
- Delivery / Installation reflects the date where delivery, installation, configuration, calibration, and testing of the infrastructure has been completed

- Operational reflects the point at which the infrastructure is fully functional and available for research and/or training use

These stages should clearly demonstrate the progression from procurement through to full operational use within the required 24-month implementation period.

18. The INSPIRE Programme Governing Framework adopts a broad definition of research infrastructure, including creative practice studios, exhibition spaces, archives and other specialist research environments. For some Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines, the research infrastructure may comprise a specialised research environment, with the space itself constituting a core component of the infrastructure rather than serving solely as a location for equipment. As a result, the establishment or enhancement of such infrastructure may require substantial adaptation, fit-out or refurbishment works as an integral element of the infrastructure investment.

Could Research Ireland clarify whether Shared Advanced Infrastructure proposals of this nature are eligible under INSPIRE and, if so, the extent to which associated adaptation, fit-out and refurbishment costs may be included within a proposal.

Given the importance of this issue for the development of Shared Advanced Infrastructure EOIs, any clarification in advance of the submission deadline would be welcomed.

A specialist research space that constitutes a core component of the infrastructure may be eligible for funding under Shared Advanced Infrastructures. Where necessary, reasonable costs are acceptable for specific refurbishment or adaptation works required to install research infrastructure being funded under the INSPIRE Programme. However, such refurbishment works must either create the infrastructure or be directly related to the deployment and functional use of the infrastructure. Funding is not intended to support major or large-scale capital construction projects, or wider refurbishment or retrofitting plans.

19. The INSPIRE Programme Governing Framework adopts a broad definition of research infrastructure, including data infrastructure, digital platforms, archives and curated collections. Could the HEA and Research Ireland clarify whether licences, subscriptions or access arrangements for specialist research datasets, digital corpora, curated collections or comparable research data resources may be considered eligible infrastructure expenditure where they constitute a core research capability and align with institutional and national research priorities?

Where such resources are eligible, could the HEA and Research Ireland also clarify whether there are any restrictions relating to licence or subscription duration within the INSPIRE funding period?

Costs associated with licences, subscriptions or access arrangements for critical research infrastructure may be considered eligible where they are clearly justified as supporting the objectives and criteria of the INSPIRE programme and the advancement of the institutional strategies and research strategy.

In terms of duration, INSPIRE funding for Local Institutional Infrastructure is limited to the 24-month

implementation period, within which all expenditure must be incurred.

Applicants should therefore ensure that:

- any licence or subscription costs covered by Local Institutional Infrastructure allocations are incurred within this timeframe, and
- the ongoing sustainability of access to such resources beyond the implementation period is clearly addressed in the application, with institutions responsible for resourcing it beyond the lifetime of INSPIRE support.

20. Will (or how will) the priority ranking of a piece of SAI impact on its chances of progressing to full proposal. (if two similar pieces are requested from 2 HEIs, will the one with the higher prioritisation be invited to full submission?)

At the Expression of Interest stage, there is no requirement to submit a ranked priority list, as required for the Phase 1 Local Infrastructure template. The primary purpose of the EoI process is to provide a system-level view of infrastructure needs, and to encourage collaboration and consolidation across HEIs, rather than to allocate funding at this stage. Prioritisation within the institution's broader infrastructure ambitions will be assessed as part of Phase Two Expression of Interest review. Please note that all Expressions of Interest will be reviewed regardless of designated institutional prioritisation. If requests are of equal priority, please outline this in the narrative in Column J.

21. If- subsequent to the awarding of the Phase 1 grant- a HEI manages to secure significant discounts, will it be able to use the savings to purchase additional items from lower on its priority list?

Please refer to Q22 for the answer to Q21.

22. What if the HEI was awarded at the top end of its bracket and they subsequently secure savings during procurement- how can those savings be used?

One answer addresses Q21 and Q22.

Where savings arise, HEIs may submit a request to the HEA to reallocate those savings for consideration. Any such reallocation is not automatic and is subject to HEA approval and must remain aligned with the approved scope of the Local Institutional Infrastructure proposal.

The use of savings to fund additional infrastructure items, including items from lower on the priority list, is not guaranteed. If HEI allocations are not spent within the permitted timeframe of 24 months, HEIs may be required to return unspent funding.

HEIs are requested to ensure that the costings provided in Local Institutional Infrastructure budgets are well-informed and realistic at the application stage.

23. In relation to the Appendix 2 - SAI Expression of Interest Template, column G - Indicative Investment and Readiness - seeks an indication of the scale of investment needed. Should our researchers include potential additional technical staff required within that amount? In the Webinar Follow Up Statement issued in April, it was stated that "each institution will receive a contribution to maintenance and technical support, calculated as a function of infrastructure funding eventually awarded and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis." So, our researchers were unclear as to whether the cost of such supports should be included in the indicative scale at this point?

If the cost of such supports is known, please outline these in the indicative scale section. As part of this section, please also outline the current available administrative and/or technical support available to provide an indication of readiness to host.

24. Will the HEA rule on the eligibility of any of the items requested in the LII Budget table?

The HEA will convene an expert panel, including external independent expertise, to assess applications for the Local Institutional Infrastructure element of Phase One using the assessment criteria outlined in the Phase One Call document. The expert panel reserves the right to exclude any infrastructure item or package from the priority list where the justification provided is considered insufficient or where the panel considers that it does not adequately meet the requirements of the Programme.

25. Can you tell me what happens to the value of our institutional allocation if one or more items in our LII list are deemed ineligible? Is the value of our allocation reduced by the value of the ineligible items?

HEI allocations will be determined by the independent assessment panel who will evaluate applications in accordance with the assessment criteria set out in Section 5.4 of the Phase One Call Document.

Successful HEIs will be awarded an overall institutional allocation following the assessment process. As part of this process, HEIs will be advised which infrastructure items or packages within their proposal are being supported for funding.

Where individual items or packages are deemed ineligible or are not recommended for funding, these will not be supported as part of the final allocation.

26. Our reading of the call document and responses to previous queries is that training costs on new equipment are not an eligible item. If this interpretation is correct, is there any possibility to expand the eligible costs to include training costs on new equipment? Given the scale of investment, we would strongly encourage the extension of eligibility to training costs to avoid a scenario where only a handful of staff are able to manage and use equipment etc which would ultimately create potential points of weakness/failure in the sustainability and long-term use of new equipment and infrastructure.

As per Q14 & Q15, training costs related to the operation of equipment are an ineligible cost under

Section 5.3 of the Phase One Call Document.

Accordingly, there are no provisions within the current Phase One Call to extend eligibility to include training costs. Institutions should take account of these requirements in planning for the operation of funded infrastructure.

27. In light of current trends in research assessment reform, the strategic KPI on p. 7 of the call document – “citation impact” – is particularly problematic. It is unclear to us how an institution is supposed to track this with any level of accuracy when in practice, researchers will also be making use of equipment and infrastructure that will not have been supported through INSPIRE.

As set out in Section 3.1 of the Call Document, the strategic KPIs are indicative in nature at this stage. Further guidance on monitoring and reporting requirements will be provided in due course.

28. Related to Q.2 above, on p.15 of the call document the requirement to acknowledge the HEA, Research Ireland and DFHERIS on all publications and outputs will be difficult to monitor and enforce. Does this requirement apply beyond the lifetime of the funding programme? Does it apply to every item procured via the programme, including those under €1,000? If so, are there any suggestions as to how researchers, staff, students etc are to be made aware that the equipment they are using falls under this requirement?

This requirement is intended to apply to outputs that are supported by INSPIRE-funded infrastructure, rather than to every individual item or piece of equipment procured under the programme.

In terms of duration, the requirement applies to outputs arising from the use of INSPIRE-funded infrastructure, including those generated after the implementation period where relevant.

Institutions are expected to take a proportionate approach to implementation, for example through internal guidance, communications, and appropriate labelling or to ensure that users are aware of the requirement where relevant.

29. Can multiple versions of similar items be included in the proposal for consideration? For example, we are exploring Trusted Research Environments which will be linked to specific physical locations which would require separate packages.

Yes, multiple versions of similar items may be included within a proposal where they form part of a clearly defined and justified infrastructure need.

In such cases, each item or package should be presented separately within the Detailed Infrastructure Table and must demonstrate a clear rationale, including how it supports the institution’s strategic priorities and the objectives of the INSPIRE Programme.

Where similar infrastructure is proposed across different locations or settings, applicants should clearly outline the distinct purpose, use case, or operational requirement for each package.

30. In reviewing some of the previously submitted queries, we were hoping to clarify whether the Expressions of Interest for Phase Two also have to be listed in order of priority?

Under the Expression of Interest for Phase Two, there is no requirement to submit a ranked priority list, as required for the Phase One Local Infrastructure template. The primary purpose of the Eol process is to provide a system-level view of infrastructure needs, and to encourage collaboration and consolidation across HEIs, rather than to allocate funding at this stage. Prioritisation within the institution's broader infrastructure ambitions will be assessed as part of the Eol review for Phase Two. Please note that **all** Eols will be reviewed regardless of designated institutional prioritisation. If requests are of equal priority, please outline this in the narrative in Column J.

31. We would appreciate some clarification on what is being considered core activity in the context of this call. At points in the call document it refers to equipment and infrastructure for day-to-day activities but at others says that core funded activity is not eligible.

Funding provided under the Local Institutional Infrastructure component is intended to fund critical research equipment and facilities that support the day-to-day activities that advance institutional and national strategic research priorities.

It does not encompass general institutional infrastructure beyond the research mission of the institution, such as student records systems, or costs such as salaries and general overheads.

The core grant-funded activities or schemes referred to in the INSPIRE Phase One Call Document (Section 5.5) that are not eligible for funding under INSPIRE are the activities or schemes funded by the recurrent grant funding allocated by the HEA on an annual basis using the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM).

32. Assuming the EOIs for Phase Two are to be submitted in a prioritised list as well, how this will be considered and will it play a role in Research Ireland's feedback or any selection of Eols. It would also be good to know if RI intend to share the prioritised list of Eols or the Eols separately - or indeed what information will be shared.

Under the Expression of Interest for Phase Two, there is no requirement to submit a ranked priority list, as required for the Phase One Local Institutional Infrastructure template. The primary purpose of the Eol process is to provide a system-level view of infrastructure needs, and to encourage collaboration and consolidation across HEIs, rather than to allocate funding at this stage. Prioritisation within the institution's broader infrastructure ambitions will be assessed as part of the Eol review for Phase Two. Please note that **all** Eols will be reviewed regardless of designated institutional prioritisation. If requests are of equal priority, please outline this in the narrative in Column J. All Eols received will be shared across all INSPIRE eligible institutions.

33. Can we please clarify in relation to the SAI Expressions of queries no. 20, 30, 32, where it is stated "Prioritisation within the institution's broader infrastructure ambitions will be assessed as part of Phase Two Expression of Interest review." If there is a institutional change in

status/change in the details of the applications between the Phase 1 and Phase 2 submission leading to a change in the university's prioritisation of the SAI proposals, will it be possible to change that prioritisation? Or will the prioritisation as submitted under Phase 1 be set in stone?

The primary purpose of the EoI process for Phase Two is to provide a system-level view of infrastructure needs, and to encourage collaboration and consolidation across HEIs, rather than to allocate funding at this stage. Following assessment of the EoIs for Phase Two, institutions will receive structured feedback and, where appropriate, guidance on developing coordinated or joint full proposals for Phase Two, which will subsequently be subject to robust international peer-review. If invited to full proposal, we expect the Phase Two application to be broadly reflective of the submitted EoI but prioritisation may change if suitably justified.

34. Can I please confirm, for column A on the Detailed Infrastructure Table tab in Appendix 1. How are we to assign prioritisation here? Is it that all line items in Package 1 are assigned P1, for Package 2 all P2, and so on? Or, do we provide a priority number for each line item in each package?

Prioritisation in Column A of the Detailed Infrastructure Table should be assigned at the infrastructure package level and be based on the strategic priority of the institution. Potential funding recommendations will be informed by this prioritisation.

Accordingly, each package should be assigned a single priority designation (e.g. P1, P2, etc.). All line items related to a particular package should be assigned to that priority, i.e. P1 = package 1. This prioritisation should be consistent across all relevant components of the application.

Individual items should be detailed in the Detailed Budget tab, where items with an estimated value greater than €1,000 should be listed separately, and lower-value items may be grouped where appropriate.

35. One of our items will involve remote monitoring: Sampling is a considerable component and we need to purchase 2 vans to enable support for funded research. Are these vehicles eligible as dedicated field-research infrastructure? They enable safe access to remote aquatic, coastal and freshwater sites, transport/deploy specialist equipment, support towing and sampling campaigns, allow parallel fieldwork, and maximise shared institutional use for research, training and environmental monitoring.

Please refer to Q36 for the answer to Q35.

36. Inflatable boat for sampling - is this eligible as a mechanism to collect samples for funded research?

Where such items are proposed, applicants must clearly demonstrate that they are rooted in institutional strategy, sufficiently justified, and constitute or support a defined research infrastructure.

Applicants must also set out how the infrastructure will be managed, governed and sustained, including how any ongoing operational costs associated with its use will be met by the institution.