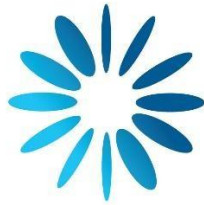




An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science



Infreastruchtúr don Nuálaíocht, Staidéir, Páirtíocht,
Imscrúdú, Rath Eacnamaíochta agus Eolaíocht

INSPIRE

Pre-Call Briefing
Follow-Up Statement
April 2026

HEA

An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas
The Higher Education Authority

 **Taighde Éireann
Research Ireland**

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1. Introduction

This document consolidates responses to questions and comments raised during and following the pre-call briefing webinar for the INSPIRE Programme held on 9 February 2026. The document is organised across eight themes. The [Programme Outline](#) published in November 2025, and the [Programme Governing Framework](#) circulated to institutions in December 2025 are key reference documents for further information.

2. Institutions (& Collaborations)

There are 18 eligible higher education institutions (HEIs) under Phase One of the programme. These are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1 - INSPIRE Phase One Eligible HEIs

Atlantic Technological University (ATU)	RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences (RCSI)
Dublin City University (DCU)	South East Technological University (SETU)
Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (DIAS)	Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin)
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT)	Technological University of the Shannon (TUS)
Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)	University College Cork (UCC)
Mary Immaculate College Limerick (MIC)	University College Dublin (UCD)
Maynooth University (MU)	Trinity College Dublin (TCD)
Munster Technological University (MTU)	University of Galway (UoG)
National College of Art and Design (NCAD)	University of Limerick (UL)

Applications from eligible HEIs must demonstrate that proposals are clearly rooted in the institution's research strategy. Institutions without a formal research strategy or where a research strategy begins or ends within the funding timeframe must show evidence of an agreed institutional strategic approach over the period of funding.

Phase One Research Infrastructure focuses on setting the strategic baseline and overarching ambition of each institution under the INSPIRE Programme, as well as the allocation of funding to each higher education institution for local institutional infrastructure.

Applications are expected to be submitted by individual institutions. Joint applications between institutions are not expected as part of Phase One.

3. Application & Assessment Process

All applications will be assessed in accordance with the criteria outlined in the Call document. An expert panel which will include external independent expertise will be convened to assist in the strategic review of applications. This is to support an objective, consistent, and robust assessment process.

Assessment will consider the alignment of proposals with institutional strategies and national priorities and the strategic rationale for the infrastructure requested. While an institution's previous research performance is relevant, the evaluation will primarily focus on the strategic importance and impact of the proposed infrastructure, at institutional, sectoral and national level.

The weightings for assessment criteria will be provided in the Call documentation. The proposed timeline for the call process, including opening and closing dates and evaluation stages, will also be confirmed in the Call documentation.

Phase One applications may also include preliminary EOIs for Phase Two (Shared Advanced Infrastructure). The shared infrastructure EOIs that HEIs submit as part of their proposals will be shared across all eligible HEIs. This is to support a strategic national approach, build collaboration and avoid duplication.

Feedback will be provided to institutions following the assessment process in relation to EOIs submitted with respect to shared infrastructure and how they could best be brought forward.

4. Investment Principles

As set out in the Programme Outline published in November 2025, and 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.

5. Funding

€265 million in multi-annual funding is allocated over 2026–2027. This is distributed through Phase One & Two with,

- €150 million allocated for Phase One: Local Institutional Infrastructure over 2026–2027. The breakdown by year will be confirmed in the Phase One Research Infrastructure Call document.
- €115 million is allocated for Phase Two: Shared Advanced Infrastructures in 2027.

DFHERIS will conduct a review in early 2028 to inform the next stages of the INSPIRE programme.

Matched funding is not a requirement of proposals under Phase One of the programme. However, the provision of matched funding may help to demonstrate an institution's commitment to the proposal.

Institutions are expected to ensure that proposals align with the objectives of the programme, as set out clearly in the Programme Governing Framework. Should an application be successful under the INSPIRE programme, any duplicate requests for 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.

6. Funding Allocation Brackets

Phase One Research Infrastructure funding will be distributed through an incentivised allocation model with enhanced accountability, thereby enabling each institution to receive an allocation of funding subject to the quality of the institution's proposal.

Prior to the submission of applications, institutions will be advised of an indicative funding range based on metrics relevant to the institution and will draw on several funding models used by the HEA, as appropriate. These metrics may include factors such as institutional size, disciplinary mix, student numbers, and other factors unique to the nature of the institution.

The indicative range will act as a guide for HEIs in preparing their Local Institutional Infrastructure applications.

Applications will be assessed against the institution's research strategy, wider strategic priorities, and national relevance and in accordance with the assessment criteria outlined in the Call document. This approach enables all HEIs to access funding for local institutional

infrastructure needs and will enable each institution to receive funding, subject to the satisfactory expert panel assessment of the applications submitted.

7. Allowable Expenditure

Research Infrastructure

As outlined in the Governing Framework, eligible expenditure includes the purchase of research infrastructure.

- Requests for Local institutional Infrastructure must demonstrate how they will benefit teaching and/or research within a higher education institution.
- Preliminary EOIs for Shared Advanced Infrastructures must demonstrate how they will facilitate collaboration across multiple institutions and sectors, to strengthen Ireland's competitiveness, drive national innovation, and deliver broader public good impact.
- The number of items available for purchase by each institution is not limited but applications must demonstrate how it aligns to a strategic priority of the institution and how items are being prioritised for procurement.
- Multiple items may also be purchased with the aim of developing larger infrastructure, but applications must demonstrate how it aligns to a strategic priority of the institution.
- In Phase Two Shared Advanced Infrastructure there is no maximum amount which can be spent on a single item of infrastructure.

Where necessary, reasonable costs are acceptable for specific refurbishment or adaptation works required to install research infrastructure being funded under the INSPIRE Programme. Such works must 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.

All funding requests must demonstrate clear strategic justification, alignment with institutional research priorities, and in full compliance with public spending and procurement requirements. While the final costs for research infrastructure may not be known at the time of submission, budget requests should be as informed as possible.

Maintenance & Technical Support

Phase One - Local Institutional Infrastructure. It is intended that time-bound maintenance support will be provided, subject to compliance with public spending requirements. Technical support is not an allowed expenditure for local institutional infrastructure.

Phase Two - Shared Advanced Infrastructure. To support the effective operation and long-term sustainability of the infrastructure, 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.

Administrative costs associated with preparing and managing proposals and managing infrastructure funded are expected to be met through institutional budgets.

Access Charges

Access charge models predominantly relate to Phase Two – Shared Advanced Infrastructure and should be appropriate from the start and can be balanced across institutional level rather than against each specific piece of research infrastructure. Submissions must demonstrate how this balance will be managed.

8. Phases

As set out in the [INSPIRE Programme Outline](#), the Programme will be implemented in two Phases, with Phase Two building progressively on Phase One. Phase One Research Infrastructure 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 outline 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.

9. Separate Funding Programmes

Institutions must ensure that requests for research infrastructure funding are not duplicated across multiple programmes. Proposals should clearly demonstrate how the requested infrastructure fits within the institution's research strategy and wider institutional strategies with regard to talent development, industry collaboration, research commercialisation, and

international connectivity. Proposals should demonstrate how the requested infrastructure complements, rather than overlaps with, other funding sources.

Applications must present a clear strategic rationale for the research infrastructure requested. Institutions are expected to consider the broader research funding landscape when developing proposals and to ensure that applications are aligned with the objectives of the programme.