HEA | An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas
The Higher Education Authority

# Shared Island Digital Creative Industries Innovation Programme

## Call Document

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Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Shared Island Initiative

## Contents


Shared Island Digital Creative Industries Innovation Programme ..... 5

1. Summary ..... 5

1.1 Context ..... 5

1.2 Programme Aims ..... 6

2. Key Principles ..... 8

2.1 Key Objectives ..... 8

2.2 DCIIP Requirements ..... 8

3. Shared Island DCIIP Call for Proposals ..... 10

3.1 Pillar I: Innovation Hubs and Collaborative Networks ..... 10

3.2 Pillar II: Partnerships of Scale ..... 10

3.3 Funding Limits ..... 11

3.4 Eligible Researchers ..... 11

4. Programme Criteria ..... 12

4.1 Host institutions and Partnerships ..... 12

4.2 Eligibility ..... 14

4.3 Application Requirements ..... 16

4.4 Institutional Responsibilities ..... 18

4.5 Application Criteria ..... 19

5. Specific Programme Criteria ..... 21

5.1 Innovation ..... 21

5.2 Research and Innovation Excellence ..... 21

5.3 Building Innovation Capacity ..... 21

5.4 Industry Engagement ..... 22

5.5 Sustainability ..... 22

5.6 Talent Development ..... 22
5.7 Skills Development ..... 22
5.8 Shared Island Collaboration ..... 23
5.9 Regional Development ..... 23
6. Funding and Budget Allocation ..... 24
6.1 Funding Overview ..... 24
6.2 Project Duration ..... 24
6.3 Allowable Expenditure ..... 24
6.4 Training Costs ..... 26
6.5 Research and Innovation Costs ..... 26
6.6 Student Support ..... 27
6.7 Innovation Activities ..... 29
6.8 Dissemination and Impact ..... 29
6.9 Overheads ..... 29
6.10 Contingency ..... 30
6.11 Ineligible Costs ..... 30
6.12 General ..... 31
7. Application Procedure ..... 33
7.1 Application Process ..... 33
7.2 Format of Applications ..... 33
7.3 Queries and Clarifications ..... 33
7.4 MS Forms Application ..... 33
8. Assessment Process ..... 35
8.1 Assessment Panel ..... 35
8.2 Assessment Criteria Scoring ..... 36
8.3 Notification of outcomes ..... 37

8.4 Indicative Timeline ..... 38
9. Monitoring of Funded Applications ..... 39
9.1 Monitoring Reports ..... 39
Appendix 1 – Eligible Institutions ..... 40
Appendix 2 – Glossary ..... 42

# Shared Island Digital Creative Industries Innovation Programme

## 1. Summary

The **Shared Island Digital Creative Industries Innovation Programme ("DCIIP")** is a collaborative scheme supported by Government of Ireland funding through the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science ("DFHERIS") and the Shared Island initiative.

The DCIIP will strengthen the digital creative industries sector by building innovation capacity across Higher Education Institutions ("HEIs") and industry on an island-wide basis. Through collaborative research, innovation, skills development and industry engagement, the DCIIP aims to create new opportunities for the growth and international competitiveness of the digital creative industries ecosystem across Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The DCIIP is managed by the Higher Education Authority ("HEA") on behalf of DFHERIS and contributes to the objectives of the government's Shared Island initiative through supporting the further development of sustainable cross-border partnerships, research excellence, talent development, and innovation capacity in the digital creative industries.

### 1.1 Context

The creative industries are among the most dynamic sectors of the all-island economy and increasingly rely on digital technologies, innovation capabilities, and highly skilled talent. The **Digital Creative Industries Roadmap 2024-2026** identifies significant opportunities to strengthen the sector through investment in research, innovation, entrepreneurship, skills development, and collaborative infrastructure.

In recognition of the interconnected nature of the creative industries across the island, and their considerable future potential, the government is supporting the **Shared Island Digital Creative Industries Innovation Programme**, to foster research collaboration between HEIs, industry partners, and relevant external partners, in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

DFHERIS will contribute 60% (€6 million) to the fund, with the remaining 40% (€4 million) provided through an allocation by the government from the Shared Island Fund, in view of the island-wide dimensions to the sector and cooperation opportunity in this new **Shared Island Digital Creative Industries Innovation Programme (2027-30)**.

The Programme for Government and revised National Development Plan set out an ambitious agenda for Building Our Shared Island. Backed by a €2 billion commitment out to 2035 through the government's Shared Island Fund, the DCIIP is delivering practical benefits through deeper island-wide cooperation and working to build understanding and consensus with all communities and traditions on the island around a shared future, underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement.

Further information on the Shared Island Initiative, including on other projects supported through the Government's Shared Island Fund, is available at www.gov.ie/sharedisland

## 1.2 Programme Aims

The DCIIP has been established to support collaborative innovation, research, skills development, and capacity-building across the digital creative industries ecosystem on the island of Ireland.

The DCIIP seeks to create long-term partnerships between HEIs, industry, and associated creative industries organisations (external partners), to strengthen research innovation capability and support the growth of internationally competitive digital creative industries. The DCIIP will:

- Build research and innovation capacity in HEIs, aligned with the current and emerging needs of the digital creative industries.
- Strengthen research, innovation, development, and collaboration in and between HEIs, by rewarding innovation and excellence, thereby enhancing the higher education sector in Ireland and Northern Ireland.
- Advance the objectives of the government's **Digital Creative Industries Roadmap 2024-2026** as

part of the **NDP Review Tertiary Sector Sectoral Investment Plan 2025-2030**.

- Expand the skilled workforce across the island, with a focus on innovation linked to emerging skills needs in the Digital Skills Industries.
- Leverage existing capacity and infrastructure on a cross-border basis.
- Promote networks of excellence and partnerships of scale for research, innovation, and development.
- Contribute to policy development in relevant sectors and benefit industry, north and south.
- Contribute to capacity building and innovation networks in a regionally balanced framework.

The DCIIP supports activities across areas including, but not limited to:

- Digital media and content creation
- Creative technologies
- Immersive technologies (AR / VR / XR)
- Animation and visual effects
- Games development
- Digital storytelling
- Design innovation
- Audiovisual production
- Digital arts and cultural innovation
- Creative AI applications
- Creative entrepreneurship and commercialisation

# 2. Key Principles

The DCIIP will support the establishment of all-island innovation networks, centres of expertise, and strategic partnerships, that address shared opportunities and challenges within the digital creative industries.

## 2.1 Key Objectives

The key objectives of the programme are to:

- Align with the objectives of the government's Digital Creative Industries Roadmap 2024-2026.
- Strengthen collaboration between HEIs, industry, and associated creative industries organisations (external partners), across both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland.
- Build innovation and research capacity within the digital creative industries ecosystem.
- Support the development of highly skilled talent and future workforce capability.
- Promote interdisciplinary research collaboration between technology, arts, humanities, design, and creative disciplines.
- Foster innovation-led economic growth and international competitiveness.
- Support knowledge exchange, commercialisation, and industry engagement.
- Contribute to balanced regional development and the objectives of the Shared Island initiative.
- Create sustainable, long-term island-wide partnerships that continue beyond the lifetime of DCIIP funding.

## 2.2 DCIIP Requirements

Project applications must demonstrate:

1. Excellence in innovation, research, and creative practice.

2. Clear contribution to the development of the digital creative industries on an all-island basis.
3. Strong partnerships between HEIs, industry, and associated creative industries organisations (external partners).
4. Tangible outcomes relating to innovation capacity, skills development, talent pipelines, and industry growth for the digital creative industries.
5. Alignment with:
    - Impact 2030;
    - the Digital Creative Industries Roadmap 2024-2026;
    - the Shared Island Initiative;
    - sectoral and regional innovation and enterprise strategies, north and south, on the island of Ireland; and
    - relevant European and international innovation priorities.
6. Sustainable collaboration structures that continue beyond the lifetime of the DCIIP.
7. Demonstrable contributions to:
    - new products, services, or creative content;
    - technology adoption and digital transformation;
    - talent and workforce development;
    - commercialisation and industry engagement; and/or
    - international visibility and competitiveness of the island's digital creative industries.

# 3. Shared Island DCIIP Call for Proposals

To strengthen innovation capacity and strategic collaboration across the digital creative industries ecosystem, the inaugural Call of the Shared Island Digital Creative Industries Innovation Programme will support ambitious, collaborative projects involving HEIs, industry partners, and external partners across the island of Ireland. The programme is centred on two Pillars.

## 3.1 Pillar I: Innovation Hubs and Collaborative Networks

Supporting the development of all-island digital creative industries innovation hubs, shared facilities, collaborative networks, and innovation ecosystems that bring together HEIs, industry, and associated creative industries organisations (external partners).

Activities may include:

- Shared facilities
- Innovation labs
- Testbeds
- Knowledge exchange platforms
- Incubators
- Creative technology demonstrators

## 3.2 Pillar II: Partnerships of Scale

Supporting large-scale strategic collaborations focused on research, innovation, skills development, technology adoption, and industry engagement within the digital creative industries.

Supports strategic collaborations focused on:

- Research and innovation
- Talent development
- Technology adoption
- Commercialisation
- Industry engagement
- Internationalisation

## 3.3 Funding Limits

Two funding pillars are available:

| Pillar | Duration | Maximum Award |
|---|---|---|
| Pillar I – Innovation Hubs and Collaborative Networks | 3 Years | €1,100,000 |
| Pillar II – Partnerships of Scale | 3 Years | €3,000,000 |

**Note:** Subject to available budget, one or more projects across both Pillars will be funded.

## 3.4 Eligible Researchers

Project applications will be open to eligible researchers, innovators, and interdisciplinary teams from **creative industries relevant disciplines**, including technology, engineering, arts, humanities, media, and design. Applications will be open to all eligible researchers, at early, mid, or advanced stages of their careers. HEIs are expected to support project applications led by researchers across all career stages.

The **Lead Investigators** and any **Co-Lead Investigators** in Ireland and Northern Ireland must have a proven track record and expertise relevant to the creative sector. Interdisciplinary project applications are encouraged.

# 4. Programme Criteria

The objectives of the DCIIP can be clarified through the following criteria.

**Projects should demonstrate meaningful collaboration between academic and non-academic partners.**

## 4.1 Host institutions and Partnerships

4.1.1 The DCIIP will be open to project applications from Lead Investigators located at eligible HEIs, as listed in **Appendix 1**. There must be a minimum of **one lead HEI in Ireland** and **one lead HEI in Northern Ireland**.

4.1.2 **While there must be a minimum of two HEIs – one in Ireland and one in Northern Ireland – applications from projects that include other HEIs as co-leads or partners are encouraged and will be prioritised.**

4.1.3 The lead HEI in Ireland will be regarded as the **Lead Administrative/ Governance Institution** for HEA communication, award governance, and management purposes. Where projects have two (Ireland HEI) co-leads, one of those HEIs must be designated as the Lead Administrative/ Governance Institution.

4.1.4 Each HEI in Ireland may act as **lead or co-lead** on **no more than one application under Pillar I** and **no more than one application under Pillar II**. There is no limit on the number of other project applications in which a HEI may participate as a supporting partner. There is no limit to the number of project applications where a Northern Ireland HEI can be lead, co-lead, or supporting partner.

4.1.5 All applications must be submitted under the auspices of and with the approval of all proposed host institutions.

4.1.6 All submitted applications must be signed by the Lead Investigator in the Lead Administrative/ Governance Institution and the lead HEI in Northern Ireland and must be endorsed by the President/Provost (or equivalent), or their authorised nominee, within the lead HEIs.

4.1.7 Each project application must have **one Lead Investigator who will be employed at the Lead Administrative/ Governance Institution in Ireland** and **one Lead Investigator employed at the lead HEI in Northern Ireland** at the time of award commencement.

4.1.8 **Industry partners** from outside higher education and research institutions are required in each project application including SMEs, multinational companies, and industry representative organisations. Industry partners in Ireland and Northern Ireland may claim costs **up to 10% of the budget**. Industry partners claiming budget costs must be based in Ireland or Northern Ireland. Companies must be officially registered.

4.1.9 While projects will be led by HEIs with industry partners, **external partners** from further education, civic society, cultural organisations, creative enterprise, and innovation from Ireland and Northern Ireland may also be included. NGOs and charities must be officially registered. Research Performing Organisations and other government agencies may be also included as external partners. Costs assigned to external partners may be included in the project application once clearly justified and **not exceeding 5%** of the total cost of the project budget.

4.1.10 Applicants must outline how the project will benefit from any such inclusion of external partners and their contribution to the project must be clearly outlined in the application, along with a description of their compatibility with the DCIIP objectives. The dominant concern in this provision is to maximise the cost-effective use of Exchequer resources. **Financial contribution to the project is not required from partners.**

4.1.11 Spin outs and campus companies may act as industry partners, provided their reason for collaboration is clearly justified and their inclusion does not contravene State Aid rules.

4.1.12 Other **additional partners** from outside of Ireland and Northern Ireland may be included in a project application, provided their inclusion can be demonstrated by the proposers as bringing added value and further support to the project in meeting the aims and objectives of the DCIIP. Such additional partners **must not be included in place of partners in Ireland or Northern Ireland**. Costs incurred by additional partners may not be included in the project budget or charged to the DCIIP.

4.1.13 Ownership of any intellectual property arising from collaborative projects shall be dealt with and ascertained through appropriate host and partner institutional structures, in line with the **National Intellectual Property Protocol**.

4.1.14 **Collaborative Research Agreements** must be established between all institutions and organisations involved in a project. Where a project receives outside financial support, the source of that support should be included in the Collaborative Research Agreement.

## 4.2 Eligibility

4.2.1 A completed Application Form must be submitted to the HEA by the appropriate Office at the Lead Administrative/Governance Institution in Ireland on behalf of the proposed applicants by the deadline of **12:00pm on Tuesday 15th December 2026**. The HEA will complete eligibility checks and inform the contact office in the proposed Lead Administrative/Governance Institution in Ireland to confirm a project application is eligible to proceed to assessment stage.

4.2.2 Applications for the Call are open to researchers from early to advanced career stages, in accordance with **Section 3.4** above.

4.2.3 In line with the goals and objectives of the DCIIP, the programme will support research, innovation, and development in and between any disciplines relevant to the creative industries, including technology, engineering, arts, humanities, media, and design.

4.2.4 The project application can comprise a partnership between individual Lead Investigators, or by a Project Team that will include Lead Investigators and Co-Lead Investigators, under the auspices of eligible host HEIs.

4.2.5 The identified Lead/ Co-Lead Investigators must have a proven track record of research experience relative to the creative industries.

4.2.6 At the time of award commencement, the Lead Investigator in the Lead Administrative/ Governance Institution in Ireland **must be employed by that HEI** with a contract of sufficient duration to cover the complete duration of a project (i.e. 3 years). Contractual matters are an issue for resolution between prospective team members and their prospective host HEI.

4.2.7 **Team members, except for visiting researchers, must be employed by the host institution. Research students are to be registered at the host institution.**

4.2.8 Projects whose applications are unsuccessful may be placed on the **reserve list** following their submission, provided their application is:

(i) eligible for Pillar I: Innovation Hubs and Collaborative Networks **and/or** Pillar II: Partnerships of Scale; and

(ii) all other eligibility requirements are met.

4.2.9 Requests for funding must be in line with Allowable Expenditure. A **maximum of 30% of any award may be allocated to Northern Ireland partners**. Within this limit, proposed funding, north and south, should be proportionate to the share of research or other allowable activity undertaken.

4.2.10 Each project application must identify a **primary point of contact** in the Lead Administrative/ Governance Institution in Ireland. The primary point of contact may be the Lead Investigator, a project manager, or another suitably appointed representative in the HEI in Ireland.

4.2.11 A Lead Investigator/ Co-Lead Investigator from Ireland and from Northern Ireland may be involved in **only one project application per Pillar in a leading capacity**. They may be involved as a team member in other projects. Where more than one of the projects are recommended for funding, researcher(s) involved in multiple projects must confirm their capacity to deliver their commitments to the project, in writing to the HEA, prior to any award being made.

4.2.12 The research can be basic or strategic in nature and can include costs associated with the establishment of partnerships which improve researcher exchanges and interactions with each other and with external stakeholders. The project application should focus on the establishment of a critical mass of resource and expertise in a clearly identified area and, where relevant, demonstrate sustainability beyond the lifetime of funding under the DCIIP.

4.2.13 In line with the objectives of the DCIIP, project applications which can reasonably be expected to produce commercial applications and exploitation in the short term **will not be supported** (i.e. projects which are already in advanced progress and/ or are close to potential commercialisation). However, collaboration and/or support from commercial sources is permissible. Such interactions must clearly be in the context of added value from a research quality perspective.

4.2.14 Where the feasibility of a project application is dependent on external support from commercial sources, details of the support should be included in the project application and clearly justified. The source of the support should be shown to be aligned and in agreement with the aims and

objectives of the DCIIP. Project applications which might produce longer-term commercial application must have the appropriate arrangements in place to manage this in accordance with national protocol and institutional norms.

4.2.15 Co-funding support may be obtained from other research funding agencies for related or complementary projects. **Parallel funding for the same project work is not permissible.**

## 4.3 Application Requirements

4.3.1 Reference must be made to project management procedures and how they will aid the collaborative process. Evidence must be provided of shared objectives, joint work programmes, costs, resources, joint responsibilities, and associated clarification on roles and contributions of each party to the project. Due regard should be given to dealing with research misconduct, in line with institutional procedures and national policies.

4.3.2 The **HEA's Principles of Good Practice in Research within Higher Education Institutions** and the nine elements of good practice identified therein should be reflected, as appropriate, in project applications.

4.3.3 Applicants must demonstrate that they have fully considered the potential sex and/or gender dimension of their proposed research. Where applicants have indicated that there is no sex/gender dimension to their research, they will be asked to justify this assertion. As far as possible, the gender balance of a research team should also be sought, and reporting requirements will seek reflections on that balance.

4.3.4 In line with the **National Access Plan 2022-2028**, the HEA promotes equality of access to higher education for people with disabilities, mature students who previously had not the opportunity to access higher education, those facing social and economic barriers, and minority groups, including the Traveller Community. Where relevant, project applications should take equality of access into account in relation to project design, outcomes, and outputs.

4.3.5 The proposed project shall comply with ethical principles and relevant national, EU, and international legislation, including the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union** and the **European Convention on Human Rights** and its Supplementary Protocols. Projects must adhere to the recognised ethical practices and fundamental ethical principles appropriate to their discipline(s), as well as to ethical standards as documented in the various national, sectoral or

institutional Codes of Ethics. An **ethics self-assessment table** will be required to be completed as part of the application process. Where a project requires approval by the Ethics Committee or equivalent committee of the host HEIs, written evidence of such ethical approval will be required by the HEA within six months of award commencement. In instances where the project's ethical approval(s) is/are to be obtained in a staggered or sequential order based on the progress of work packages, written evidence will be required by the HEA, and confirmation must be provided as each stage of the sequence is satisfied.

4.3.6 Data management plans must be based on the **FAIR Data Principles** and developed in line with institutional policies. An outline of how data will be managed must be included in the project application. Where relevant, details of data management plans will be sought at the time of contract agreement.

4.3.7 The principles of research integrity and responsible research practice underpin the **National Framework on the Transition to an Open Research Environment** as set out in the 2019 publication by the National Open Research Forum (NORF). In the spirit of supporting open research and progressing Ireland's **National Action Plan for Open Research 2022-2030**, project applications should make a commitment to making data and other types of research, open, and accessible. Researchers and research team members may be requested to provide ORCIDs in relation to reporting.

4.3.8 Where co-funding is obtained or is already in existence, reference must be made to such funding at the time of application (in the relevant section of the application form), or if received after obtaining DCIIP funding, the HEA must be informed in writing. The dominant concern in this provision is to maximise the cost-effective use of resources.

4.3.9 **If the project, as proposed in the application, is currently or has previously been funded, either in full or in part, by the HEA or any other funding agency, applications will be deemed ineligible and will not be considered for funding. Funding received by a project partner for any other related Shared Island initiative project should also be declared, even if not specifically for the proposed project.**

4.3.10 The **Team Composition** provided in a project application should reflect the personnel requirements necessary to full completion, to meeting the aims and objectives of the project and, where relevant, adequate projections for the number of research students that may need to be trained through lifetime the project. All eligible and relevant costs necessary to support the

Team Composition over the lifetime of the project must be reflected in budget costs at the time of application.

## 4.4 Institutional Responsibilities

4.4.1 A Lead Administrative/Governance Institution in Ireland must be designated for the purposes of the administration, monitoring, and governance of the project. This Lead Administrative/ Governance Institution will be responsible for all communication with the HEA regarding the management and monitoring of an award. The project will be supervised and managed by the Lead/ Co-Lead Investigator(s) and their host institutions, having regard to international best practice.

4.4.2 The host institutions will have full regard to any regulatory, safety, health, or other statutory requirements associated with the carrying out of this work and protection of individuals involved in same.

4.4.3 The host institutions will take full responsibility for the provision of full supervision and training of any PhD students who join projects, with reference to **Ireland's National Framework for Doctoral Education**.

4.4.4 The host institutions will accept full responsibility for the management, monitoring, and control of all research funded by this award and all those persons involved, including, but not limited to, employees (full or part-time, permanent or temporary), students, volunteers, and others employed or involved in any research funded by this award.

4.4.5 The host institutions accept responsibility for any litigation or liability that may arise out of research funded by this award and are responsible for ensuring appropriate insurance coverage in this regard. Each host institution will be responsible for their involvement in the project in accordance with the terms and conditions of the award and institutional norms.

4.4.6 Any award funding must be applied in a manner compliant with State Aid Legislation and Export Controls.

4.4.7 All publications and outputs from the research project must acknowledge the support of the HEA, DFHERIS and the Shared Island Fund, and display the appropriate agreed logos on related documentation, media, and social media.

4.4.8 **Funding is conditional on meeting the specified criteria of the DCIIP and on the outcome of the competitive process.**

## 4.5 Application Criteria

4.5.1 The project application should be of a standard to be deemed of high quality on review by peers and to have merit on review by the Assessment Panel.

4.5.2 The discipline/ research area proposed must be an area where the Lead/ Co-Lead/ partnering institutions have established and demonstrable strength/ track record **OR** capacity to perform in an associated new and emerging area.

4.5.3 Project applications must have a demonstrable impact on the education sectors with regard to the following:

- **a.** quality of research work and outputs;
- **b.** illustration of the feedback into the teaching and learning domain (achieved through the input of project team members to policy design and implementation), addressing institution and/or national strategies, by direct contribution to curricular reform or content, skills development, and enterprise or societal engagement; and
- **c.** the building up of research capabilities in specific research areas on the island as a whole.

4.5.4 Project applications should support the achievement of, and deliver outputs relating to, the objectives named in **Section 2.1** above, and:

- **a.** the goals and objectives of the respective institutional research strategy;
- **b.** the objectives of the Shared Island initiative and the shared objectives of the Government of Ireland and the Northern Ireland Executive, including balanced regional development;
- **c.** national alignment with Horizon Europe's mission-based approach; and/or
- **d.** one or more of the United Nations SDGs; and
- **e.** the objectives of a unified tertiary system, as relevant to achieving the shared priorities of the Government of Ireland and the Northern Ireland Executive.

4.5.5 Project applications should be made with reference to the strengthening of current Ireland and Northern Ireland higher education collaborations or for the establishment of new collaborations with agreed joint programmes and project management processes.

4.5.6 Project applications must demonstrate the contribution to achieving the goals and objectives of the research strategy of the Lead Administrative/ Governance Institution, the Lead Institution in Northern Ireland and any partner institutions.

# 5. Specific Programme Criteria

**Projects must contribute to one or more of the following key objectives.**

## 5.1 Innovation

Evidence of:

- Novel approaches
- New collaborations
- New technology adoption
- Sector transformation potential

## 5.2 Research and Innovation Excellence

Developing:

- New knowledge
- New products
- New services
- New creative content
- New methods

## 5.3 Building Innovation Capacity

Creating new capability within:

- Higher education institutions
- Industry
- Innovation ecosystems

## 5.4 Industry Engagement

Strengthening connections between:

- Higher education
- Industry
- Public sector
- Cultural organisations

## 5.5 Sustainability

Projects must identify:

- Long-term outcomes
- Sustainability plans
- Future funding opportunities
- Legacy structures

## 5.6 Talent Development

Supporting:

- Researchers
- Creatives
- Technologists
- Entrepreneurs
- Students

## 5.7 Skills Development

Plans for:

- Research training
- Professional development
- Graduate talent pipelines

## 5.8 Shared Island Collaboration

Enhancing:

- Cross-border partnerships
- Knowledge exchange
- Shared infrastructure
- Joint innovation activity

## 5.9 Regional Development

Supporting growth throughout:

- Urban centres
- Rural regions
- Border communities

# 6. Funding and Budget Allocation

## 6.1 Funding Overview

Awards for projects will be funded from a total programme budget of **€10 million**, subject to Ministerial approval.

Projects may request funding between **€1,100,000** and **€3,000,000**, in line with the respective Pillar maximum allowable budgets.

## 6.2 Project Duration

Projects must be **36 months** in duration.

## 6.3 Allowable Expenditure

Eligible costs include:

6.3.1 Staff Costs:

- Academic buy-out
- Researchers
- Technical specialists
- Software developers
- Creative practitioners
- Innovation managers
- Project managers

6.3.2 Buy-out costs may be included. Buy-out costs may be sought for core staff already employed in the institutions hosting the project. Institutions listed in **Appendix 1** (List 1) can seek staff buy-out costs or request salary costs for eligible researchers/ personnel. Costs anticipated for increments incurred over the course of employment on a project must be included in the proposed budget. **No further funding will be made available for the duration of a project to cover raises in salary costs.**

6.3.3 Buy-out costs for research staff and a project manager at the host institutions may be sought. Buy-out costs may be sought for core staff already employed in the institutions hosting the project.

6.3.4 Salary costs may be sought for researchers recruited onto a project. The staff employment, pension matters and/or buy-out costs should be in accordance with institutional norms.

6.3.5 The proportion or share of buy-out or salary costs is a matter for the project consortium to agree. This may include buy-out or salary costs of core academic and/or contract academic/ research staff. The allocation of these costs within projects is not limited to Lead Investigators/ Co-Leads.

6.3.6 Irish HEI partners should use academic and research salary cost rates as per their institution. Postdoctoral salaries must begin no lower than at the first point on the Irish Universities Association salary scale or an equivalent, and no higher than the highest point on the Irish Universities Association salary scale or an equivalent. For partners in Northern Ireland, salary rates should be relevant to the rates applicable in Northern Ireland.

6.3.7 Costs may include up to **€80,000 per annum pro rata for a project manager for the complete duration of the project**. Costs should include provision for salary, PRSI, and pension. Costs for research consumables and travel **cannot** be sought for the project manager. An existing institution staff member may be recruited to this position. The project manager may be based at the Lead Administrative/ Governance Institution or in one or more of the other lead institutions. The cost may be split across more than one project manager based in or across any of the lead institutions, provided the maximum allowable value per annum is not exceeded. Breakdown of the costs and the project manager's location is subject to the agreement of all institutions involved in the project.

6.3.8 Research consumables and travel costs are **capped at a maximum of €10,000 per research staff member per year**.

6.3.9 Inter-institutional visiting researchers' costs may also be included, once clearly justified.

6.3.10 Employment and research consumable costs may be sought for individuals whose skills are crucial to the completion of the research (i.e. a digital archivist, lab manager participating in research, public engagement practitioner, etc). The dependence of the project on these individuals must be demonstrated in the project application.

6.3.11 In addition to those working on the project as part of the full team, research staff and research students may join on a temporary basis, with a view to supporting the project on an operational level.

## 6.4 Training Costs

- Skills programmes
- Workshops
- Industry placements
- Micro-credentials
- Professional certification

6.4.1 Training costs for the development of research staff may be sought for the duration of their employment on the project. Training costs necessary to the completion of the project and/or appropriate researcher development should be justified in the project application.

## 6.5 Research and Innovation Costs

- Equipment
- Software licences
- Cloud services
- Creative production tools
- Data management

6.5.1 A **maximum of €10,000** may be sought for any single item of small research equipment. Clear justification must be provided in the budget that the equipment is absolutely necessary to carry out the research and that such a facility is not available through other means to the researcher(s), e.g. through leveraging existing facilities or funding such as INSPIRE. All costs for equipment must clearly pertain to the project application submitted to the DCIIP. **Costs for equipment that are not fundamental to an approved project will not be permitted.** Costs for laptops may be included in consumable costs or in research equipment costs.

6.5.2 Where access to equipment and/or services and/or infrastructure is necessary to the completion of the project, costs may be sought, with justification provided. Should the project's sustainability or completion depend on the maintenance of equipment purchased as part of the project, anticipated costs may be included in the contingency costs to be sought in the submitted budget. Where the sustainability of a project is dependent on such costs, budgeted contingencies set

aside for equipment maintenance may be used for a limited time after the completion of the project, subject to approval by the HEA.

6.5.3 All equipment must be acquired in compliance with all national and EU procurement guidelines, at the most cost-effective price, and upon the most competitive terms, having regard to the needs of the project in relation to economy, time and quality, and without any conflict of interest.

6.5.4 **Cost per laptop is capped at €2,500**. Where a higher specification laptop is required, the cost and its clear justification must be included in the budget template to be reviewed at award offer stage.

## 6.6 Student Support

Masters and PhD students may be supported through:

- Fees
- Stipends
- Research costs
- Mobility supports

6.6.1 Fees for research students (Masters and PhD), including international research students and associated registration and tuition fees, may be sought as part of Research Student costs.

6.6.2 Research students may supplement their stipend/ research costs/ travel costs through funding awarded from other sources, provided the terms and conditions of that other source do not inhibit or prevent the student from achieving the aims and objectives of their research as funded by the DCIIP.

6.6.3 All costs sought for research students (Masters and PhD) must be clearly set out in the project application using the budget template. Costs may include fees, research consumables, travel and maintenance grants for postgraduate students which facilitate participation in the project on a full-time basis.

6.6.4 Research costs, including stipends for research students (Masters and PhD), consumables and travel, **up to €30,000 per annum per student** may be sought. **Stipends must be no lower than €19,000 per annum.** In addition, costs for fees may be sought for research students **the duration of the project.**

6.6.5 Costs required for the development of specific modules around transferable skills and academic context for research students and/or training necessary to the project for researchers may be sought under this Call. Costs for research students can only be sought for the period of the project's duration. Financial commitments that extend beyond the lifetime of the funding or beyond the stated funding allocation are the responsibility of the host institutions.

6.6.6 As far as possible, research students (Masters and PhD) are expected to spend at least 12 months or more outside of their host institution, with the view to increasing all island collaboration at the early career stage.

6.6.7 Where research students spend time outside of their host institution, up to an **additional €5,000 may be sought for costs incurred**. Where a research student spends less than 12 months outside of their host institution, €5,000 pro rata may be requested and must be justified in the application. A student may also spend time in several different locations outside of their host institution. Time spent in this way may be counted cumulatively provided time spent outside of their registered institution is in keeping with the funded project's aims and objectives.

6.6.8 Under the DCIIP **registration fees are understood to mean fees other than tuition fees**, such as a levy for HEI student centres or sports facilities. Where a research student spends 12 months or more outside of their host institution and as a result incurs an increase in registration fees, the research student may use some of the additional payment of up to €5,000 pro rata (see point 6.6.7 above) to cover the increase in registration fees.

6.6.9 Research students recruited to a project funded from the DCIIP should be working full-time on a PhD project that reflects the DCIIP's key principles and criteria. Where a research student is already working on a project compatible with the DCIIP and is in receipt of funding from another source, a request for research consumables for that student is permissible providing that their work is contributing to the project.

## 6.7 Innovation Activities

Funding may support:

- Demonstrators
- Pilot projects
- Innovation challenges
- Living labs
- Prototype development

## 6.8 Dissemination and Impact

- Conferences
- Industry showcases
- Publications
- Public engagement
- International marketing

6.8.1 External partners may seek costs related to travel, networking (i.e. workshops & seminars), dissemination and impact (i.e. publication services), and fieldwork.

6.8.2 Costs associated with the objective of building research capacity between institutions in Ireland and Northern Ireland may be sought, such as development of academic content, visiting researchers, guest speakers, workshops and seminars. Balanced development and impact in Ireland and in Northern Ireland should be demonstrated.

## 6.9 Overheads

**Institutional overheads may be charged up to 25% of staff costs.**

6.9.1 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. The division of overheads between the HEIs in Ireland and Northern Ireland is subject to the project consortium's agreement and the institutions involved.

## 6.10 Contingency

**Up to 10% of the total project budget.**

6.10.1 Provision should be made for contingency costs at up to 10% of the overall budget. **The total budget must not exceed €1,100,00 for Pillar I project applications and €3,000,000 for Pillar II project applications and be inclusive of contingency costs.** Contingency costs can only be drawn down at the end of the project, and only after a request is made and approved by the HEA. The funds transferred to the project for its duration will exclude the contingency amount until approval for their use is provided.

6.10.2 The contingency budget is intended to mitigate risk and to minimise the impact of risk related costs. Contingency is not to be used for research activity essential to the project which should be calculated in the budget. Details of risk mitigation should be included in the project application.

6.10.3 Contingency provision should be apportioned to institutions involved in the consortium and in accordance with the project consortium agreement.

6.10.4 A Northern Ireland HEI can receive **up to a maximum of 30% of project award funding**, inclusive of provision for contingency costs and overheads within the overall award.

## 6.11 Ineligible Costs

6.11.1 Costs to fund estates, room rental, or office space within or outside of an institution are not allowable.

6.11.2 Additional partners from outside of Ireland and outside of Northern Ireland may be included, however no costs may be requested for these additional partners.

6.11.3 Costs cannot be sought for seed funding to support further funding calls or sub-projects.

6.11.4 Any capital costs incurred by such external partners will not be covered by this provision. **Additional partners from outside of Ireland and outside of Northern Ireland may not seek costs, recurrent or otherwise.**

## 6.12 General

6.12.1 The breakdown of funding across partners is at the discretion of the Lead Administrative/ Governance Institution in Ireland and the Lead Institution in Northern Ireland, with any partner institutions participating in the project application.

6.12.2 **No additional funding over and above agreed allocations to projects awarded funding will be made available by the HEA.**

6.12.3 One consolidated budget in euro must be submitted per application. The InforEuro website should be used for calculating exchange rate.

6.12.4 The foreign exchange rate risk is to be borne by the project. However, contingency costs may be used (at the end of the project and subject to approval by the HEA) to absorb downward changes in foreign exchange. Impacts of severe changes in foreign exchange rates must be reported in annual progress reporting.

6.12.5 Taxation matters that may arise are to be addressed at an institution/ project consortium level.

6.12.6 Each project, host institution, industry partner and the Lead Administrative/ Governance Institution must ensure compliance with State Aid regulations in their jurisdiction. Payments to all partners should be agreed in the financial schedule of the collaborative research agreement between all partners on a project.

6.12.7 Requests for costs for external partners should align with eligible budget costs and institutional norms.

6.12.8 The use of incentives/ vouchers to recruit and incentivise participants/ participation in a project will be a matter for the institutions/ project consortia to agree, in accordance with usual institutional convention and ethical oversight.

6.12.9 The type of incentives/ vouchers being used, the stage of research at which they are being offered and the benefit they provide to the participant must be clearly stated in the **Design, Methodology and Implementation Template** to be submitted as part of the project application and the stage at which any ethical approval is required for their use should be set out in the Ethics section of the application.

6.12.10 Costs requested for the use of incentives/ vouchers to recruit and incentivise participants/ participation in a project should be clearly set out and justified under **Other Costs** in the **Budget Template** to be submitted as part of the project application. Approval for these costs will be subject to evidence being provided to the HEA of approval for their use from relevant institutional research/ ethics committees.

# 7. Application Procedure

## 7.1 Application Process

Submitted applications will be assessed by the **Assessment Panel** convened by the HEA. Incomplete applications which do not address all questions as set out in in the **Project Application Form** will be deemed ineligible. All applications must be submitted to the HEA by email skills@hea.ie, along with a completed Project Budget Template.

The deadline for submission of applications is **12:00pm on Tuesday, 15th December 2026**. No applications will be accepted after the deadline.

## 7.2 Format of Applications

Project consortia are requested to make a single application, to be signed by the President/ Provost or equivalent in Ireland, the President/ Provost or equivalent in Northern Ireland, and the head of the industry partner organisation. In the case of collaborative applications, all heads of participating institutions and organisations must sign-off on the application.

While the independent assessment panel will have the right to amend applications in the context of overall limited funding, institutions should have regard to the overall amount of funding available in the Pillar and the likelihood of high-quality bids from other institutions.

## 7.3 Queries and Clarifications

The HEA will take queries from all institutions up to **27th November 2026**. All queries and responses will be dealt with through a Frequently Asked Questions document, updated weekly and circulated to all primary points of contact for the Call. Queries can be emailed to skills@hea.ie

## 7.4 MS Forms Application

Project applications must be submitted using the designated **MS Forms Application with the completed budget template attached**. Each institution will be asked to register one official point of contact for ongoing communications with the HEA for the duration of the Call. Submitted applications will receive an acknowledgment when their project application is submitted. If an acknowledgement **is not received**

**within 24 hours, it is the responsibility of the applicant to contact the HEA and advise that acknowledgement of submission was not received.**

Applicants must submit:

- Application form
- Budget template
- Workplan
- Gantt chart
- Letters of support
- Institutional endorsements
- Applicants may be asked to present to the panel

# 8. Assessment Process

## 8.1 Assessment Panel

Project applications will be assessed on a competitive basis by an Assessment Panel which will include international expert(s), the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, and the Higher Education Authority. The Assessment Panel will be supported by the HEA Executive and will call on additional expert support, as necessary. The Assessment Panel will make recommendations for the allocation of available funding to the highest scoring applications. The Assessment Panel will only make recommendations in respect of project applications that meet at least a minimum level of quality. The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science will make all final decisions on funding allocations.

The assessment will follow a five-step process:

1. All project applications will be checked for eligibility and completeness as per the Call terms and conditions, by the HEA Executive. Applications which do not fulfil the eligibility criteria and/or are incomplete and do not address all questions as set out on the Application Form will not progress.

2. The HEA Executive will assign all project applications to the Assessment Panel and share the outcomes of Step 1. The Assessment Panel will conduct individual remote assessments on project applications assigned to them, in accordance with the published assessment criteria.

3. The Assessment Panel will convene in Dublin at a meeting chaired by the HEA. The Assessment Panel will prepare a ranked list of applications. Highly ranked project application teams may be invited to an interview with the Assessment Panel.

4. The Assessment Panel will provide its final recommendation list of ranked applications for funding, including a reserve list of projects for funding, subject to budgetary availability. This will include consideration of the overall programmatic composition of projects by quality, type, size and duration, as well as geographical spread.

5. The final list of projects recommended for funding will be subject to Ministerial approval in accordance with the governance procedures. The Minister's decision is final. The Ministerial approved outcome will be reported to the HEA Board.

**The HEA reserve the right to issue a second call for applications subject to consideration of the outcomes of the first call.**

## 8.2 Assessment Criteria Scoring

**Programme Alignment (50 Points)**

| Criterion | Description | Marks |
|---|---|---|
| Alignment with DCIIP objectives | Compatibility with DCIIP objectives on potential impact on the education and research sectors in Ireland and Northern Ireland, including on the sectors' relationship with external partners. | **10** |
| Collaborative strength | Substance, level, and quality of research collaboration including the justification and demonstration of the partnership. | **10** |
| Governance | Demonstration of the adequacy and specificity of arrangements for formal governance management, financial and risk management and co-ordination of the work. | **5** |
| Digital Creative Industries | Demonstration of lasting impact and advancement of research and innovations of benefit to the Digital Creative Industries sector in Ireland and Northern Ireland. | **20** |
| Policy contribution | Contribution of the application to achieving the goals and objectives of national, European and institutional research strategy, and/or one or more of the United Nations SDGs; and relevant policies including<br>▪ Impact 2030;<br>▪ the Digital Creative Industries Roadmap 2024-2026;<br>▪ the Shared Island Initiative;<br>▪ sectoral and regional innovation and enterprise strategies, north and south, on the island of Ireland; and<br>▪ relevant European and international innovation priorities. | **5** |

**Application Quality (50 Points)**

| Criterion | Description | Marks |
|---|---|---|
| Expertise and track record of Project Team | Demonstration of strong expertise through extensive experience, in-depth knowledge of the sector, and a clear understanding of relevant practices and policies. A proven track record of delivering successful outcomes, leading complex initiatives, and achieving measurable results that positively impact creative sector objectives. | **10** |
| Digital Creative Innovation Excellence | The project idea with clear abstract and pertinent project objectives for the Digital Creative Industries sector. | **15** |
| Project Delivery Roadmap | Proposed methods, including a clear description of the proposed project methodology and the credibility of the proposed approach. | **10** |
| Project Plan | The project design with plan specifics, including work packages with clearly identified SMART deliverables (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound). Specification of milestones, output measures, indicators and evidence which will be used to monitor the performance and progress of the application and where relevant a description of how the project's sustainability is to be maintained. | **10** |
| 3-Year Budget | Clear justification of budget requests and appropriate allocation of resources in accordance with eligible costs. | **5** |

**Total Score: 100 Points**

## 8.3 Notification of outcomes

It is planned that notification of approved projects will be sent to applicants by **early 2027**. Successful applicants will receive a formal Letter of Offer and be invited to agree a contract between the Lead Administrative/ Governance Institution and the HEA. The first instalment of funding will be transferred to HEIs within one month of the completion of the contractual process. Feedback will be provided on request.

## 8.4 Indicative Timeline

| Action | Date |
|---|---|
| Call Publication | 16th October 2026 |
| Deadline for Applications | 12.00pm Tuesday, 15th December 2026 |
| Notification of Call Outcome | Mid-End February 2027 |
| Projects Commence | From March 2027 |

# 9. Monitoring of Funded Applications

**All funded applications will be subject to ongoing monitoring and will be required to submit progress reports.**

## 9.1 Monitoring Reports

The lead HEI will be required to return bi-annual programmatic monitoring and evaluation reports to the HEA on project activity and outcomes, including financial reporting on the funding allocated per project. Further details will be agreed as part of any subsequent contract for funding.

Programmatic monitoring reports will include details of:

- Activities undertaken; and
- Objectives attained, as benchmarked against agreed targets and performance indicators.

Financial monitoring reports will include details of:

- Financial monitoring of expenditure and tracking of expenditure within the allocated budget; and
- Progress of expenditure in reporting period and projected expenditure for next reporting period.

The release of funds will be dependent upon the submission of satisfactory progress reports. A portion of the allocation will be retained pending completion of the project and a satisfactory final report including an evaluation of the application in terms of the agreed targets and performance indicators.

**The HEA also reserve the right to audit expenditure of the funding allocation.**

Failure on the part of an institution to provide adequate and timely information and/or failure to achieve objectives will be taken into account in any future calls and will result in the exclusion of the institution(s) concerned. Significant departure from the objectives of the application will result in the funding awarded being suspended or revoked. Any deviation from the agreed activities, objectives and timelines will impact upon the release of the funding to the institution.

HEA and DFHERIS may conduct project reviews and site visits throughout the funding period.

# Appendix 1 – Eligible Institutions

The list of eligible institutions will mirror the existing Shared Island programme framework and include:

**Institutions in Ireland**

- Atlantic Technological University
- Dublin City University
- Dublin Dental Hospital Dublin
- Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design & Technology
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Institute for Advanced Studies (DIAS)
- Marino Institute of Education
- Mary Immaculate College, Limerick
- Maynooth University
- Munster Technological University
- National College of Art and Design
- National College of Ireland
- RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences
- Royal Irish Academy Royal Irish Academy of Music
- South East Technological University
- St. Patrick's College, Maynooth
- Technological University Dublin

- Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest
- University College Cork
- University College Dublin
- University of Dublin, Trinity College
- University of Galway
- University of Limerick

**Institutions in Northern Ireland**

- Armagh Observatory
- Centre for Cross Border Studies
- Queen's University Belfast
- St. Mary's University College
- Stranmillis University College
- The Open University
- Ulster University

# Appendix 2 – Glossary

### Digital Creative Industries

Economic activities combining creativity, culture and technology to generate products, services and experiences.

### Innovation Hub

A collaborative structure bringing together education, industry and stakeholders to support innovation and knowledge exchange.

### Partnership of Scale

A large-scale strategic collaboration involving multiple institutions and sectoral partners.

### External Partner

A non-higher education organisation participating in project delivery.

### Lead Administrative/ Governance Institution

The Irish institution responsible for governance, contractual management and reporting.

### Shared Island Collaboration

Activities that strengthen cooperation, innovation and skills development across Ireland and Northern Ireland.

### Eligibility for Funding

This section will reference categories/ types of funded bodies as per the act, indicating which categories are eligible for funding under the given scheme/ programme, and/or conditions that must be met by bodies seeking funding to be eligible for funding under the given funding scheme/ programme.

### Funding Period

This section will set out the period for which the funding is provided.

### Allocation Principles

This section will outline the allocation principles, including but not limited to assessment criteria and assessment process for competitive funding schemes and programmes, and allocation criteria/ models for non-competitive funding schemes and programmes.

### Eligible Expenditure

This section will indicate which expenditure categories are allowed: current/ capital; pay/ non-pay/ indirect costs, etc.

### Other Conditions of Funding

This section will outline other conditions of funding applicable to the given funding scheme/ programme, including but not limited to reporting requirements.

### Additional Information

This section will outline any other additional relevant information as relevant to the funding scheme/ programme.