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

Shared Island Digital Creative Industries Innovation Programme

FAQ Document

23rd November 2026

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Shared Island Initiative

Shared Island Digital Creative Industries Innovation Programme (DCIIP)

Frequently Asked Questions

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. This document aims to clarify queries in respect of the funding call. Queries can be emailed to skills@hea.ie, the HEA will update this document with responses to all queries.

The HEA will not accept Call queries after 27th November 2026.

1. What is the DCIIP?

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.

2. Who manages the DCIIP?

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.

3. What is the context of the DCIIP?

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.

4. What funding is available?

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)**.

5. What are the DCIIP 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.

6. What activities will the DCCIP support?

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

7. What are the DCIIP 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.

8. What are the DCIIP application 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.

9. What are the DCIIP key policy documents?

- 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.

10. What is "Pillar I: Innovation Hubs and Collaborative Networks"?

Innovation Hubs and Collaborative Networks will support 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

11. What is a "Pillar II: Partnerships of Scale"?

Partnerships of Scale will support large-scale strategic collaborations focused on research, innovation, skills development, technology adoption, and industry engagement within the digital creative industries.

They will supports strategic collaborations focused on:

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

12. Who can apply?

Project applications are open to eligible researchers employed in the listed eligible institutions, innovators, and interdisciplinary teams from **creative industries relevant disciplines**, including technology, engineering, arts, humanities, media, and design.

13. What are the minimum Consortium partners required?

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, and an industry partner from outside higher education and research institutions.

14. How many projects can an investigator lead on?

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. If an investigator is involved as a Lead or Partner in multiple projects recommended for funding, they will be required to confirm their capacity to deliver their commitments to the projects, in writing to the HEA, prior to any awards being made.

15. What other partners can be included?

Each project application must adhere to the minimum consortium partnership requirements detailed in question 13. There is no specified maximum limit on the number of partners. Project applications may include **external partners** from further education, civic society, cultural organisations, creative enterprise, and innovation from Ireland and Northern Ireland, and other **additional partners** from outside of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

16. How many applications can be submitted?

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 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.

17. What is an industry partner?

Industry partners are registered companies from outside higher education and research institutions including SMEs, multinational companies, and industry representative organisations.

Industry partners currently in receipt of public funding must declare this funding at the time of application or if received after obtaining DCIIP funding, must notify the HEA in writing. Resources funded through existing public funding should not be utilised in the industry participation in the proposal. Industry partners are responsible for ensuring that they are in full compliance with State Aid rules for receipt of public funding.

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.

18. Are HEIs not listed in Appendix 1 eligible participate in the DCIIP?

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that are not listed in Appendix 1 of the DCIIP Call Document, including private and independent HEIs, that are based in Ireland and Northern Ireland **are eligible to participate in the DCIIP as supporting academic partners** of a proposal led by a HEI listed in Appendix 1.

HEIs that are **not** listed in Appendix 1, **cannot lead or co-lead an application** to the DCIIP.

HEIs that are **not** listed in Appendix 1, that are based in Ireland and Northern Ireland **can receive funding as a supporting academic partner**. The funding requested must be respective of their contribution and must be within the maximum budget allowable for their leading academic partner.

19. The lead applicant currently leads a separately funded pilot study in a related area. The proposed project would build on that experience but has distinct aims, activities and outputs, and no work would be funded twice. Is a project of this kind eligible, and how should the earlier study be declared?

A Lead Investigator/ Co-Lead Investigator may be involved as a team member in other projects. When a Lead Investigator/ Co-Lead Investigator is involved in multiple projects they must **confirm their capacity to deliver their commitments to the project**, in writing to the HEA, prior to any award being made.

Declaration of other funded project commitments will be assessed in the application form and must be provided in section 61 and 62 of the proposal application form.

20. Can the 36-month project period begin later than March 2027?

Projects are expected to commence as soon as possible after notification of an award. The budget is available for three years only, and funding will cease in 2030.

21. Can a public hospital, or a national public health body, be an external partner?

External partners from further education, civic society, cultural organisations, creative enterprise, and innovation from Ireland and Northern Ireland may also be included. Research Performing Organisations and other government agencies may be also included as external partners. There is no barrier to a public hospital or national public health body being proposed as an external partner. 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.

22. Can industry partners' creative production costs (for example, producing demonstrator video content) be included under Innovation Activities?

Project budgets and proposed activities must be reasonable and reflective of the research project objectives. Industry partners in Ireland and Northern Ireland may claim costs **up to 10% of the budget**. All budgets and proposed activity costs will be assessed with the application. There is no barrier to inclusion of creative production costs which are in line with proposal objectives.

23. Does the 30% cap on funding to Northern Ireland partners apply only to Northern Ireland HEIs, or does it also include industry and external partners based in Northern Ireland? If it includes them, does a Northern Ireland industry partner's allocation count toward both the 30% cap and the 10% cap on industry partners combined? And where a partner operates on both sides of the border, is it the company's registered location or the location of the funded work that decides which side of the cap it falls under?

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. This maximum 30% of the award includes HEI, industry, and external partners in Northern Ireland. A company's registered location must be provided to determine its eligibility for funding.

24. Does time a PhD student spends working with an industry partner count toward the 12 months to be spent outside the host institution?

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. Time spent performing research activity with an industry partner outside of the host institution can count towards the 12 months.

25. For Postdoctoral staff and Project Managers, is it necessary to go through a competitive process or may we add staff on the basis of expertise if they are not currently employed full-time at the HEI?

All funded staff appointments must **follow institutional recruitment policies and procedures**. Team members, except for visiting researchers, must be employed by the host institution. Research students must be registered at the host institution. DCIIP funding is time bound; staff funding will only be provided for the duration of the project.

26. May a lead HEI in Ireland or Northern Ireland, following its own procurement rules, buy training and evaluation services from a supplier registered in another EEA state or the UK?

Application budgets will be assessed for their **value and appropriateness to the proposed research activity**. All approved project budget expenditure must follow respective procurement policy and procedures. Justification and clear grounds for the necessity to use suppliers outside of Ireland will be required, including the rationale and detail as to why suppliers within Ireland cannot deliver the services.

27. **If so, does this sit outside the provisions that bar additional partners from outside Ireland and Northern Ireland from claiming costs, provided the supplier is not a partner and is not included in place of an Irish or Northern Irish collaborator?**

    Suppliers would not be classified as additional partners.

28. **Would such costs be accepted under the allowable heads for training, dissemination and impact, or must they be shown another way in the budget?**

    Costs in respect of training, dissemination and impact must be clearly identified as such in the proposed budget. Application budgets will be assessed for their value and appropriateness to the proposed research activity.

29. ***Partners registered in both jurisdictions.*** **Where an industry partner has registered companies in both Ireland and Northern Ireland, does the registered location or the location of the work decide which side of the 30% Northern Ireland cap its costs fall on?**

    The registered company address of the proposed industry partner which the project will work with must be provided. The company's registered office address will determine its eligibility for funding.

30. ***Payments to participants.*** **Under Innovation Activities ("pilot projects" and "innovation challenges"), can the project pay creative businesses and freelance creators who are not formal partners for briefs they produce? If so, are prizes, bursaries or stipends the preferred mechanism?**

    This type of activity could be considered as a supplier to the project and thus these costs could be identified as such in the proposed budget. Application budgets will be assessed for their value and appropriateness to the proposed research activity.

31. *Sole traders*. Can a registered sole trader, such as a self-employed content creator, act as an industry partner, or must industry partners be incorporated companies?

There is no barrier to sole traders acting as an industry partner. All application consortia will be assessed on their relevance and suitability to deliver outcomes that will be of benefit to the creative industries and not to the benefit of individual companies/ sole traders.

32. *Application Form*. The Methodology template specifies 1000 words as its maximum length. Does this include any references or can we add all references outside the word count?

If there are additional supporting documents, including references, that are critical to the assessment of a project application's methodology, these can be included separately but the word count on the Design, Methodology & Implementation Template should not exceed the maximum 1,000 word limit.

33. The FAQ confirms that a registered sole trader may act as an industry partner. Does this require registration with Revenue as a self-employed person, registration of the business name with the CRO, or both?

Individuals must be officially registered with both the Companies Registration Office and Revenue to be eligible for inclusion as a sole trader industry partner.

34. Can an independent creative practitioner whose work is currently organised informally participate as an external partner, particularly under the category of cultural organisations or creative enterprise?

Informal or unregistered practitioners cannot be included as industry or external partners to receive funding as part of a DCIIP project application.

35. Can an individual creative practitioner participate as a paid project contributor or supplier without being a formal consortium partner?

See answer to question 34; informal or unregistered practitioners cannot receive funding as part of a DCIIP project application.

36. Are there opportunities for independent practitioners to connect with eligible higher-education institutions currently developing proposals?

There are no HEA-facilitated opportunities for independent practitioners to connect with eligible higher education institutions currently developing proposals.

37. Does a registered charity and company limited by guarantee satisfy the requirement for an officially registered civic society organisation? Are their activities eligible for funding as part of an external partner work package.

Registered charities and creative enterprises can act as an external partner and can receive funding for their activities as an external partner.

38. Could the research, workshop, engagement and dissemination costs be included within the 5% external partner funding limit for a registered charity and company limited by guarantee?

Proposed budgets will be assessed based on their appropriateness and value for the activities proposed. There is no barrier to the inclusion of workshop, engagement and dissemination costs in an external partner budget.

39. Is funding for an external partner administered through the lead higher education institution?

All funding awarded is administered through the lead higher education institution.

40. Can we assume that the questions on the application form will mirror the PDF Indicative Application form

Yes, these will be the same. We have **updated the indicative application form** on the HEA website to account for the supporting template documents being emailed rather than uploaded. No other changes will be made to the application form.

41. QUBIS, Queen's University Belfast's commercialisation company, could contribute innovation and commercialisation support. As QUBIS is a separate legal entity from the University yet solely owned but the University. Could you clarify whether an HEI could subcontract this work to us, subject to its procurement procedures?

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.

42. If so, would the subcontracted budget count towards the 10% industry partner limit and the 30% Northern Ireland allocation? Is there a separate cap on subcontracting?

The funding percentages are totals of the overall project budget for each partner type; the 10% for industry partners is not on a per partner basis but 10% across all industry partners involved in a consortium. The 10% for industry partners is separate to the 30% for Northern Ireland HEIs.

43. Could you also confirm that Northern Ireland HEIs can lead or co-lead multiple bids under each pillar, while individual lead/co-lead investigators are limited to one per pillar?

There is **no limit** to the number of project applications where a Northern Ireland HEI can be lead, co-lead, or supporting partner.

A Lead Investigator/ Co-Lead Investigator 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 project applications. 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.

44. Is it permissible to include a contingency less than 10%?

The contingency budget is intended to mitigate risk and to minimise the impact of risk related costs. Provision should be made for contingency costs at **up to 10%** of the overall budget, and the contingency costs must be included within the funding limits for each Pillar (i.e. €1.1m for Pillar I and €3m for Pillar II).

Contingency provision should be apportioned to institutions involved in the consortium and in accordance with the project consortium agreement. Contingency costs must be appropriate to activities proposed and cannot exceed 10% of the total budget however there is no barrier to these costs being under 10% of the total budget.

45. It is not allowed to include industry contribution to the overhead calculation. Are there any funder rules around individual HEIs negotiating overhead rates directly with their industry partners?

The DCIIP will not provide overheads costs for industry partners. HEIs can apply Institutional overheads up to a maximum of 25% of pay costs only. HEIs cannot apply overheads in respect of industry partner costs. Overheads should be used in accordance with HEI policies and procedures.

46. Project duration is 36 months. Structured PhDs are usually 48 months. Will the HEA impose any stipulation that funding for the 4th of an any PhD student recruited to a successful project must be covered by the HEI that enrolled the student, even if local policy allows for the submission of a PhD thesis before year 4 of study?

Project funding will be for 36 months duration only. Approved funded posts can only receive DCIIP funding within the duration of the project. It is at the discretion of a HEI if they wish to continue to fund any staff/ student costs post funding completion.

47. Can you clarify whether Travel and Consumable costs may be requested for the Programme Manager? The call documents states that costs for research consumables and travel cannot be requested for a Project Manager. However, the Sample Budget worksheet in the template budget includes a request for Travel for the Project Manager, as well as a laptop.

Following further consideration, travel and laptop cost can be requested for project managers, the call document and sample template have been updated with this change. Research consumable costs cannot be requested for project manager.

48. Could you please clarify acceptable start dates? The call document says from March 2027 while the Guide for Applicants merely says 2027. Would a start date of September 2027 be acceptable to coincide with the intake of new PhD students?

Projects are expected to commence as soon as possible after notification of an award and **no later than 1st August 2027**. The budget is available for three years only, and funding will cease in 2030.

49. Should the contingency costs be calculated before or after the allocation of the 10% to industry partners?

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

costs must be appropriate to activities proposed and cannot exceed 10% of the total budget however there is no barrier to these costs being under 10% of the total budget.

50. Similarly, should the allocation of 10% of the funding to industry partners be calculated before or after overheads are considered?

The 10% industry partner allocation is 10% of the total budget including overheads.

51. Is it acceptable to include letters of support from industry and other partners, to demonstrate their commitment to the project?

The Application Endorsement Template includes a declaration confirming that industry / external / additional partners named in the project application are committed to the project and further confirmation is not required but may be included at your discretion.

52. Can an individual with a proven track record and expertise relevant to the creative sector but without proven track record of research experience relative to the creative industries act as Lead / Co-Lead Investigator?

Please refer to point 4.2.5 of the Call document "The identified Lead/ Co-Lead Investigators must have a proven track record of research experience relative to the creative industries."

53. Does the application ask for work packages, and if so, where should they be added?

Details on work packages should be included on the **Gantt Chart** (your own template), and emailed along with the other completed templates to skills@hea.ie

The Gantt Chart should be a visualisation of the timelines for the completion of the project, outlining the work-packages, outputs, deliverables and key milestones of the project. This will inform the implementation phase of the proposal.

54. ***Gantt Chart Format:*** **As applicants are allowed to use their own format for the Gantt chart to outline work packages, deliverables, outputs, and milestones, could you clarify if they are permitted to include additional explanatory text or a work package table (with short descriptions, outcomes, etc.) within this same document?**

See response to Q53 above. If additional descriptions are critical to the understanding of the project timeline, these may be included in your Gantt Chart template submission.

55. ***PhD Funding (Section 6.6.5):*** **The guidelines note that financial commitments beyond the three-year funding period are the responsibility of the host institution. Could you confirm if it is permissible to propose a four-year PhD where the first three years are funded by DCIIP and the fourth year is supported by a separate mechanism or partner? This would be on the condition that the funding commitment is secured by the institution/partner, and that the fourth year of PhD work does not impact the delivery of the main project objectives and outcomes expected at the end of the three-year project.**

See response to Q46 above. Project funding will be for 36 months duration only. Approved funded posts can only receive DCIIP funding within the duration of the project. It is at the discretion of a HEI if they wish to continue to fund any staff/ student costs post funding completion.

56. Could the HEA confirm which partner allocations applicants should include when calculating the 30% Northern Ireland cap? Section 4.2.9 of the call refers to "Northern Ireland partners", and FAQ 23 explicitly includes HEIs, industry partners and external partners in Northern Ireland. However, FAQ 42, in response to a question about subcontracting, describes the 10% industry cap as separate from the "30% for Northern Ireland HEIs". For example, if 28% of the award is allocated to Northern Ireland HEIs and 3% to a Northern Ireland company participating as a named industry partner, would the Northern Ireland allocation be 31%, exceeding the cap, or 28%, within the cap? In this example, would the 3% also count towards the consortium-wide 10% industry cap?

The funding allocation of **up to 30% of total project budget** for Northern Ireland is specifically for HEI partners in Northern Ireland. For example, under Pillar II the maximum budget allocation to Northern Ireland partners is €900,000 shared between all Northern Ireland HEI partners involved in the consortium.

The funding allocation of **up to 10% of total project budget** for industry partners is the maximum permitted allocation for all industry partners in a project consortium. For example, under Pillar I the maximum budget allocated to industry partners is €110,000 shared between all industry partners involved in the consortium.

57. Could the HEA confirm whether catering is an allowable expense as part of workshop/demonstration or industry engagement activities?

In accordance with HEI procurement procedures and public sector financial limits hospitality expenses may be incurred for events and meetings which are directly specified within the approved project activities.