

NATIONAL FORUM FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING  
AND LEARNING

**Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund  
(Building Digital Capacity in Irish Higher Education)**

**Call for Proposals—Phase 1—2014**

**1. Call for Proposals**

The objectives and priorities of the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund reflect and support the enhancement and transformation agenda that is being pursued at both a national and a European level. The strength of the Irish higher education system will only be fully realised through collaboration across the sector. The aim will be to ensure that funded projects optimise the synergies and scope that can be enabled by strong inter-institutional or intra-institutional collaboration, or through partnerships with other education providers or external stakeholders, for maximum national impact.

Higher education institutions<sup>1</sup> are invited to make collaborative proposals for funding under the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund 2014 (Building Digital Capacity in Irish Higher Education) The fund amounts to €6 million and the total investment will be over a 3-year time-frame ending in 2016. In this inaugural call, €2 million will be available for allocation of phase 1 funding. Proposals will be evaluated on a competitive basis in accordance with the criteria and processes outlined in this call.

- 1.2 The aim of this fund is to enhance teaching and learning by building digital capacity in higher education institutions. It will support new, collaborative approaches to technology-enhanced teaching and learning within higher education. Proposals can build on activity that has already been initiated (enhancing such activities with digital technological innovation), or initiate completely new activities for enhancing teaching and learning with technology.
- 1.3 Specifically this call for proposals aims to support the advancement of the recommendations of the report on the sectoral consultation process for building digital capacity undertaken by the National Forum. This report is available online at

<http://teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Digital-Roadmap-PHASE1MAY282014.pdf>

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<sup>1</sup> The eligible institutions are identified in Appendix 1.

## 2. Context for the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund

- 2.1 The higher education sector is acknowledged as a sector that through its activities in teaching, learning and research, builds confidence and competence among all its learners and fosters the development of effective, ethical, imaginative and innovative citizens who are equipped to play a positive role in society.

The National Forum provides key system-level infrastructure for the enhancement of teaching and learning in Irish higher education, and for the implementation of the recommendations of the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* in this area. The National Forum aims to enhance the learning experience of all students in Irish higher education.

Building digital capacity for teaching and learning is a key element of the National Forum's work-plan and is inter-linked with its other strategic elements, namely:

- Professional development;
- Identifying, endorsing and awarding excellent teaching;
- Scholarship in teaching and learning;
- Partnership and collaboration with key networks and groups.

This call for proposals aims to support the National Forum's enhancement theme, which is currently 'teaching for transitions'.<sup>2</sup>

- 2.2 A series of cross-sectoral consultations has taken place to inform the emerging roadmap for building digital capacity in Irish higher education that is being developed by the National Forum<sup>3</sup>. In the report on the sectoral consultation process, a strong vision for building digital capacity is articulated, which includes:

- Developing a culture that fully embraces digital learning and digital innovation in higher education teaching and learning contexts;
- Using digital technology to enhance teaching and learning to connect teachers and students and to increase the level and quality of learning-related communication;
- Developing and supporting digital literacy and skills among students and teachers in higher education;
- Enhancing access for students to a range of technological supports to enhance learning;
- Collaborating across institutions and linking with schools in order to build digital capacity.

Key recommendations from the report on the sectoral consultation process include:

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<sup>2</sup> Please refer to the national Forum website [www.teachingandlearning.ie](http://www.teachingandlearning.ie) for further details on the enhancement theme.

<sup>3</sup> See *Principles and First Insights from the Sectoral Consultation on Building Digital Capacity in Higher Education*.

- Strengthening and supporting collaboration within and between institutions and with different parts of the higher education sector to build digital capacity;
- Developing shared policies and infrastructure that support engagement with an increasingly complex digital learning environment;
- Prioritising the strategic development of digital capacity in institutional and national strategies, and in quality frameworks;
- Developing a consistent, seamless and coherent digital experience for students and teachers to develop digital literacy;
- Engaging with students and teachers to develop digital literacy;
- Developing digital capacity in tandem with the development of a strong evidence-base for enhanced pedagogy.

Stakeholders from across the sector identified a range of actionable first steps that we need to take as part of the first phase of building digital capacity for teaching and learning in higher education. These actionable first steps which underpin this call (either individually or in combination) are:

1. Higher education institutions should each develop a strategy and review process that clearly outlines how the development of digital capacity will be addressed at an institutional level. The strategy should include a strong focus on teaching and learning, and an explicit review process that ensures the strategy remains up to date in a rapidly developing technological environment.

NB: In order to set the scene for effective collaboration, all proposing institutions need to make explicit their strategy and review process for enhancing teaching and learning, which incorporates the development of digital capacity

2. A systematic review of technical infrastructure across the sector should be undertaken. This will identify clearly the current status and the specific technical infrastructural developments that need to be resourced to support building digital capacity in the future. This review should involve all stakeholders (senior management, IT specialists, teachers, students, other stakeholders e.g. HEAnet) and results should be published by the end of 2014.
3. The establishment of a collaborative approach to the development of policies and practices for the sector that enable digital innovation for teaching and learning in an increasingly regulated environment. These policies and approaches should be made available nationally.
4. The development of new approaches to assessment and feedback that leverage the potential of digital technologies to enhance and transform student learning in ways that support students' performance and prepare them for a world that is increasingly digital.
5. A strategic approach to programme development (inter or intra-institutional) should be piloted and evaluated. This should include all stakeholders in the design process, leverage digital technology in delivery and assessment, and

actively integrate and support the development of the digital literacy of staff and students.

6. The adoption of open-education principles by all higher education institutions to support the active development of open-access institutional repositories for research outputs and teaching and assessment resources.
7. A coherent approach to academic and technical support-provision and sharing should be piloted as a model for the development of future supports across institutional clusters in an environment of constrained resources.

**Please note:**

Actionable step 1 will not be funded directly. However all proposals must be accompanied by a strong teaching and learning strategy from each participating institution—including how digital capacity will be developed at an institutional level to support and enhance teaching and learning. (This can either be a distinct teaching and learning strategy or it can be the teaching and learning element of institutional strategy documents). All subsequent actionable steps are fundable under this call.

For Actionable Step 2 we envisage a sector-wide submission whose subsequent work in delivering on this initiative would be supported by the Forum

For Actionable Step 4 in particular it is envisaged that initiatives to enhance assessment and feedback will focus on:

- Equipping students for an increasingly digital world;
- Enabling technological features to increase knowledge, competence, motivation and engagement;
- Improving value for teacher effort to enhance timeliness and impact of feedback, using technology.

**3. Scope of the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund 2014 (Building Digital Capacity)**

- 3.1 A thoroughly collaborative approach has already been adopted in order to develop and articulate the emerging digital roadmap. The resulting approach to funding allocation (outlined below) will aim to ensure that the proposal and allocation process is as collaborative, appropriate, transparent and inclusive as possible. The aim will be to ensure that funded projects optimise the synergies and scope that can be enabled by strong inter-institutional or intra-institutional collaboration, for maximum national impact.
- 3.2 The Fund will not be allocated to the creation of physical capacity or to proposals that could reasonably be expected to be funded from other public funding sources, e.g. research funding agencies, core grant funding. It will fund new initiatives and also activities that clearly build on or develop existing initiatives. All proposals must clearly show how they enhance or transform learning experiences for students.

- 3.3 Institutions may propose projects which have multi-annual requirements as well as projects with an implementation time of a period of a year or less.
- 3.4 In order to support greater collaboration and develop critical mass within existing programmes, proposals may be subject or discipline specific.
- 3.5 Proposals should have regard towards their lasting impact. Proposals should engender real, beneficial & long-term change.
- 4. Allocation of the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund: Principles and Processes**

For proposals focused on actionable steps 3–7 the process for evaluation and for the allocation of funding will be based on the following five key criteria:

#### **CRITERIA (ACTIONABLE STEPS 3–7)**

- A. The alignment with action areas as outlined in the actionable first steps above.
- B. The demonstrated quality and strength of the collaboration (either intra or inter-institutional or in partnership with other education providers and external stakeholders).
- C. The extent of strategic alignment with institutional or inter-institutional teaching and learning strategies.
- D. The extent to which responsiveness to student concerns and perspectives have been integrated into the proposal – i.e. commitment to students as partners in building digital capacity.
- E. The degree to which the particular impact on ‘teaching for transitions’ is addressed by this proposal (including effective early learning experience, engagement and retention of students in higher education).

#### **CRITERIA (ACTIONABLE STEP 2)**

- A. The strength of the alignment with the aims of actionable step 2 as outlined above
- B. The demonstrated quality and strength of the collaboration (which must involve a representative alliance of institutions capable of connecting effectively with all institutions in the sector)
- C. Demonstrated research strengths and achievements among the proposing team within the domain required, given the nature of the review to be conducted.

#### **4.1 *Upper Limits for proposals.***

There will be an upper limit of €1 million for any single proposal (spanning the 3-year time-frame).

## 5. Management of process

- 5.1 This section sets out the process for evaluation of proposals, including the marking system, the composition of the Assessment Panel and other requirements.

**All proposals will be completed using the National Forum online application facility. This facility will be available from June 30<sup>th</sup> 2014. The facility can be accessed through the National Forum website [www.teachingandlearning.ie](http://www.teachingandlearning.ie)**

The process for applying for funding has two stages:

- Stage 1            Written online submission  
Stage 2            Face-to-face presentation. (Only proposals that reach the cut-off mark outlined below will move to this stage.)

### 5.2 *Marking system*

General marking scheme for all fundable activities under actionable steps 3–7:

- A. The strength of alignment with the activities outlined in actionable steps 3–7. (20 marks)
- B. The demonstrated quality and strength of the collaboration (either intra or inter-institutional or partnerships with other education providers and external stakeholders. (20 marks)
- C. The extent of strategic alignment with institutional or inter-institutional teaching and learning strategies. (20 marks)
- D. The extent to which responsiveness to student concerns and perspectives is integrated into the proposals—i.e. commitment to students as partners in building digital capacity. (20 marks)
- E. The degree to which the proposal focuses in the particular impact of building digital capacity on ‘teaching for transitions’ including effective early learning experience, engagement and retention of students in higher education. (20 marks)

General marking scheme for fundable activities under actionable step 2

- A. The alignment with actionable step 2. (20 marks)
- B. The demonstrated quality and strength of the inter-institutional collaboration. (20 marks)

- C. The quality of the research team as indicated by experience and calibre. (20 marks)
- D. The quality of the research process (which should include engagement and communication with key stakeholders). (20 marks)
- E. The immediate and longer-term impact of this initiative. (20 marks)

Collaborative proposals must meet a minimum requirement of at least 55 marks, with a minimum of 5 marks from all criteria in stage 1 to be eligible for progression to stage 2. We envisage that single institutional proposals will be rare, but exceptional single-institutional proposals with strong intra-institutional collaboration and high potential for subsequent impact beyond that institution must also meet the above marking criteria in stage 1 to be eligible for progression to stage 2. All institutions will get formal feedback on their proposals post stage 1. Those that have reached the minimum criteria will be invited for stage 2. Stage 2 will require the proposal, development and implementation team to present their initiative to a plenary group led by an independent chair and panel and to which all other proposers will be invited. A further 50 marks will be allocated to this stage.

The presentations will focus on proposals' national impact and give proposers the opportunity to elaborate on the quality of the collaboration, the implementation plans and the sustainability of the initiatives. This stage will be scheduled for early October 2014 and further details will be made available closer to the date.

### **5.3 Assessment Panel and Process**

Proposals will be assessed on a competitive basis by an independent assessment panel of international experts. Institutions should have regard to this international dimension of the process, and should seek to use best international practice and theory to inform their proposals. The panel will have the right to amend proposals in the context of overall limited funding and will make recommendations for the allocation of available funding to the highest scoring proposals. The panel will only make recommendations in respect of proposals that meet at least a minimum level of quality.

## 5.4 Timeframe & Calendar

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|--|---|
| Call issue to institutions   | 11 <sup>th</sup> June 2014                        |
| Webinar to support proposal development and demonstration of proposal online interface | 26 <sup>th</sup> June 11-12pm                     |
| Online interface for proposal submissions available from                               | 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2014                        |
| Institutions to return submissions   | 5 <sup>th</sup> September 2014                    |
| External Panel to review submissions   | September 2014                                    |
| Results of stage 1 to issue  | 30 <sup>th</sup> September 2014                   |
| Presentations (stage 2)  | 9 <sup>th</sup> and 10 <sup>th</sup> October 2014 |
| Announcement of results  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> November 2014                     |

## 5.5 Format of proposal

See online template (available from June 30<sup>th</sup>)  
Teaching and Learning Enhancement Call—Online Application Process 2014  
(Note that the online interface will be similar to that currently used for Springboard tendering)

## 5.6 *Monitoring*

The National Forum will monitor the allocation of the enhancement fund on an ongoing basis. Institutions receiving funding will report regularly to the National Forum on:

- a) Activities undertaken; and
- b) Objectives attained, as defined in each initiative's implementation plan.

For all proposals an interim financial report, must be submitted in February 2015. The National Forum may also put in place independent reviews of the projects funded.

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

- 5.7** 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 proposal will result in the funding awarded being suspended or revoked.

Any deviation from the agreed activities, objectives and time lines will impact upon the release of the funding to the institution.

**5.8 Queries and clarifications**

The National Forum will take queries from all institutions up to the date of the presentation. All queries and responses will be dealt with via a dedicated publicly accessible National Forum website page.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Queries should be addressed to [www.teachingandlearning.ie](http://www.teachingandlearning.ie)