



NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

HEA | AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS
HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Network and Discipline Fund 2021

Theme: Shared Solutions to Common Challenges

Call for Proposals

February 2021

1. About the National Forum

The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education is the national body responsible for leading and advising on the enhancement of teaching and learning in Irish higher education. In partnership with those who learn, teach, and lead in Irish higher education, the National Forum works to develop an inclusive, collaborative and innovative culture that maximises learning impact for the success of all students.

The National Forum has four key strategic priorities:

The Professional Development of All Those Who Teach

Promoting evidence-based, flexible, inclusive professional development for all those who teach, reflecting the contextual needs and drivers within and across higher education institutions

Teaching and Learning in a Digital World

Supporting those who learn, teach, and support learning to embrace and harness the potential of digital technologies with the goal of enhancing learning, teaching, and overall digital capability

Teaching and Learning Enhancement Within and Across Disciplines

Recognising that disciplines are a key unit of change in higher education, with a focus on disciplinary excellence in learning, teaching and assessment

Student Success

Developing a vision of success, in partnership with students, with the aim of providing all students with the opportunity to fulfil their potential and become creators of new knowledge who are community engaged, ethically conscious, professionally competent and equipped to flourish in a global world.

2. Policy Context

The current national higher education strategy, the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, sets out teaching and learning as the first of three interconnected core roles of higher education. Enhanced teaching and learning is fundamental to the achievement of objectives across key national policies related to employability, internationalisation, innovation, and equality of opportunity. The work of the National Forum informs, and is informed by, a range of national policies, strategies and frameworks including but not limited to Action Plans for Education, Higher Education System Performance Frameworks, HEA Strategic Plans, Strategy Statements of Quality and Qualifications Ireland, the Charter for Irish Universities, the Strategy of the Technological Higher Education Association, the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, and the National Skills Strategy.

3. A Focus on Networks and Discipline Groups

Networks and discipline groups are important mechanisms for collaboration and enhancement in Irish higher education due to their direct links with those working in subject areas or focused on key educational activities across institutions. Acknowledging this, a key strategic activity outlined within the National Forum Strategy 2019-2021 '[Leading Enhancement and Innovation in Teaching and Learning](#)' is to provide opportunities to strengthen networks and discipline groups and support their efforts to enhance teaching and learning.

With this in mind, the objective of the 2020 Network and Discipline Fund is to sustain the collaborative and coherent approach to enhancement within and across networks and discipline groups that has been evident in recent years. Specifically, the Fund has a focus on *Shared Solutions to Common Challenges*. It will support networks and discipline groups to work together to respond proactively to identified challenges in teaching and learning in higher education, including those that have come to light through the sudden move to online/remote teaching and learning. National networks and discipline groups are well positioned to leverage this Fund for the benefit of all those who teach and learn across the sector.

4. Eligibility

To be eligible for funding under this call, a network/discipline group must:

- Have a clear mission/vision that aligns with the National Forum vision of a valued and informed teaching and learning culture in Irish higher education
- Have an implemented governance structure, separate to that of the host institution¹
- Have been active as a distinct group for more than three years*
- Actively engage members from across institutions nationally²
- Have an existing dedicated bank account/hosted institutional sub account into which funding can be transferred³

*Special consideration will be given to national networks/disciplinary groups who may not meet this criterion but are particularly focussed on finding solutions to problems arising, or amplified, in the current context.

¹ Please refer to Appendix 1 Q.18 for further details

² Please refer to Appendix 1 Q.19 for further details

³ Monies cannot be transferred into the individual bank account of any person representing the group.

5. Application and Review Process

Applications can only be made through the dedicated application interface [here](#). Applications should be submitted no later than 05 March 2021. The information requested in the online application form will include the following:

- A description of the challenge that has been identified by the group and the proposed solution
- Evidence of fulfilment of each of the selection criteria outlined in Section 6
- Confirmation of acceptance of the conditions of funding outlined in Section 9
- An indication of the amount of funding requested (up to a max of €10,000 per network/discipline group)
- An outline budget for the proposed initiative

All applications will be reviewed by a National Forum panel. Applicants will be notified regarding the result of their application on 01 April 2021. Those that are deemed to have provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate fulfilment of all selection criteria will receive funding by the end of April 2021.

6. Selection Criteria

Networks/discipline groups must evidence that the proposed initiative will lead to transformation or enhancement of practice across the sector within the relevant funding timeframe. For example, networks/discipline groups might set targets of working to transform a number of programmes/modules across the sector, working with senior administrators or heads of department to embed an innovative teaching/assessment approach, or working to develop a resource from which the group, and the broader higher education community, will benefit.

Please note: Funding will not be extended for conferences/seminars; these are supported under other National Forum funding streams. [National Seminar Series](#) funding supports local events on an annual basis and the National Forum also has dedicated [funding for conferences](#) that align with national teaching and learning priorities.

In order to secure funding, a proposed initiative must be...

...responding to an authentic need

The application must clearly outline the existing challenge that is being addressed and demonstrate the suitability of the proposed initiative as a potential solution to this identified challenge.

...focused on teaching and learning

The proposed initiative must have a clear focus on the enhancement of teaching and learning and be likely to prompt conversations and enhancements related to teaching and learning within and across institutions.

...nationally inclusive

The proposed initiative should not be exclusive to members of any one institution; it must be open to all institution types and all those who learn, teach and lead, demonstrating potential reach across the sector.

...strategically directed

The proposed initiative should demonstrate a clearly articulated purpose and value, as well as strategic alignment with local and national priorities.

...evidence informed

The proposed initiative should be based on sound evidence from research and/or practice in the area of teaching and learning enhancement.

...adding value

Additionality will be an important component in the evaluation of all proposals submitted in response to this call. It is important that proposals take cognisance of initiatives and activities already underway that have been funded through National Forum to ensure coherence and avoid duplication of effort.

...impactful

The impact the initiative is expected to have and how this will be captured and communicated by the applicant group will be taken into account.

7. Commitment to Sharing and Review of Funded Initiatives

In place of a review, each funded group will be asked to participate in a showcase event during the National Forum's [Valuing Ireland's Teaching and Learning \(VITAL\) Week](#) on 08-12 November 2021. This event will provide an opportunity to share the outcome(s) of the funded initiatives with a wider audience.

8. Support and Guidance

A dedicated email address has been established to support applicants. Any queries regarding this call should be submitted by email only to NDF@teachingandlearning.ie.

9. Summary of Important Information and Conditions of Funding

- 1 The National Forum will be responsible for coordinating the review of applications. Eligible applications will be reviewed with reference to the selection criteria outlined in Section 6.
- 2 There must be a clear link between the requested funding amount and the workload/resources required to achieve the impact outlined in submitted proposals.
- 3 Before funding is released, the panel will have the right to recommend amendments to proposals to ensure greater national impact and value for money.
- 4 Funded groups must develop a clear work plan of activity and associated spending (to be submitted by 30 June 2021).
- 5 All funding allocated must be used to support teaching and learning enhancement in line with the selection criteria outlined in this call.

- 6 In addition to applications from individual networks/discipline groups, collaboration between networks/discipline groups is welcome under this call. If the application is a collaboration between or across networks/discipline groups this should be stated in the application, with one network/discipline group acting as the point of contact and submitting the application⁴.
- 7 Funding cannot be used to buy equipment or for infrastructure.
- 8 Although funding cannot be used to employ staff, assistance with, for example, administration, web, or research support can be funded on a once-off, short-term basis.
- 9 All funded groups will be required to take part in a showcasing event during [VITAL Week](#) on 08-12 Nov 2021. Details of this event will be forthcoming in due course.
- 10 Group profiles and initiative summaries will be hosted on the National Forum website. Networks/discipline groups will be required to engage constructively with members of the National Forum team to assist in ensuring the profile of their group and their funded initiative is kept up to date on the National Forum website.
- 11 Networks/discipline groups will be required to engage constructively with members of the National Forum team to assist in ensuring the impact of initiatives is optimised and sustained.
- 12 All resources generated by initiatives arising from this call must be made available under a Creative Commons licence. Please refer to our short guides for support in this area: 'National Forum Open Licensing Toolkit' and 'How to Choose an Open License' (guides available at www.teachingandlearning.ie/open).
- 13 A full summary of spend must be forwarded to the National Forum by 11 April 2022⁵. Any funding not spent by 11 April 2022 must be returned to the National Forum.
- 14 Any funded activities/resources must acknowledge the National Forum's financial support in all associated web presence, communication, promotion, and dissemination. Relevant logos and guidelines can be accessed [here](#).

⁴ Please refer to Appendix 1 Q.17 for further details

⁵ This summary should be signed off by the chair and treasurer of the network/discipline group if the bank account is not housed within a HEI or by chair of the network/discipline group and finance office if the bank account is housed within a HEI.

Key Dates

Online Interface Open for Applications	19 February 2021
Application Submission Deadline	05 March 2021
Applicants Notified of Decision	01 April 2021
Completion of work outlined in proposals	11 April 2022



Network and Discipline Fund 2020 – Spring 2021 Call

FAQs Document

1. Can part of the fund be allocated to a mentoring session?

If this is directly related to the proposed initiative and would direct and enhance the approach taken, this would be eligible under the fund.

2. Can you buy out academic hours?

The buy-out of academic hours would have to be justified as essential expenditure in the submission.

3. Can it be used for CPD?

Funding can be used to fund CPD/the upskilling of members where it is demonstrated that it directly relates to the proposed initiative and takes place within the fund's timeframe (before 11 April 2022)

4. Can it be used for new course development - based on shareholder needs?

Funding can be used to fund new course development, directly related to enhancing the teaching and learning of the network/discipline group where it is demonstrated that it directly relates to the proposed initiative and takes place within the fund's timeframe.

5. Does the group have to have been funded in the past for this call? We are an existing collaborative group, but have not been funded from National Forum, can we still apply?

As long as the group meets the eligibility criteria, there is no requirement to be a past recipient of National Forum, or any other, funding.

6. Are there any limits on the number of network leads per institution?

Only one lead person can be identified in relation to any single network/discipline group. However, more than one network/discipline group can apply from an institution.

7. Can it be used for a website restructuring? We have the hosting covered so that is not a problem for our Network.

The link between the enhancement of T&L and how the restructuring would contribute to responding to the group's identified problem would have to be clearly demonstrated in the submission. The National Forum may be able to provide webspace or support but this will be agreed on a case by case basis.

8. Can it be used for rebranding?

Cost relating to rebranding are not eligible under this fund.

9. Could funds be used to fund a literature review to provide evidence to underpin an educational initiative?

Information gathering/research that directly relates to the proposed initiative and takes place within a reasonable timeframe, would be eligible (please note that staff contracts cannot be generated under this fund so support personnel must be engaged on a casual, once-off and short-term basis).

10. Is there the ability to build on this project next year with new funding next year?

Recipients of funding in the 2020 call (in either November 2020 or February 2021) may be eligible to apply for further support in a 2022 call.

11. How long will projects have to spend the funds?

Projects will be given one calendar year to spend the funds (this will be approximately March/April 2022, depending on the transfer of funds).

12. Is there any benefit in applying for <€10,000?

The €10,000 limit is a guide rather than a target so we recommend groups align their proposed budget and the amount they apply for.

13. When will funds be released to successful applicants?

It is anticipated that applicants who are awarded funding will be notified by 01 April 2021.

14. Can funds be used to market and promote a network?

The link between the enhancement of T&L and how the marketing and promotion would contribute to responding to the group's identified problem, would have to be clearly demonstrated in the submission.

15. Can you provide some guidance on what the funding can be spent on?

With all expenditure, there must be a clear link between the enhancement of T&L and how the expenditure contributes to solving the group's identified problem. This could include design and production costs relating to resource development, course design see Q.4 above, programme development (please note that all resources generated by initiatives arising from this call must be made available under a Creative Commons licence). It could also be used to fund research activity or CPD/upskilling members.

If there is something specific you would like to query, that is not already covered in this FAQ document, please let us know by emailing NDF@teachingandlearning.ie and we can advise on a case to case basis.

16. Could we use the funding to cultivate a Community of Practice (CoP)?

If a group was looking to cultivate a CoP or Special Interest Group (SIG), this sub-group, and its impact, would need to be identified as part of the main group's overall strategic plan. Please note that funding could not be used to support retrospective activities.

17. Can more than one network submit a single, collaborative proposal?

In addition to applications from individual networks/discipline groups, collaboration between networks/discipline groups is welcome under this call. If the application is a collaboration between or across networks/discipline groups this should be stated in the application, with one network/discipline group acting as the point of contact, submitting the application and managing the award funds. Please note that where a collaborative application is made, the maximum budget still remains at €10,000.

18. Can you clarify what is meant by implemented governance structure?

Network & Discipline funding is intended to support established groups that may not have access to other sources of funding (outside of membership fees). As established groups, it would be expected that groups have in place a governance structure separate to the host institution/parent group. They might, for example, have some of the following in place:

- Their own Terms of Reference, as agreed by the group's members
- Agreed aims/objectives
- A mission statement
- Annual meetings
- Someone taking on a leadership role, for example, a Chair (that may be rotated)
- Meetings to plan and document the group's activities

19. Can you clarify what is meant by active engagement of participants from across institutions nationally

As this funding is intended to support sectoral, rather than institutional networks and groups, active engagement in this sense means that it is a requirement that the group can demonstrate an active, formal and participatory membership drawn from across institutions nationally.

20. Are institutional overheads eligible?

Overheads are not eligible expenditure under this funding call.

21. Can groups awarded funding in the 2020 call apply for funding in the 2021 call?

No, groups awarded funding in the 2020 call will not be eligible to apply for additional funding in the February 2021 call.