



**Workshops to cultivate Interdisciplinary Research in Ireland:**

**Call for Proposals from Research-Performing Organisations**

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*This document provides information to research-performing organisations (RPOs) that are interested in submitting a proposal to the Irish Research Council to run workshops on interdisciplinary research. The document provides background to the Call, details of the kind of proposals being sought, and guidelines on how to make a proposal.*

*Deadline for receipt of proposals: Noon, Friday 20 November 2015*

## PART A: CALL FOR PROPOSALS

### 1 Background

In recent years, an increasing emphasis has been placed on research systems and communities' capacity for interdisciplinary research. This has occurred in tandem with the development in the European Research Area, and indeed in a number of national jurisdictions, of a challenge-based research framework. The challenge-based approach does not align neatly along disciplinary lines, and the overall focus is about contributing to solving complex external problems rather than primarily adding to the knowledge base within the discipline. To achieve the desired outcomes in this context, there is a need for the participation of multiple actors, generating cross-fertilisation between different fields, working together to solve a common challenge faced by society.

A number of researchers have pointed out that Ireland's landscape, with many institutions of small-moderate size by international standards, has naturally stimulated inter-disciplinary activity *within* discrete institutions for some time. It is important that measures that seek to widen and deepen IDR do not stifle this pre-existing, 'organic' activity that currently takes place. However, given the diffuse nature of excellence in the system, there is a need to develop greater interdisciplinary linkages and collaborations between and across institutions.

There is a strong argument that, as a small country, we can develop a strong national track record on IDR more quickly than elsewhere. It is important that the research system grasps this opportunity. IDR is one avenue by which our research system can increase outputs and impact in an environment of constrained national investment. Interdisciplinary collaboration also presents opportunities to leverage greater funding from Horizon2020<sup>1</sup>, not least as larger project consortia with more diverse experts can emerge, which can compete more successfully for the available funding.

The research eco-system has a critical role not just in generating knowledge, outputs and outcomes, but also in the formation of excellent researchers with the necessary skill set to work effectively in all sectors that need and utilise research talent. It is

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<sup>1</sup> Ireland has a target to secure a total of €1.4 billion from Horizon2020 over the lifetime of the framework.

estimated that 90% of early-stage researchers in Ireland will ultimately pursue careers outside of academia. Greater opportunities for young researchers to gain experience in interdisciplinary research and collaboration will contribute to building their skill set. This is especially so when IDR is seen in a broader context, to include collaboration with partners outside of RPOs, such as SMEs, civic society groups or government. Horizon2020 actively encourages the participation of such non-academic entities in project consortia. For many colleagues in the Humanities and Social Sciences in particular, collaborations with, for example, SMEs represent a new departure and this represents a gap that needs to be addressed.

## **2 Role and Activities of the Irish Research Council**

The Council was established and mandated to -

- I. Fund excellent research within, and between, all disciplines, and in doing so to enhance Ireland's international reputation as a centre for research and learning.
- II. Support the education and skills development of excellent individual early stage researchers and cultivate independent researchers and thinkers, whilst offering a range of opportunities which support diverse career paths.
- III. Enrich the pool of knowledge and expertise available and accessible for addressing Ireland's current and future needs, whether societal, cultural or economic by supporting excellent research and researchers.
- IV. Provide policy advice on graduate education and research nationally and internationally. In giving the Council this role, the Minister for Research and Innovation requested that particular attention be given to the arts, humanities and social sciences (AHSS).

Ireland's Horizon 2020 Strategy commits to taking steps to encourage and stimulate greater inter-disciplinary research over the coming years. The Irish Research Council has a key role in this regard, in particular as it pertains to cultivating and enabling the engagement of AHSS researchers in interdisciplinary research. At a European level, there are clear indications from the preliminary results in H2020, and from associated analysis, that the arts, humanities and social sciences are not being

embedded in project proposals as originally envisaged and new approaches are required.

In addition to this Request for Proposals, the Council is currently implementing or supporting a range of complementary actions and measures designed to support greater interdisciplinary research at both individual and systemic level. These include:

- Implementation of a research funding Call, New Horizons (Strand Two), which provides grants for excellent interdisciplinary research by AHSS PIs, working with STEM co-PIs, that addresses societal challenges in the medium term under Horizon 2020;
- Co-funding of the Science Foundation Ireland Investigator Programme 2015, to encourage STEM PIs to collaborate with AHSS researchers;
- Participation in Marie Curie COFUND, which places a strong emphasis on exposure to IDR as part of the development of Scholars or Fellows. The Council is currently managing the Elevate scheme, and has submitted a proposal to Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions 2015 for a further scheme.

### **3 Definition**

It is important that IDR is clearly understood for the purposes of this Call. Drawing on the literature on IDR, the following is one commonly-cited definition:

*Interdisciplinary Research is a mode of research by teams or individuals that integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose solutions are beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of research practice.<sup>2</sup>*

Lyall and King (2013) define interdisciplinarity as being concerned with ‘the study of a research topic within multiple disciplines, and with the transfer of methods from one discipline to another. The research topic integrates different disciplinary

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<sup>2</sup> Committee on Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research, Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy (2004). Facilitating interdisciplinary research. National Academies. Washington: National Academy Press.

approaches and methods.<sup>3</sup> Two key facets of IDR are therefore a) the primacy of the research topic over the individual discipline and b) a dynamic process in which participating disciplinary approaches change and evolve in response to the interactions and interrelationships.

IDR differs from multidisciplinary, which is defined by Lyall and King as being 'concerned with the study of a research topic within one discipline, with support from other disciplines, bringing together multiple dimensions, but always in the service of the driving discipline. Disciplinary elements retain their original identity. It fosters wider knowledge, information and methods.'

Researchers from some disciplines have argued that, where the discipline is very broad (e.g. the humanities), experts working in different areas within it who collaborate may consider themselves to be engaged in interdisciplinary research. However, the key focus for the workshops for which proposals are invited is interdisciplinary collaboration *across* the traditional STEM-AHSS boundary.

#### **4 Purpose of this Call**

The purpose of the Call is to encourage higher education and research institutions in Ireland to come together and formulate joint proposals for funded workshops on IDR, commencing in 2016. The initiative is expected to result in a regionally-balanced set of workshops taking place over the duration of 2016.

#### **5 Objective of Workshops:**

The objectives of the workshops are twofold:

- to stimulate and embed interdisciplinary thinking among researchers in the Irish higher education and research system;
- to pro-actively facilitate researchers to engage across disciplines and establish networks and connections for IDR collaboration.

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<sup>3</sup> Lyall, C and King, E (2013) International good practice in the peer review of interdisciplinary research: report of a scoping study conducted for the RCUK Research Group. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh

The initiative will fund workshops of sufficient critical mass and scale to have, combined, a measurable positive impact on momentum within Ireland for interdisciplinary collaboration. **The workshops will complement rather than replicate existing measures carried out at individual institutional or regional level.** In addition, the workshops will provide opportunities for researchers at different stages of their careers to participate and learn from each other. It is intended that the Irish Research Council will produce and publish a short report arising from the workshops capturing the key 'learnings' and proposing recommendations for next steps for institutions, agencies and others as appropriate. Successful consortia will therefore be required to submit a workshop report to the Council as an input to the overall report.

Successful consortia will be responsible for all aspects of the design, planning and delivery of workshops according to the framework as set out in this Call document. Consortia will ensure that workshop(s) and the benefits of participation are clearly promoted to the target audience(s). **Consortia will similarly ensure that workshops have the necessary diversity of disciplinary and institutional attendance to leverage maximum benefit for participants.**

Although funding can only be allocated to eligible RPOs under this measure, consortia may include other types of partners where there is a rationale for such an approach, e.g. SMEs. Likewise, consortia may wish to consider working on an All-Ireland basis, to include QUB and/or the University of Ulster.

## **6 Structure and content of Workshops:**

As stated above, the twin objectives of the workshops are to stimulate attendees' thinking on IDR and bring individuals together to collaborate and network. The workshops will provide an opportunity for researchers to initially scope projects and discuss themes and topics. Workshops will be participative and not passive in nature, and will be strongly orientated around bringing people together from different disciplines to discuss topics of mutual interest.

It is envisaged that individual workshops would be of a minimum of one day's duration.

Workshops could include some or all of the following elements:

- Plenaries and/or 'clinics' featuring expert speaker(s) with a track record in the area
- Panel discussion
- Presentation on and examples of Irish and international exemplar(s)
- Innovative tools to connect people across disciplinary boundaries such as 'speed-dating' or 'matchmaking'
- Case studies, posters
- Proactive and structured networking opportunities
- Breakout sessions which may focus on a particular theme or practical advice

The call is open and consortia have the flexibility to come up with innovative ideas and structures for workshops, including consideration of the merits of a thematic or non-thematic approach. Innovative measures in relation to the use of social media and communications technology in the promotion and running of the event(s) could also be considered.

## **7 Budget**

A total of €100k is being set aside by the Council for this initiative. In addition, it is anticipated that the funding awarded for any individual workshop will not exceed €15k.

## **8 Conditions of this Call:**

The Call will open on **Wednesday 14 October 2015** with proposals being accepted up to **noon on Friday 20 November**. The following conditions apply for consideration of proposals by the Council:

- Only proposals from **consortia**, which must include a minimum of two eligible RPOs, will be accepted. See <http://www.research.ie/aboutus/institutional-eligibility> for details of eligible RPOs;



- A single member of the consortium will act as the lead applicant; where successful, funding will be allocated to the lead applicant only. The lead applicant will manage the funding awarded on behalf of the consortium;
- Proposals will include a nominated person within the lead applicant's RPO who will act as a contact point for the Council;
- Consortia may include other partners that are not eligible RPOs for the purposes of this Call;
- The proposal submitted by the lead applicant should include a letter of commitment from each of the other consortium partners, signed by a senior representative;
- Successful consortia will be required to report to the Council on progress with preparations for the implementation of agreed workshop(s);
- Successful consortia will also be required to submit a learnings and recommendations report to the Council following implementation of the workshop(s);
- Workshops should be fully accessible for any participants with special needs;
- In all cases, workshops will be branded as an IRC-funded event with the IRC logo being used on all publicity materials and included in all public relations including press releases;
- Workshop organisers are required to generate a contact list of attendees for all workshops to support future communication and network development.

## 9 Guidelines on submitting a proposal:

Consortia of eligible RPOs interested in running a workshop or series of workshops should submit, through the lead applicant, a concise proposal for same. **Proposals should not exceed 10 pages.** Proposals should include details of:

- Proposed, timing(s), location(s) and target audience(s);
- Overview of similar-type measures at institutional or other levels addressing IDR and how the proposed workshop(s) will complement and add value to these;
- How the workshop(s) will engage members of the research community;

- Communication and promotion plans to maximise participation;
- Proposed content and modes of delivery of workshops, to include a sample draft programme;
- Schools and/or departments within consortium institution that will be jointly responsible for planning and implementing the event(s), to include details of responsible person(s) in each of the consortium members;
- Rationale for the consortium membership and existing collaborations between the members;
- The experience of participating institutions running regional/national workshops or events;
- Resources, including human resources, that will be allocated by consortia for the workshop(s), including on the day of the workshop;
- Proposed budget (see eligible costs below);
- Contingency plans, for example to address poor take-up in the run-up to a workshop;
- Plans for capturing delegate feedback on the impact of the workshop and their ideas for what further development and support could be usefully provided in respect of IDR.

## **10 Eligible Costs**

Examples of eligible costs include the following:

- Venue rental (including AV hire) and catering
- Design of promotional materials
- Design and printing of workshop material for distribution to attendees
- Funding to cover the travel and accommodation costs of speakers.

## **11 Anticipated Timelines:**

The first workshop(s) will be run in Quarter 1 2016, the number being run at this time depending on the proposals received and having regard to the need for regional balance. It is intended that a further series of workshops will follow during 2016.

## **PART B: MAKING A SUBMISSION**

### **1 Instructions to Consortia and important information**

- a. Consortia must provide all the information requested.
- b. The lead applicant must submit a **pdf** of the consortium proposal by email to Dr. Justin Sinnott, IRC (email: [jsinnott@hea.ie](mailto:jsinnott@hea.ie)) by the advertised deadline. The subject header of the email should read *"IDR Call for Proposals"*.
- c. Closing date for receipt of electronic proposals is **12pm, Friday 20 November 2015**. No late applications will be considered.
- d. The IRC will not be liable for any costs incurred by institutions in the preparation and submission of response(s), including any work, effort or expenses required to complete the proposal. Any materials submitted as part of the proposal shall not be returned save where there is an expressed request for same and any expense incurred for such return shall be borne by the proposer.
- e. The IRC reserves the right to amend or alter any information contained in these documents at any time. Participating proposers will be informed of any amendments or alterations.
- f. Unwarranted or inappropriate attempts (including canvassing) to influence the decision of the IRC by a proposer, or by any party acting on behalf of a proposer will automatically disqualify the proposer.

### **2 Criteria for assessment of tenders**

Each proposal received will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- The quality of the proposal with reference to the specifications outlined (max. 40 marks);

- Project management, coordination and reporting arrangements (max. 20 marks);
- Resources and skills to be applied to the work (max. 20 marks);
- Proposed cost (max. 20 marks).

### **3 Queries and Information**

Queries or questions in relation to this call should be emailed to Dr. Justin Sinnott, Irish Research Council. Email: [jsinnott@hea.ie](mailto:jsinnott@hea.ie). Telephone queries cannot be accommodated. Any responses to email queries will be collated into a set of FAQs and made available to the circulation list for this Call.

### **4 Outcome of Call**

The Council anticipates that consortia will be notified of the outcome of the Call by the end of November 2015.