

# Investigator-Led Projects (ILP) 2026

Frequently Asked Questions



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## 1 General

### How do I apply for ILP 2026?

All applications must be made using the HRB online Grant E-Management System GEMS <https://grants.hrb.ie/>. Applicants must **select one** of the following three remits, based on which is most appropriate to application:

Patient-oriented research (POR)

Population health research (PHR)

Health services research (HSR)

Applicants are strongly advised to carefully read the guidance and details of the research areas covered under each remit (please refer to **Appendix II** of the Guidance Notes). It is the responsibility of the Lead Applicant to select the most appropriate remit for the application. If in doubt, they should contact the relevant project officer ([ILP@hrb.ie](mailto:ILP@hrb.ie)).

Once the Lead Applicant selects the remit on GEMS, they will be asked to complete a check list of mandatory questions. In order to start the application, the Lead Applicant must satisfy the conditions of this check list.

### Have there been any changes since the last round of the ILP scheme?

The changes since the last round are:

1. The **Host Institution letters of support for a Lead Applicants** in contract position will be replaced by a checklist that the Host Institution will need to complete prior to finalising the submission.
2. The **Host Institution letters of support for Co-Applicants** in a contract position is no longer required
3. The **Approvals Declaration** is no longer requested at this point. This will be requested only of successful applications.
4. In the **Budget** section:
  - a) The salaries continue to be entered per each role individually but, for **non-salary categories**, these should be included as an overall cost per category, and the detailed breakdown of the costs within each category should be described in the budget justification.
  - b) The Budget has now a dedicated heading for **Open Access Costs** to reflect the changes introduced by the [HRB Policy on Open Access](#), where HRB grant holders are required to ensure open access to all peer-reviewed scientific publications relating to the output of their project. The HRB supports Open Access publications by either providing [HRB Open Research](#) or a contribution towards Open Access publication costs of €2,200 per publication. The number of publications thus supported should be proportionate to the duration of the award (typically up to three publications for 3-4 years grant).
5. Minor refinements to **assessment criteria** weightings and description aligned to scheme objectives.

## 2 Applicant/Eligibility

### **Can a Lead Applicant submit more than one application?**

No, only one application per Lead Applicant will be considered in this round. However, the Lead Applicants can be a Co-Applicant or Collaborator in another application provided they have the time commitment to fulfil both roles, should the applications be successful.

### **Can I apply if I was previously awarded an Investigator-Led Project?**

Yes, current or previous holders of Health Research Awards/Investigator-Led Projects are eligible to apply to this round.

### **Does a Lead Applicant need to have last author publications?**

Not necessarily, however, Lead Applicants must have at least three peer-reviewed original research publications. Where appropriate, they should also provide evidence of other outputs (e.g., published book chapters, reports to government, research data and datasets, research materials, databases, audio/video products, national and/or international reports, patents, models and protocols, software production, evidence of influence on health policy and practice, outreach and/or knowledge translation activities, media coverage or other relevant activities) and/or any other relevant outputs that have resulted in a significant impact in their field.

### **Does a Lead Applicant have to have previous peer reviewed funding?**

Yes, the Lead Applicant must demonstrate research independence through securing at least one peer-reviewed research grant for a research project/s as the Lead Applicant or Co-Applicant. Funding received for travel to seminars/conferences and/or small personal bursaries will not be considered in this regard.

### **Can a Lead Applicant in a tenured academic post request a salary?**

No, the salary or benefits of academic staff within research institutions (including buy out from teaching time etc.) that are already in receipt of salary or benefits will not be funded.

### **Can a contract researcher be a Lead Applicant and apply for their own salary?**

Yes, a contract researcher acting as Lead Applicant can apply for their salary.

### **If an applicant has a joint contract with the HSE and an academic institution, can they apply?**

Yes, applicants with a joint contract with the HSE and an academic institution are eligible to apply.

### **Can I be Lead Applicant on one application and Co-Applicant on another?**

Yes, it is worth bearing in mind however that should both applications reach review Panel stage, the amount of time you are spending on both will be scrutinised so this should be realistic.

### **How do I document a career break(s)?**

Lead Applicants have the opportunity to describe any breaks from research that might have affected or influenced their progression as a researcher. This may include statutory leave, secondments, flexible work arrangements or other relevant changes (e.g., sector or discipline).

## **3 Co-Applicants and Collaborators**

### **Can a Co-Applicant receive payment for their role in the project?**

Co-Applicants can request their own salary, depending on their role and percentage of time dedicated to the research for the duration of the award if they are contract/independent investigators, knowledge user and PPI contributor Co-Applicants. A Host Institution Letter of Support is required for co-applicants in contract positions and are seeking their own salary. Please note the HRB does not fund the salary or benefits of academic staff within research institutions (including buy out from teaching time etc.). A Co-Applicant may also receive funding for items such as running costs and personnel.

### **Can a post doctorate researcher be a Co-Applicant?**

Yes, a post doctorate researcher may be a Co-Applicant.

### **Does a Co-Applicant's contract have to cover the duration of the award?**

There are no requirements for the duration of a Co-Applicant's contract. However, where a Co-Applicant is applying for salary, their contract must cover the duration of their role on the award, or the Host Institution must be willing to issue/extend a contract should the award be successful.

### **How many Co-Applicants can I have?**

The maximum number of co-applicants allowed is 6. It is not mandatory to have 6 Co-Applicants, but this is to allow for flexibility should this seem appropriate.

### **Can a Co-applicant/Collaborator be from outside Ireland?**

Yes, Co-applicants/Collaborators from outside the Republic of Ireland are welcome where the nature of the research renders this necessary and is appropriately justified in terms of added value for the project. This is not intended to displace researchers based in Ireland, but to recognise that the Lead Applicant should assemble the best team to tackle the research question.

### **Will the HRB pay for visits from or to Co-applicants/Collaborators?**

Yes, visits to or from Co-Applicants/Collaborators where justified may be included under running costs.

### **Is a Collaborator agreement form needed?**

Yes, a Collaborator Agreement Form must be signed by each Collaborator and uploaded with your application. You can download the form on GEMS.

### **Can a Collaborator be from private enterprise?**

Yes, a Collaborator may be from private enterprise. Applications including a private enterprise are encouraged where they add value to the project for example in terms of access to expertise, technologies, or reagents. The HRB does not have the capacity to broker these arrangements. The terms of the collaboration should be determined early, and relevant agreements must be in place by the onset of the project. Consideration should be given to issues such as relative responsibilities, governance arrangements, ownership and copyright, access and sharing of data/materials/samples etc when working up Partnership proposals.

### **Can a Collaborator receive payment for their role in the project?**

Yes, collaborators are eligible to receive funding from the award when properly detailed and justified in the application.

### **What is Public and Patient Involvement (PPI)?**

PPI represents an active partnership between members of the public, patients and researchers in the research process. This can include, for example, involvement in the choice of research topics, assisting in the design, advising throughout or at particular decision points of the research project or in carrying out the research.

### **Will Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) play a large role in this grant call?**

In the application, you are asked to describe any public involvement in your research throughout the various stages of identifying and prioritising the research question, the research design, conduct,

analysis, and dissemination. Depending on the role in delivering the research activities, PPI contributors can be included as Co-Applicants or Collaborators.

We strongly advise that you consult with your Host Institution who may be able to provide guidance and support on PPI in research.

## 4 Personnel

### Can I hire a PhD student to carry out the project?

This scheme is not framed as a training initiative for PhD researchers. Where candidates for a higher degree are proposed to work on projects, Lead Applicants must show evidence of careful consideration ensuring a good training experience for the PhD candidate.

If proposing a PhD researcher, the Lead Applicant,

1. should clearly put in place appropriate supervisory arrangements with a supervisory team in place, which may include Co-Applicant(s), if appropriate.
2. with the support of the Host Institution must have a mitigation plan in case they move host institution within Ireland or leave Ireland to ensure that the training and development of the PhD researcher continues, and the successful completion of the PhD thesis is supported. This mitigation plan must be set out in the Host Institution's letter of support.
3. must budget for four years of funding for PhD candidates.
4. should support the PhD researcher enrolment in a structured PhD programme, at the Institution where they will be registered or through the SPHeRE PhD programme<sup>1</sup>, which is Ireland's national research training programme for Population Health, Policy, and Health Services Research.

The Host Institution should provide a Host Institution's Letter of Support in support of the Lead Applicant addressing the points above.

### Should a PhD student be registered on a structured programme?

PhD candidates should be enrolled in a structured PhD programme, at the Institution where they will be registered or through the SPHeRE PhD programme<sup>2</sup>, which is Ireland's national research training programme for Population Health, Policy, and Health Services Research.

It is not necessary to have a candidate identified at this early stage, however, please note that identified/nominated candidates will need to apply officially to the SPHeRE programme (usually around March) and have to be interviewed by the SPHeRE Directors in collaborations with the Lead Applicant (usually at the end of May). No additional fees (in addition to the student fees) accrue to the SPHeRE programme for the inclusion of a self-funded Scholar. Please also note that the purchase

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sphereprogramme.ie/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sphereprogramme.ie/> For further information please contact Katherine Walsh [katherinewalsh@rcsi.ie](mailto:katherinewalsh@rcsi.ie)

of some or all SPHeRE training modules (six in total) in year 1 may be another option to provide a more structured training to the PhD candidate through SPHeRE. Please contact the Programme Manager Elaine Healy ([elainehealy@rcsi.ie](mailto:elainehealy@rcsi.ie)) for details of the SPHeRE programme.

### **Can I hire more than one person to carry out this project?**

Yes, please note the type and number of research personnel hired should be the most appropriate within the budget to successfully carry out the proposed project.

## **5 Funding**

### **How much can I apply for?**

The maximum amount that can be requested from the HRB per application is **€330,000 direct costs** (exclusive of overheads) per award. The maximum total award including overhead contribution will be **€430,000**. Awards will have a duration of between **24 and 48 months**. Please refer to Section 9 - Project Budget of the Guidance Notes for further detail on allowable costs.

### **How do I determine what gross salary to pay?**

Applicants should use the IUA website scales for the most up-to-date recommended salary scales for academic researchers (<http://www.iua.ie/research-innovation/researcher-salary-scales/>). Pay scales used and the level and point on the scale must be stated and justified. For appointment of Research Fellows or Senior Research Fellows evidence of position must be provided at point of award.

Applicants should include annual pay increments for staff and related costs (pension contribution, employer's PRSI contribution, and overhead contribution) in the budget. Please note employee pension contribution of 5% has already been incorporated into the IUA gross salary figure.

For employees who are not academic researchers the relevant pay scales for their profession should be used and referenced in the justification.

### **Does the HRB pay pension contributions?**

Yes, pension provision up to a maximum of 20% of gross salary will be paid to the Host Institution to enable compliance with the Employment Control Framework (an additional 5% employee contribution is part of the salary).

### **How is the overhead contribution calculated?**

Overhead Contribution will be added by HRB staff during contract negotiations for successful applications. It is not requested as part of the application budget. In accordance with the [HRB Policy on Overhead Usage](#), the HRB will contribute to the indirect costs of the research through an overhead payment of 30% of Total Direct Modified Costs (TDMC excludes student fees, equipment,



and capital building costs) for laboratory or clinically based research and 25% of Total Direct Modified Costs for desk-based research.

### **What costs are included in the overhead contribution?**

The following costs are included in the overhead contribution: recruitment costs, bench fees, office space, software, contribution to gases, bacteriological media preparation fees, waste fees, bioinformatics access. A copy of the HRB overheads policy can be found at the following link: [Health Research Board: Use of Research Overheads](#).

### **I would like to hire a salaried researcher to carry out this project and they would like to register for a PhD; will the HRB pay their fees?**

Only personnel in receipt of a stipend as set by the Host Institution are eligible to receive a student fee contribution. The HRB support a maximum contribution to postgraduate fees of €5,500 annually for individuals registered for a higher degree.

### **Can I hire a consultant to carry out part of the project?**

Yes, this cost should be included under running costs.

### **Can Co-Applicants who are based in another institute/organisation receive part of the budget/overheads?**

The HRB will pay the award directly to the Host Institution. The Host Institution may provide running costs/overheads to a Co-Applicant's institute and the arrangements for this should be agreed between the two institutes.

### **Where a co-funding contribution is being made, where should the co-funding contribution be added in the GEMS budget section?**

Where a co-funding contribution is being made as part of the application, this should be added under the co-funding budget heading only. The other budget headings are only for the breakdown of the HRB contribution.

### **Does HRB support costs related to FAIR Data Management?**

Yes, you should include costs related to data management activities in line with best practice of data management and stewardship and the FAIR principles incurred during the lifetime of the project.

## What type of FAIR Data Management costs can be included?

The HRB will support costs with:

- People – staff time per hour for data collection, anonymisation, management/ stewardship support, training, etc.
- Storage and computation – cloud storage, domain hosting charge
- Preparing data for sharing (e.g. anonymisation)
- Deposition and reuse – costs for depositing research data and metadata in an open access data repository, defining semantic models, making data linkable, choosing the licence, defining metadata for dataset, deploying/publishing
- Others – when properly justified

Note that the HRB is currently not covering the cost of long-term preservation of data, and that this list is not exhaustive and aims to provide examples only of eligible costs.

Costs for secondary data access should be included under Running costs.

## 6 Supporting Documents

### What documents should be uploaded with my application form?

You must upload the following documents:

- Host Institution Letters of Support, if including a PhD researcher.
- Collaborator agreement forms, if applicable (required for all collaborators)
- Infrastructure Agreement Form, if applicable
- Gantt chart
- Project Description Figures: A maximum of 5 figures which can be a combination of images, graphs, tables, scales, instruments, or surveys (optional)

### Do Co-Applicants have to sign-off the application?

Each Co-Applicant is invited to view the application form online and approve content prior to submission.

### Do I need to contact the Dean of Research to sign off on my application?

As part of the online application process, you will be asked to select the **Dean of Research or equivalent person** authorised to endorse research grant applications for your Host Institution. Their approval is necessary to allow the application to be submitted to the HRB. **Please note that as part of the online system the Host Institutions will approve and submit each application on behalf of the applicant.**

When the application is submitted for approval online, emails are sent to the selected signatory informing them that their approval is requested. If a signatory rejects the application the Lead Applicant will be notified, along with any feedback the signatory has supplied. The application can then be amended and re-submitted; it will be returned to the signatory who made the rejection and continues through the approval process as before.

When signatories approve the application, it will be sent automatically to the HRB to be considered for funding, a grant application number will be assigned to the application and a confirmation email will be sent to the Lead Applicant.

### **Do I need to provide an infrastructure agreement form?**

Applications availing of the advice, research design, data management services and/or other forms of support from a Clinical Research Facility/Centre (CRF/CRC), other infrastructure unit (e.g., Centre for Applied Medical Imaging, Centre for Support and Training in Analysis and Research, HRB – Trials Methodology Research Network) or a biobank are required to provide additional information detailing the scope and nature of the engagement.

## **7 Submission**

### **Submission process using GEMS**

Prior to final submission to the HRB, all applications must first be reviewed and approved within GEMS by the signatory approver at the research office (or equivalent) at the Host Institution. It is critical therefore that Lead Applicants leave sufficient time in the process for the Research Office (or equivalent) in their nominated Host Institution to review, seek clarifications and approve applications prior to the final submission date. This may involve being aware of and complying with any internal Host Institution deadlines for review and approval, distinct from the HRB deadline.

### **What is the closing date for submission of applications?**

All applications must be submitted to the HRB by using HRB GEMS by **14<sup>th</sup> October 2025 at 13:00**.

### **How will I know that my application has been successfully submitted?**

Once the HI endorses your application it will be sent automatically to the HRB to be considered for funding, a grant application number will be assigned to the application, and you will receive a confirmation email.

### **I have submitted my application but have just realised I have amendments to make; can I amend the application?**

No. Once you have submitted your application, you cannot edit or unsubmit it.

## 8 Review Process

### **Will public review be part of the review process?**

Yes, public reviewers will be included to assess the quality of PPI in the proposal. They will provide comments and a rating but not a score. For short-listed applications, the public review comments and rating will be shared with the review panel for discussion. PPI will not be a standalone assessment criteria, but the review panel will be asked to consider PPI as relates to any of the assessment criteria.