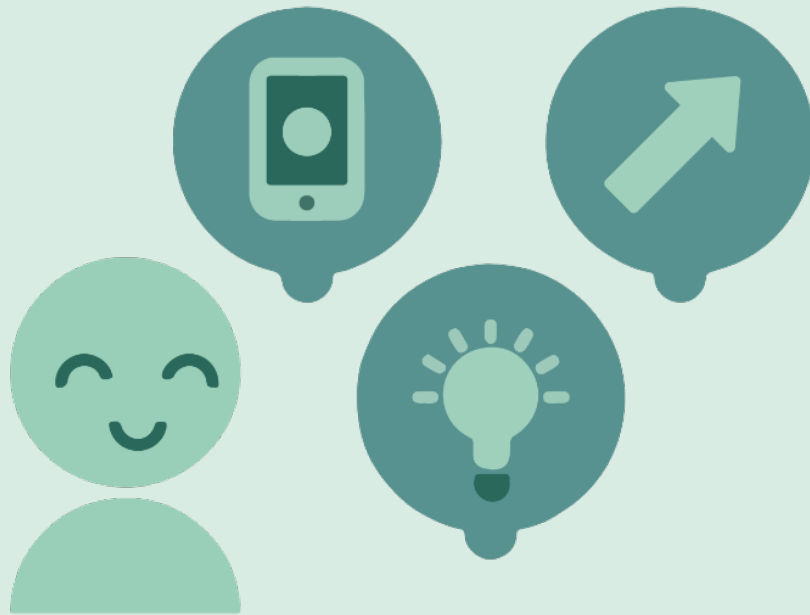


Skills to Advance:  
**Innovation through  
Collaboration Call  
for Proposals 2021**



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## Section 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Call for Proposals

The *Innovation through Collaboration Fund 2021* provides Education and Training Boards (ETBs) support to find innovative solutions to operational service and policy delivery challenges and opportunities arising from the workforce development strategy published in 2018<sup>1</sup>. This is the second call arising from the *Innovation through Collaboration Fund*, following on from the inaugural call in 2019, under the *Skills to Advance* initiative.

ETBs are invited to make proposals in collaboration with other organisations but must nominate one ETB as lead bidder. Collaboration can be with any type of organisation. This could include, but is not limited to, companies, international partners, edtech companies, consultants, representative bodies, professional associations, community-based organisations, research institutions, other education and training institutions or other bodies/agencies.

Collaboration partners may be domestic and international. The involvement of international partners is encouraged to broaden perspectives and gain relevant insights through the lifetime of the projects. A proposal must identify a minimum of three partners, i.e. lead ETB, partner ETB and at least one other partner organisation.

ETBs are invited to propose new, creative, and previously undeveloped ideas, and encouraged to collaborate outside the FET sector with innovative organisations to develop, test and access creative solutions to the challenges they face in engaging with workforce development.

### 1.2 Background

The *Skills to Advance* policy framework enables targeted support for those working in low skilled jobs in vulnerable sectors in the Irish workforce, particularly those who have lower skills levels and who need more opportunities to advance in their working lives and careers, to sustain their employment and to avoid displacement or to avail of emerging job opportunities. The policy also supports small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) who need some assistance to invest in and develop their workforce, and industry sectors with skills needs arising from emerging opportunities, or because of economic vulnerabilities.

*Future FET: Transforming Learning The National Further Education and Training Strategy 2021-2024* sets out an ambitious agenda in transforming learning, and achieving a more strategic, and more integrated FET system based on three central pillars of building skills, fostering inclusion, and facilitating pathways.

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<sup>1</sup> SOLAS (2018) *Supporting Working Lives and Enterprise Growth in Ireland 2018 – 2021: further education and training policy framework for skills development of people in employment*

The central premise of *Future FET* is that FET is for everyone and serves as a major driver of both economic development and social cohesion. It is available in every community and offers pathways, regardless of any previous level of education.

This fund combines the ambitions of *Skills to Advance* and *Future FET* in supporting projects that show FET is innovative, and that FET contributes to innovation in the Irish economy, in the context of workforce development.

### 1.3 Innovation Challenges

SOLAS invites innovative and collaborative solutions to the following priority challenges:

- ✓ How can learning opportunities be packaged attractively to employers? How can the value of FET be communicated to employees in low skilled work who are traditionally less likely to engage? How can the FET offer be communicated consistently and coherently across different channels? **(Promotions)**
- ✓ How can the FET offer be made easier to navigate from an employer perspective? How can support be provided to employers on a sustained basis to engage in workforce development? How can employees find information and support for further education and training when they need it throughout their working lives? **(Support & Information)**
- ✓ How can pedagogical innovations and digital learning technologies be better used to meet the needs of employees and enterprise? How can digital technology enhance the type and scale of new or under-exploited types of learning for workforce development? **(Learning Design)**
- ✓ How can more flexible learning opportunities be provided to employees based on identified skills needs? How can technology be harnessed to animate learning and improve learner experiences? **(Flexible Delivery)**
- ✓ How can employees be facilitated to participate in upskilling and reskilling across socio-emotional, digital, and sustainability capabilities integrated with technical skill development? How can employees be prepared to meet future skills challenges? **(Skills Resilience)**
- ✓ How can existing networks and regional/sectoral development structures be leveraged for collaborative and innovative education and training responses at regional/sectoral level? How can national and/or international examples or innovative approaches to the skills dimension of regional development be leveraged in the Irish context? **(Regional & Sectoral)**
- ✓ Is there a specific challenge that arises from engaging in workforce development? Proposals under this category must clearly identify the problem and propose a creative and collaborative solution which fulfils the national policy objectives of *Skills to Advance* and *Future FET*. **(Specific Need)**

Proposals must relate to one of these areas and must be innovative and collaborative. Proposals must also demonstrate how they relate to national policy objectives.

## Section 2: Funding Criteria and Guidelines

### 2.1 Principles and process for allocation

In accordance with the priority areas of the Innovation through Collaboration Fund as outlined above the potential projects will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

#### 1) Alignment with national strategic objectives

ETBs must demonstrate that a proposal fits within their strategic plans and is informed by national policy objectives and national, regional social and economic needs. Specifically, this fund supports innovative and collaborative approaches to meeting the needs of those in the workforce as identified in *Supporting Working Lives and Enterprise Growth in Ireland 2018 – 2021: further education and training policy framework for skills development of people in employment* (2018).

#### 2) The level of innovation and quality of collaboration

Proposals must demonstrate how the proposed approach, its implementation and/or outcomes are innovative,<sup>2</sup> and how collaboration with partners will add value to the proposition. Proposals must evidence that proposed partnerships are substantive.

#### 3) Demonstrated capacity to deliver

ETBs must provide evidence of their capacity to deliver on the proposal. Submissions must specify the project management approach including milestones, output and outcome measurements, indicators and other evidence which will be used to monitor the performance and progress of the proposal. The lead ETB must include an outline of the processes for the operational and financial management of the project. An outline project plan, staff plan, budget estimate and dissemination plan will be required as part of the proposal (templates provided).

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<sup>2</sup> Innovation is defined as ‘the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organisational method in business practices, workplace organisation or external relations.’ (OECD, 2005)

#### 4) Mainstreaming

ETBs are asked to demonstrate how proposals are compatible with mainstreaming, particularly the potential for application and impact across the further education system. An outline dissemination plan will be required as part of the proposal (template provided).

#### 5) Impact and value for money

ETBs must detail the impact that the proposed project will have on the sector and demonstrate how their proposal represents value for money for the sector.

## 2.2 Specific Programme criteria

- ✓ Applications that relate to routine or current business practices will not be considered. This fund is specifically to support and promote innovative proposals in further education and training to address the challenges identified in *Supporting Working Lives and Enterprise Growth in Ireland 2018 – 2021: further education and training policy framework for skills development of people in employment*. The fund will not be used to fund ongoing operations, or proposals that could reasonably be expected to be funded from existing funding sources.
- ✓ ETBs receiving funding under this mechanism will commit to dissemination activities to support mainstreaming of benefits gained from the measures supported under this fund.
- ✓ ETBs will be required to report regularly on actions funded under this programme for the duration of the funding, with a final report to be submitted upon cessation.
- ✓ ETBs will be required to conduct action research throughout their project, a logic framework for evaluation will be agreed with SOLAS in the initial stage of the project.
- ✓ All funding is subject to approval by the relevant authority.

## **Section 3: Funding**

### **3.1 Allocation of overall scheme budget**

It is anticipated that projects will be awarded in the broad region of grants of €150,000 to €600,000 over a 12 to 24 month period.

The first drawdown of funding will occur in 2022 with remaining funding drawn down over 2022/2023 as appropriate to the project schedule.

All funding allocations are subject to approval by the relevant authority.

## Section 4: Application Procedure and Assessment

### 4.1 Application Procedure

In submitting a proposal, the ETB will be deemed to have accepted the conditions outlined in this and any subsequent communications from SOLAS regarding this programme and to have agreed to be bound by them. Furthermore, signing of the proposal by the CEO of the ETB reflects acceptance of the award and a commitment to provide the necessary support for the project. All proposals must be signed by the CEO of the Lead ETB.

ETBs are required to submit documentation as detailed in the call application template. Proposals should be submitted by email to [innovation@solas.ie](mailto:innovation@solas.ie) before 5pm on Thursday 7 October 2021. ETBs are encouraged to submit their applications in advance of this deadline.

### 4.2 Assessment Panel and Scoring

Proposals will be assessed by a panel composed of external experts and SOLAS personnel.

Proposals will be scored as follows:

- 1) Alignment with national strategic objectives (20 marks/funding minimum 12)
- 2) Level of innovation and collaboration (20 marks/funding minimum 12)
- 3) Demonstrated capacity to deliver (20 marks/funding minimum 12)
- 4) Impact and value for money (20 marks/funding minimum 12)
- 5) Potential for mainstreaming (20 marks/funding minimum 12)



### 4.3 Timeframe

Call Issued :	08 July 2021
Deadline for Submissions:	17:00, Thursday 7 October 2021
Panel to appraise submissions:	October 2021
Notice of invitation to contract:	November 2021
Contracting and Agreement of Project Monitoring and Reporting:	November 2021 – December 2021
Project Start	January 2022
Project Reporting:	Quarterly reporting schedule with additional reporting at agreed milestones

## Section 5: Implementation

### 5.1 Monitoring

The proposal will specify the outline project plan, resource plan, budget, and dissemination plan. Any drawdown of funding by successful projects will require the submission of a detailed project plan, risk assessment and financial plan. The milestones, output measurements, indicators and other evidence contained in these plans will form the basis of a contract, funding schedule and corresponding monitoring framework.

Reports covering all financial and programmatic aspects of the project will be required at regular intervals and will be assessed based on the stated projected milestones and outputs for that time point. These reports will be subject to review by SOLAS. SOLAS may request supplementary information and documentation if deemed necessary to support the report.

The release of funds will be dependent upon the submission of satisfactory progress reports. If an ETB is found to be in breach of the programme's terms, SOLAS reserves the right to take appropriate action and/or cease funding.

All successful applicants must be willing to share information and learning to assist the introduction of the innovative practice across the sector in so far as possible.