Funding interdisciplinary research

The mission of the **Irish Research Council** (IRC) is to enable and sustain a vibrant research community in Ireland by supporting excellent researchers in all disciplines. As part of its wider mandate to enhance Irish research, the IRC funds basic research and supports education and skills development through postgraduate and postdoctoral scholarships, as well as awards for established researchers. A core pillar of the IRC's mandate is to enrich the pool of knowledge and expertise available for addressing Ireland's current and future challenges and deliver for citizens through collaboration and knowledge exchange with government departments and agencies, enterprise and civic society. The IRC recognises the need for **interdisciplinary and intersectoral research to address grand challenges** and in their Strategic Plan 2020-2024 commits to leading the development of the Irish research system as an international exemplar for such collaboration and to developing pathways for interdisciplinary engagement with enterprise and employers to build capacity.

This case study profiles some of the **funding mechanisms the IRC has developed to support interdisciplinary and intersectoral research capacity building** through strategic partnerships, workshop grants and schemes designed to empower Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) researchers to engage in interdisciplinary research.

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> "We tend to think of the research challenges of our time in terms of scientific discoveries and driving the next leap in the frontier of knowledge. However, research and science arguably also face a grand challenge of interdisciplinarity.

Peter Brown, Director, Irish Research Council

CREATIVE CONNECTIONS | In late 2015, the Irish Research Council (IRC) launched a new call titled '**Creative Connections: Workshops to Cultivate Interdisciplinary Research in Ireland**'. The call aimed to encourage higher education and research institutions in Ireland to come together and formulate joint proposals for funded workshops on Interdisciplinary Research, to be delivered during 2016. A Creative Connections workshop hosted by the Trinity Long Room Hub in 2016, Interdisciplinarity for Impact, was the first step of a journey that would see the **SHAPE-ID** Horizon 2020 project funded.

The Creative Connections Synthesis Report summarised recommendations for institutions and funders from the workshops. Funders wishing to increase interdisciplinary engagement were advised to **facilitate interdisciplinary networking and development**, for instance through collaboration with other funders and support for interdisciplinary conferences; and ensure **stable funding supports for interdisciplinary research**, including a regular annual funding programme run in collaboration with enterprise and the community and voluntary sector. The need to ensure interdisciplinarity is core to the research question and not superficial was also highlighted.

Good Practice Tips

01 Seed funding is valuable in giving researchers time to build interdisciplinary relationships and capacity.

02 Work to embed interdisciplinarity in national strategies.

03 Ensure predictable annual funding calls for interdisciplinary research.

04 Build partnerships with enterprise and civil society to drive and fund engaged research around grand challenges.

https:www.shapeid.eu

Networks, Partnerships and Capacity Building

NEW FOUNDATIONS | The New Foundations scheme supports eligible researchers who intend to pursue research, networking and/or dissemination activities within and across the diversity of disciplines. This scheme provides support for research actions, the development of networks and consortia, conference and workshop development, and **capacity building for interdisciplinary collaboration**.

Strand 4 partners with the Department of Foreign Affairs to offer Networking & Collaboration Grants for prospective global North-South Research Partnerships, providing researchers with an opportunity to carry out networking activities or form consortia. It is intended as a pipeline for COALESCE applications.

> ▶ Watch IRC Director Peter Brown's presentation at the SHAPE-ID webinar on Funding Interdisciplinary Research

COALESCE | The COALESCE programme funds excellent research addressing national and European/ global challenges as set out in the challenge frameworks now in place. The call is run in partnership with a number of Government departments and agencies, who fund specific strands.

Strand 2A is an open call for **interdisciplinary research addressing national or global societal challenges**, which must be led by AHSS Principal Investigator with a STEM co-principal investigator, with a budget of up to €220,000 per award.

It aims to cultivate excellent interdisciplinary research addressing global societal challenges, enhance collaboration between researchers in Ireland and policymakers and/or civil society, nationally or internationally, support the development of capacity in the research system for interdisciplinary and challenge-based collaboration, **and support the development of AHSS research leadership within an interdisciplinary context.**

Strand 2B is a partnership with the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, and requires **the lead PI to work with a co-PI in** any Official Development Assistance (ODA)-eligible country on the African continent; any ODA-eligible Small Island Developing State; Vietnam; Palestine; Laos; Cambodia; or Myanmar, with a budget of up to €350,000 per award.

Project Profile: Building a Pipeline

Dr Elaine Murtagh (University of Limerick) was initially funded under New Foundations Strand 4 to build the *Learning in Motion Network,* which brought together researchers from Ireland (UL) and Palestine (Birzeit University) to develop a collaborative research proposal for the COALESCE call. The seed funding for consortium building led to a successful application to COALESCE Strand 2B.

Learning in Motion: embedding gender-responsive, play-based pedagogies in teacher education in Palestine addresses the Sustainable Development Goal on 'Gender Equality' by examining how gender responsive and play-based pedagogies can be embedded in teacher education programmes in Palestine. The co-PI is Dr Ahmad Aljanazrah (Birzeit University). A community-based partner, 'Right To Play', will codesign and co-deliver the bespoke training programme. The research will then examine the impact on teacher educators' practice and on student teachers during their school placement experience. This project will support rights and needs of both girls and boys in the education system in order to contribute to greater gender equality in learning environments that are physically, socially and emotionally safe.

Project Profile: AHSS interdisciplinary leadership

Professor Poul Holm (Trinity College Dublin) was funded under COALESCE Strand 2A for the FoodSmartDublin project, which aims to encourage a behavioural shift from eating high trophic level seafood (tuna, salmon, cod – the tigers and lions of the sea) to lower trophic and more sustainable local seafood (seaweed, molluscs, non-target species) by unearthing historical recipes and reconnecting Dublin residents with their tangible and intangible coastal cultural heritage. A multidisciplinary team of historians, marine ecologists, social scientists and digital humanists, applies an interdisciplinary and intersectoral approach between academia, industry and the public to establish sustainable knowledge exchange on responsible seafood consumption.

Together with innovators from the seafood industry and agents of change from NGO ECO-UNESCO, the academic team develops and disseminates historical local recipes that include its history and ecology, runs interactive sustainable seafood workshops and builds a framework to co-create knowledge flow and increase ocean literacy to overcome challenges that keep Irish people from eating more diverse seafood.

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