



Circular 0001/2017

To: The Managerial Authorities, Principals and Teachers of Recognised Primary, Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools, the Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards.

GRANT SCHEME FOR ICT INFRASTRUCTURE– 2016-2017 SCHOOL YEAR

Introduction and Purpose

As part of the implementation of the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 Enhancing Teaching Learning and Assessment, funding of €210m for ICT Infrastructure will be distributed to schools over the five years of the Strategy, commencing with €30m in the 2016-2017 school year, rising to €50m towards the end of the period (2020-2021 school year). The first tranche of this funding (€30m) is now being issued to schools. This circular provides information of this Scheme.

Digital Strategy for Schools

The Department's policy to achieve the embedding of ICT in Education is outlined in the [Digital Strategy for Schools 2015 to 2020 Enhancing Teaching Learning and Assessment](#), published in October 2015.

This Strategy sets out a clear vision that is focussed on realising the potential of digital technologies to transform the learning experiences of students by helping them become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens who participate fully in society and the economy.

This policy sets out a plan to embed ICT in teaching, learning and assessment through an ambitious programme of work for the period 2015 -2020 across a number of headings:

- Theme 1: Teaching, Learning and Assessment Using ICT
- Theme 2: Teacher Professional Learning
- Theme 3: Leadership, Research and Policy
- Theme 4: ICT Infrastructure

A series of actions and targets under each theme has been developed to progress ICT integration over the lifetime of the Strategy. Key stakeholders including the Department and its agencies, Teacher Education providers, school communities and teachers have particular responsibilities to progress these actions.

The provision of funding to support the updating and renewal of school ICT infrastructure is one of the priority actions.

A Consultative Group comprising representatives of the Education Partners is in place to advise the Department on implementation matters.

Other actions under the Strategy

Other priority actions to be progressed under the Strategy include the following:

- The NCCA will ensure that future curriculum specifications will incorporate clear statements of learning that focus on developing digital learning skills and the use of ICT in achieving learning outcomes at all levels of education.
- The NCCA is developing advice for the Minister on the study of computer studies as a subject at Senior Cycle in post primary schools.
- An evidence based ICT Competency Framework will be developed that will provide schools with greater clarity around the concept of embedding ICT into teaching, learning and assessment, and assist in identifying teacher training and other school organisational needs.
- An eLearning Planning Resource is currently available to schools at www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/planning and will be updated to reflect recent technological and educational developments.
- Department funded support services will collaborate in the development of CPD programmes, digital content and other resources to support school leaders and teachers in the embedding of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment.
- New information, guidance and CPD opportunities will be made available to schools by the PDST-TIE and other support services as appropriate.

Features of the Grant Scheme

- The scheme is designed taking a five year approach and in the expectation that €210m will become available over the period. This approach facilitates multi annual planning by schools.
- Each school is expected to draw up an eLearning plan using a whole school approach and taking account of its context and circumstances. The plan will outline the vision of the school for the embedding of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment and incorporate targets and priorities for improvement and development.
- The eLearning plan which should be reviewed and updated at least annually will guide the way in which the grant funding is used in a phased and coherent approach to incrementally improve learning outcomes for students.
- Funding will be used for the purchase of teaching computers, student shared computers, projectors, networking equipment, cloud based tools, learning platforms, software and education applications, other equipment designed to support the teaching and learning in the school.

- A standard funding formula incorporating both a flat rate lump sum and a per capita amount for each student enrolled has been used to calculate the grant due to each school.
- An enhanced per capita rate applies to students enrolled in Special and DEIS schools and special classes
- All students following primary and post programmes reckon for per capita purposes
- Fee charging schools receive 50% of the rate applying to schools in the free education scheme.
- All schools open longer than 3 years qualify for funding, and school buildings built prior to 2013 are supported under the Scheme.
- The scheme will be supported by the provision of technical and procurement guidance and information for schools and their leaders.
- Funding must be used for the purchase of ICT equipment and schools are required to use established public procurement arrangements. Further information and links are outlined in the Appendix.
- Records of expenditure and supporting documentation must be retained and be available for inspection if required
- Schools must ensure compliance with Circular: 13/2014 Management of and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer Funds.

Additional Information/Queries

Detailed guidance and information is outlined in the Appendix attached to this Circular.

FAQs on the scheme will be available on the PDST-Technology in Education website, and will be regularly updated based on queries and feedback from schools.

Queries in relation to the operation of this grant scheme should be addressed to ictpolicy@education.gov.ie.

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APPENDIX

Payment of ICT Grant

- 1) The grant will be paid directly into the school bank account. As with all exchequer grant-aid, school authorities must be able to provide detailed records on how funding, provided under this scheme, was spent. In addition, schools must be able to prove that expenditure was spent on infrastructure allowed under the scheme. All expenditure in connection with the scheme must therefore be vouched. Invoices and receipts must be retained in the event of an audit inspection by the Department and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General. It is necessary for schools to keep details of quotations received, invoices, receipts and any other relevant records in respect of all expenditure for a period of seven years. This *Appendix* contains details of the nature of records to be maintained. Schools, on request, must provide the Department with a written statement of the expenditure of the grant and any remaining balances and other relevant information. If a school closes permanently, any balance held in the account must be surrendered to the Department on the date that the school ceases operation. The Department reserves the right to withhold future payments to schools for non-compliance with any of the terms of this Scheme.
- 2) The ICT infrastructure selected for purchase must be in compliance with the broad list of authorised infrastructure as set out at in this Circular.
- 3) Schools must ensure compliance with Circular: 13/2014, Management of and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer Funds. Please refer to: circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/per/2014/13.pdf.

Planning for the implementation of the Digital Strategy in schools

The Digital Strategy for Schools (2015-2020) highlights the vision for ICT integration in Irish schools ‘to realise the potential of digital technologies to enhance teaching, learning and assessment so that Ireland’s young people become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens to participate fully in society and the economy’. It also highlights the role of ICT infrastructure in supporting teaching, learning and assessment practices in schools over the next five years:

- Every school is unique and as such needs to consider its own specific situation, including objectives and priorities.
- Schools should first review their current teaching, learning and assessment objectives.
- The eLearning plan should consider how the school can strategically use the funding, over the 5 years in a phased and coherent approach to incrementally improve learning outcomes for students.
- Having considered the longer term objectives over 5 years, they should then consider the first stage of implementing their eLearning plan for ‘year one’.

The following ‘school self-evaluation’ type questions should assist schools in the process:

1. What is our current vision for teaching, learning and assessment in the school?
2. In what areas are we achieving this vision?
3. In what areas can we improve over the next 5 years
4. What technologies (i.e., ICT equipment and ICT Infrastructure) can support the school in improving these learning objectives?
5. What fit for purpose technologies will best fit our school and our staff?
6. Can we integrate both our ‘learning’ and ‘technology’ objectives into a coherent 5 year eLearning plan?
7. Can we break down this longer term 5 year eLearning plan into more manageable yearly priorities and phases
8. What are the initial ‘year 1’ priorities and stages?
9. How do we proceed in implementing ‘year 1’ priorities
10. What ICT related advice and supports are available to assist schools?

Guidance of the Equipment and infrastructure that may be purchased under the ICT Grants Scheme

- Teaching Computers: These may include desktop PCs, laptops, tablets or hybrid devices
- Shared Student Computers: These may include desktop PCs, laptops, tablets or hybrid devices.
- Projectors including short throw or ultra-short throw, long throw, interactive, or interactive flat screens (IFS)
- Networking equipment (e.g. fixed and wireless networking, and including cabling, switches and installation)
- Cloud based tools and applications to support learning
- Learning platforms – these are generally cloud based applications used to support the teaching and learning process.
- Local software or 'apps' to support learning.
- Other ICT Equipment: This can include relevant and fit for purpose ICT elements to be used to support teaching, learning and assessment. An indicative (though not exhaustive) list includes audio visual equipment such as still and video cameras, speakers, interactive presentation technologies, visualisers, and equipment including mobile laptop/tablet trollies, printers and a school server.

Classrooms or other teaching areas:

- Teachers in classrooms need to have access to a suitable teaching computer, and a digital projector or interactive flat screens (IFS)
- The choice of teaching computer is one for the school, but can include PCs, laptops, tablets, hybrid devices or combinations of these.

Computer Rooms (if applicable):

- Each computer room should be equipped with a teaching computer, student computers (desktop PCs, laptops, or tablets), printer and a digital projector or interactive flat screens (IFS)
- The choice of student computer is one for the school. Schools may use PCs, laptops, tablets or combination of these.

Grant Rates Information

1. All schools, primary, post-primary and special schools, will receive a lump sum of €2,000 (€1,000 in respect of fee-charging schools) per school (in all years).
2. In year 1, a per capita amount will be paid as follows:
 - a. €22.20 per mainstream pupil in mainstream primary schools.
 - b. €26.60 per special needs pupil in special classes attached to mainstream schools, and per pupil in special schools.
 - c. €24.50 per pupil in DEIS category primary schools.
 - d. €31.90 per student in post-primary schools.
 - e. €35 per student in DEIS category post-primary schools.
 - f. €15.90 per student in fee-charging schools.
3. All recognised schools open longer than 3 years qualify for funding, and school buildings built prior to 2013. It is expected subject to the availability of resources that similar scheme of grants will be payable over each school year up to the 2020-2021 school year.

Tender Procedures and Record keeping

All purchases must be in compliance with Public Procurement Procedures. Existing ICT purchasing Frameworks should be engaged with and taken advantage of as they simplify the process of purchasing ICT equipment for schools. However, if having reviewed the market and considered detailed technical specifications, warranties and associated supports, it is clear that better value for money can be achieved from non-Framework vendors, schools should seek concurrent quotes from both Framework and non-Framework vendors. Care should be taken to ensure that identical technical specification is presented to all vendors at the time of request for written quotations.

Further information on current ICT Frameworks is available at <http://www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/en/Technology/Purchasing-Frameworks/>.

When purchasing equipment for which no ICT framework exists, schools are advised to refer to the PDST Technology in Education advice sheets and general purchasing guidance at: <http://www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/en/Technology>, then seek best value for money by sourcing written quotes in accordance with public procurement rules.

For further information on procurement and advice specific to schools please refer to the Schools Procurement Unit information at: <http://www.jmb.ie/school-procurement>, and the Office of Government Procurement information at <https://procurement.ie/>.

Role of Board of Management

The Board of Management must establish a set of procedures governing purchasing and should set out the arrangements for tendering and buying of goods, payment of invoices and maintenance of accounting records.

Purchasing

- A purchasing policy needs to strike a balance between quality and cost, as the cheapest is not always the best. However, tender documents should clearly specify criteria for awarding contract and these may not be deviated from during award process.
- Boards of Management must take reasonable steps to satisfy themselves that suppliers and contractors engaged are reputable and competent.
- In all cases, where a contract (verbal or written agreement) is to be awarded for the supply of goods or services and payments under the contract are likely to exceed €10,000 (inclusive of VAT) in any twelve-month period, the contractor is required to produce a valid tax clearance or a certificate demonstrating a satisfactory level of subcontractor tax compliance
- All purchases under the scheme should be made with the consent of the Board of Management evidenced by a minute of the relevant Board meeting.
- A file containing evidence of the tendering and quotation procedures actually followed must be retained for inspection if required.

Tendering Procedures should follow appropriate regulatory guidelines but in general, should follow the steps below:

- Seek a minimum of at least 5 quotes in writing or by email so that a minimum of 3 written quotations will be received
- The invitation to tender must be issued directly to firms that would be capable of carrying out the contract or supplying the goods and are of reputable standing.
- A date for receipt of tenders must be specified.
- All tenders should be opened at the same time by two people nominated by the Board of Management.
- A report of each tendering procedure and reasons for selection should be retained by the Board.
 - Consent of the Board of Management as appropriate

Support and Information

eLearning Planning

- Information on eLearning Planning for schools can be found at www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/planning
- If schools have specific queries in relation to eLearning Planning, these queries can be emailed to elearningplanning@pdst.ie

ICT Guidance and information

- ICT advice on suitable technologies and on ICT procurement for schools can be found at www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/technology.
- If schools have specific queries in relation to ICT advice or ICT procurement, these queries can be emailed to ictadvice@pdst.ie.

Resources for teachers using ICT for teaching and learning

- The Department's official Portal for Irish education (**Scoilnet.ie**) provides in excess of 12,000 high quality digital resources aligned with the primary school curriculum and the post primary subject specifications which can be used by teachers for teaching and learning.
- There are exemplars of good practice in the use of ICT to support a number of teaching approaches and methodologies at <http://www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/en/Good-Practice/Videos/> This is a growing community and if you feel your school should be featured here, email your interest to technologyineducation@pdst.ie

CPD

- Information relating to professional development relating to the use of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment can be found at <http://www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/en/Training/>.
- Further professional development programmes on the use of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment will be developed over the period of the Strategy.

Other websites

There are other websites that provide helpful advice and information on the use of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment:

<http://www.sess.ie/>

<http://www.nbss.ie/>

<http://www.jct.ie> and www.juniorecycle.ie

<http://www.ncca.ie/en/>

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