![An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna — Department of Education and Skills]

**An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills**

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 – 2018/2019 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). Two tranches of €30m have issued in respect of 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years. This circular provides information concerning the issue of a further €45m under the Scheme, in respect of the 2018-2019 school year.

Further information on the background to this scheme, the rates and eligibility for this funding, is set out below. Schools are not required to apply for this funding.

Additional funding – up to €5m to be distributed on application by schools

To recognise and support the ongoing work in schools in implementing the vision of the Digital Strategy for Schools, to embed the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning, up to €5m of this funding will be distributed via an application mechanism. Further information concerning the application process for the additional funding can be found at www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Grants-and-Additional-Support/ict-infrastructure/digital-strategy-for-schools-2015-2020-ict-infrastructure-funding.html

Digital Strategy for Schools
The Department's policy to achieve the embedding of digital technologies 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.

The Strategy sets out a plan to embed the use of Digital Technologies in teaching, learning and assessment through an ambitious programme of work for the period 2015 - 2020 across a number of headings:

       o   Theme 1: Teaching, Learning and Assessment Using ICT
       o   Theme 2: Teacher Professional Learning

o Theme 3: Leadership, Research and Policy
o Theme 4: ICT Infrastructure

A series of actions and targets under each theme has been developed to progress the embedding of digital technologies 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.

Priority Actions under the Strategy

Priority actions in progress at the moment include

- A Digital Learning Framework has been developed to help teachers and schools embed the use of technologies in teaching and learning. This provides schools with greater clarity around the concept of embedding digital technologies into teaching, learning and assessment, and assists in identifying teacher training and other school organisational needs. The full roll out of the Digital Learning Framework is underway involving a suite of CPD supports, including Seminars, Webinars, and online courses. Further information is available at https://www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/en/Planning/.

- The eLearning Planning Resource, now known as the Digital Learning Planning Guidelines is available at www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/planning. This has been updated to align with the Digital Learning Framework, and to reflect recent technological and educational developments. A dedicated www.dlplanning.ie website has also been developed to support schools to embed digital technologies into teaching, learning and assessment.

- Computer Science has been introduced as a subject for Senior Cycle in post-primary schools in September 2018.

- Future curriculum specifications will incorporate clear statements of learning that focus on developing digital learning skills and the use of digital technologies in achieving learning outcomes at all levels of education.

- New information, guidance and CPD opportunities will be made available to schools by the PDST (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 a Digital Learning 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 digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment and incorporate targets and priorities for improvement and development.
- The Digital Learning 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 should 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. Further information concerning items that can be purchased with this funding is in the appendix.

- The funding could assist schools in the implementation STEM subjects, and of new and revised subject specifications at Junior and Senior Cycle, and the changes to the primary curriculum, where the use of digital technologies enables the delivery of same.
- 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-primary programmes reckon for per capita purposes in recognised primary, special and post-primary schools
- Fee charging schools receive 50% of the rate applying to schools in the free education scheme.
- All schools which opened prior to the 2015 calendar year, or are in schools buildings built prior to the 2015 calendar year, will be eligible for this funding.
- 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 on appropriate equipment, and procurement issues, including relevant links, are outlined in the Appendix.
- Records of expenditure and supporting documentation must be retained and be available for inspection if required
- With a view to promoting good practice and compliance with the terms of the scheme, a small number of schools will be selected for audit in 2018/19. Selected schools will be contacted in this regard later this year.
- 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.

Chris Kelly
Principal Officer
Teacher Education Policy – Digital

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APPENDIX:

GRANT SCHEME FOR ICT INFRASTRUCTURE– 2018/19 SCHOOL YEAR

1. Automatic Issue of ICT Grant

1) This grant will be paid directly into the school bank account, based on the eligibility criteria outlined. Schools are not required to apply for the funding under the €45m to issue (per the terms of this circular). As with all exchequer grant-aid, school authorities must be able to provide detailed records on how funding, provided under this scheme, was spent. All expenditure in connection with the scheme must be vouched and schools must be able to prove that expenditure was used on infrastructure allowed under the scheme. 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 Section 3 in this Appendix.

3) Schools must ensure compliance with Circular: 13/2014, Management of and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer Funds. Please refer to: https://govacc.per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/DPER-Circular-13-14-Guidance-Note-and-Reporting-Requirements-1.pdf.

2. Planning for the implementation of the Digital Strategy in schools

The Digital Strategy for Schools (2015-2020) highlights the vision for the embedding of digital technologies 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 Digital Learning Plan (previously 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 relevant stage of implementing their Digital Learning Plan for their current year.

The following *'school self-evaluation'* review questions should assist schools in the process:

1. How successfully are digital technologies integrated into teaching, learning and assessment in our school?
2. What are our strengths in terms of the integration of digital technologies into teaching, learning and assessment?
3. What are our areas for development in terms of the integration of digital technologies into teaching learning and assessment?

4. Does our school have a vision for the use of digital technologies as part of teaching, learning and assessment?
5. Have we created a Digital Learning Plan?
6. Can our Digital Learning Plan be aligned to our other teaching and learning priority areas/policy initiatives?
7. Can we break the Digital Learning Plan into achievable and time-bound priorities?
8. What are the priorities in the current year against the overall Plan?
9. What actions do we need to take to implement those priorities?
10. What technologies (i.e., ICT equipment and ICT Infrastructure) can support the school in achieving our vision?
11. What digital technology related advice and supports can we access to help us?

3. Guidance for 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 (to note, a direct drawdown mechanism for schools for the purchase of Desktop PCs and laptops is available at www.spu.ie to make the process more streamlined and accessible.
- 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.
2. A per capita amount will be paid as follows:
    a. €39.89 per mainstream pupil on the rolls on the 30th September of the year prior to the issue of the grant, in mainstream primary schools,
    b. €47.85 per special needs pupil on the rolls on the 30th September of the year prior to the issue of the grant, in special classes attached to mainstream schools, and per pupil in special schools.

c. €43.87 per pupil on the rolls on the 30th September of the year prior to the issue of the grant in DEIS category primary schools.
d. €50 per student on the rolls on the 30th September of the year prior to the issue of the grant in post-primary schools.
e. €55 per student on the rolls on the 30th September of the year prior to the issue of the grant in DEIS category post-primary schools.
f. €25 per student on the rolls on the 30th September of the year prior to the issue of the grant per student in fee-charging schools.
3. All schools which opened prior to the 2015 calendar year, or are in buildings built prior to the 2015 calendar year, will be eligible for this funding. 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. Instructions to assist schools in ordering using the Framework mechanism are contained in OGP Guides. Schools should contact the Schools Procurement Unit for further information and support as required at www.spu.ie Care should be taken to ensure that identical technical specifications are presented to all vendors at the time of request for written quotations.

The OGP, in consultation with the Schools Procurement Unit, the ETBI, and PDST-TiE, has established a direct drawdown mechanism for schools to purchase Desktop and Laptop computers, meaning schools do not have to obtain quotes. Further information available at www.spu.ie.

Information on current ICT Frameworks is available at www.spu.ie. In order to access links on the OGP site, schools should register as buyers on the OGP Procurement website www.ogp.gov.ie. Information on the Framework of Providers of Wireless Networking for schools, can be found at http://www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/en/Technology/Purchasing-Frameworks/,

When purchasing equipment for which no ICT framework exists, schools are advised to contact the Schools Procurement Unit to seek further advice and information. Also schools should refer to the PDST Technology in Education advice sheets in respect of their technical requirements: http://www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/en/Technology, then seek best value for money by sourcing written quotes in accordance with public procurement rules.

Schools should refer to the School Procurement Unit **Guidance for Schools on Good Procurement Practices** document available on the SPU website www.spu.ie and the Office of Government Procurement information at www.ogp.gov.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. These rules are clearly set out in the Guidance for Schools on Good Procurement Practices available to download from this link - https://www.spu.ie/publications-2/procurement-guide/.

Support and Information

Digital Learning Planning
- Information on Digital Learning Planning for schools can be found at www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/planning (and through the dedicated www.dlplanning.ie website

which has been developed to support schools to embed digital technologies into teaching, learning and assessment).

- If schools have specific queries in relation to Digital Learning Planning, they can raise them via https://dlplanning.ie/contact/

ICT Guidance and information
- ICT advice on suitable technologies can be found at www.pdstechnologyineducation.ie/technology.
- If schools have specific queries in relation to ICT advice these queries can be emailed to ictadvice@pdst.ie.

Resources for teachers using digital technologies for teaching and learning
- The Department's official Portal for Irish education **(Scoilnet.ie)** provides in excess of 19,000 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.
- Videos demonstrating good practice in the use of digital technologies to support a number of teaching approaches and methodologies are available at http://www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/en/Good-Practice/Videos/. If you would like to share videos of good practice in the embedding of digital technologies in teaching and learning in your school, send a brief email outlining your practice to technologyineducation@pdst.ie

CPD
- Information relating to professional development on the use of digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment can be found http://www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/en/Training/, through your local education centre http://www.ateci.ie/education-centres.html and the relevant social media channels of these organisations
- Further professional development programmes on the use of digital technologies 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 digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment:
- http://www.sess.ie/
- http://www.nbss.ie/
- http://www.jct.ie and www.juniorcycle.ie
- http://www.ncca.ie/en/
- https://teachercpd.ie/
- https://dlplanning.ie/
- http://pdst.ie
- http://www.ateci.ie/education-centres.html

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