

## Transitioning pathways between Further Education and Higher Education

### Call for proposals September 2023

#### Background

##### Tertiary Education System Ireland

The creation of a unified tertiary system is one of the priorities of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The Department's 'Statement of Strategy 2021' to 2023 outlines six strategic goals, one of which centres around developing talent and skills. Crucial to the achievement of this goal is the provision of diverse and progressive pathways for learners, enabling progression across and between different institutions.

The publication of the funding and reform framework for higher education, 'Funding the Future' highlighted the creation of a unified, balanced, and integrated knowledge and skills system as one of its five priority strands of work. The system will be characterised by clear and extensive pathways for learners, and an expansive qualifications frameworks aligned to current and future knowledge and skills needs. The vision for 'Progressing a More Unified Tertiary System for Learning, Skills and Knowledge' outlined the creation of more diverse and better aligned learning and development opportunities as well as more extensive pathways will enable students' personal growth, the development of talents, and the promotion of lifelong learning; recognising that pathways and transitions between sectors required further development and expansion.

The SOLAS 'Transforming Learning Strategy 2022-2024' also highlighted the need for transitions within FET and from FET to HE as a strategic priority. This coupled with a dedicated focus to support the PATH3 funding scheme for the FET & HE sectors would result in a cohesive approach to developing the FE-HE links further in the FET sector.

The Joint Tertiary Degrees support the goals, objectives, and actions in the DFHERIS 'Statement of Strategy 2021' to 2023; SOLAS Transforming Learning Strategy 2022-2024' and the National Access Plan, and the achievement of national targets with a view to ensuring that the student body in higher education reflects the diversity of Ireland's population.

##### National Tertiary Office

The commitment to the realisation of these priorities and the creation of diverse and progressive pathways through increased collaboration and stronger co-operation in the tertiary education system is being led by the National Tertiary Office (NTO). Working with the Higher Education Institutions and the Education and Training Boards the NTO is advancing a strategic approach to enhancing the progression pathways between the Further Education and Training and Higher Education sectors.

## Objectives of the Joint Tertiary Degree

The introduction of the new Joint Tertiary degree route provides a seamless transition from Further Education to Higher Education, through programme co-design, co-delivery, and teaching collaboration. These programmes represented an important new departure in flexible provision and will provide more pathways to students outside the traditional CAO process.

The Joint Tertiary degrees are designed to support student participation and retention and develop a regional and community partnership approach to access which will support the applicant's talent and potential and mitigate barriers that may otherwise prevent engagement in tertiary education.

Students will be registered at both the ETB and the partnered university. This provides the student with access to a range of wrap around supports and services including libraries, sports, and other campus facilities as well as academic, health and wellbeing supports.

Applicants may need to have completed a certain level of education and some degrees may have specific subject requirements. However, no leaving certificate points will be applied to entry. If there are more applications than places available, the NTO expects providers to award places first to eligible applicants that would benefit from this entry route. Entry requirements are to be agreed at local level by each partnership and may include in addition to baseline academic qualifications:

- Evidence of relevant work or voluntary experience.
- Personal statement
- Interview or audition
- Admissions review
- English language skills

## Call for Proposals

The NTO is now inviting proposals from partnerships comprising of at least one Higher Education Institution<sup>1</sup> (HEI) and one Education and Training Board (ETB) for consideration for delivery in the academic years 2024/25. Partnerships must submit their proposals via email to [fmaloney@nto.ie](mailto:fmaloney@nto.ie) The deadline for submissions is 13:00hrs on Thursday, October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Proposals will not be accepted after this deadline or via any other channel.

All proposals must lead to a higher education award that is included on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) at Levels 7 to 9, from at least one HEIs within the partnership. Courses must be co-developed, co-designed and co-delivered by participating partners and tailored to either a 1+2, 1+3 or 2+2 delivery model between ETB and HEI partners. Step back awards must feature in all Joint Tertiary degrees, these may be either FET or HE awards or both.

The final submission must be signed off by the provider HEI President and ETB CE or HEI Vice President/Registrar and ETB Director of Further Education and Training.

---

<sup>1</sup> Funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA)

All submissions should outline how the proposed joint tertiary degrees will:

- a) Strengthen relationships between HEIs and ETBs and enhance provision available.
- b) Increase the diversity of the higher education population, which in turn will impact on the expectations of young children from a diversity of communities and backgrounds.
- c) Encourage innovative approaches, to support the co-development, co-design, and co-delivery of joint tertiary degree programmes to support increased access to and successful participation and retention in higher education, by the target groups.
- d) Prioritise courses that address identified future skills needs for the geographical area served by the partnership and demonstrate clear evidence of consultation with the Regional Skills Fora and with enterprise/industry partners to ensure proposals meet local economic and industry requirements.
- e) Ensure a student centric approach is embedded at all stages of the course design and delivery, with reference to the principals of UDL.
- f) Be nationally and/or regionally focussed.
- g) Demonstrate that there is an available supply of applicants.

## **Review of Joint Tertiary Degree Proposals**

The NTO will manage the process of obtaining, reviewing and approving proposals. Proposals may be approved subject to conditions and/or the submission of revisions. All approved proposals are subject to monitoring and evaluation of outcomes by either HEA or SOLAS. Each partnership will be underpinned by an MOA and data sharing agreement.

## **Joint Tertiary Degree Funding**

The NTO is not a funding agency. The HEA and SOLAS business processes regarding funding of provision applies to all tertiary degrees.

The ETB FET duration of delivery will be funded by SOLAS based on similar ETB FET provision. ETBs will need to ensure that any additional funding required is clearly identified in the 2024 funding application process as a tertiary programme.

FFI/student contribution arrangements will apply to the duration of HEI delivery. The HEI will be funded by HEA on the same basis as current HE provisions with FFI & Student Contribution. Students are registered with HEI for entirety of programme and included in RGAM allocation (on a weighted (<1) basis for FET portion to reflect access to HE facilities). Students will have to meet eligibility criteria of the Free Fees Initiative while undertaking HE part of the degree programme.

## **Managing Course Applications**

All providers of tertiary degree courses will be required to use the PLSS (FETCHCOURSES Application System) to manage course information, applications, and offers, as well as return relevant data, as set out above. The ETB will ensure all student data is shared with the HEI, underpinned by a data sharing agreement which shall be arranged by the NTO, to upload to SRS.

It is imperative that ETBs update the PLSS on a regular basis to ensure that information on courses and participant records are accurate. Failure to do so may result in funding being withheld.

## Appendix 1

### Joint Tertiary Degree Proposal template

Joint Tertiary Degree Proposal	
Partnership members	
Title of proposed Joint Tertiary Degree	
Is the proposed Joint Tertiary Degree an augmented degree or a new degree?	
Where will this Joint Tertiary Degree be offered?	
Who is the target student audience?	
What evidence exists that there is a market demand for the proposed Joint Tertiary Degree?	
What is the duration and structure of the proposed Joint Tertiary Degree? i.e., 1+2, 1+3, 2+2 and step-back awards.	
What is the aim of the proposed Joint Tertiary Degree ?	
Additional information	