



Schools Application Guidelines

Creative Connections

Shared Island Pilot Programme

1. Introduction

The Department of Education in Northern Ireland and Department of Education and Youth in Ireland are pleased to invite Primary, Post Primary and Special Schools to participate in Creative Connections Pilot Programme 2026/27. Building on the success and research emerging from the 2025/26 pilot phase, Creative Connections is now extending to further schools across Northern Ireland and Ireland in 2026/27.

Creative Connections is a cross-border creative partnership programme for children and young people, teachers, creative practitioners and school communities. Underpinned and supported by the curriculum, this Shared Island initiative contributes to, and supports, the wellbeing, personal development and learning of children and young people and their communities. Creative Connections is funded by the Department of the Taoiseach and supported by the Department of Education and Youth, Ireland and the Department of Education in Northern Ireland.

Creative Connections will run from September 2026 to June 2027 and combine online and in-person engagements for young people, teachers and creative practitioners including support to enable youth leadership and professional learning for educators and artists. To facilitate and build creative partnerships, Creative Connections 2026/27 will create cross border clusters of schools and practitioners from Northern Ireland and Ireland. In their clusters, young people, teachers, creative practitioners and school communities will engage in creative in-school residencies, shared planning and collaboration to build learning relationships supported by a Creative Connections Facilitator.

1.1 Participation and Young People's Voice

The Department of Education in Northern Ireland (DENI) would particularly encourage applications from schools supporting young people living in RAISE localities and will endeavour to ensure representation in the programme from such localities. The Department of Education and Youth

(DEY) in Ireland welcomes expressions of interest from all schools in Ireland, especially DEIS primary, post-primary and special education schools.

Creative Connections emphasises young people's right to a voice in decision-making and during this programme they will partner with teachers and creative practitioners in leading learning (see Hub na nÓg, the national centre of excellence and coordination in children and young people's participation in decision making for further information: (<https://hubnanog.ie/>)).

1.2 Aims of Creative Connections

The evolving aims of Creative Connections are to;

- Enhance learning, teaching and assessment through creative partnership and process
- Enhance school development priorities and practitioner confidence through creative pedagogies and professional learning
- Support young people's agency
- Connect communities through creativity
- Champion emotional health and wellbeing to enhance readiness to learn

2. Programme Overview

Creative Connections supports schools to work in partnership, developing cross border interdisciplinary communities of practice with professional creative practitioners and other schools. The programme combines in-school creative residencies with cross-border cluster collaboration, creating opportunities for children and young people, teachers and creative practitioners to connect, plan and learn together through creativity.

2.1 Professional Learning Events

1. Creative Connections will begin with shared planning and creative learning activities, including an online introduction for all participants and a 2-day residential event for teachers and creative practitioners.
2. These sessions will enable young people's participation in decision-making with teachers and creative practitioners at the beginning of the programme in addition to supporting relationship building, creative collaboration and learning.

2.2 Programme Structure

1. Schools and creative practitioners from Northern Ireland and Ireland will form cross-border clusters, working together as creative learning communities throughout the year.
2. Clusters will focus on building relationships, exploring shared interests and shaping creative activity informed by youth voice and professional learning.

3. Each school will receive €1,500 / £1,290 cluster funding to support cross-border creative collaboration and will be supported by a trained facilitator to guide collaboration and partnership in 3 cluster meetings throughout the school year.
4. An additional grant will be available through a separate application process to support cluster meet-ups and shared activity.

2.3 Creative Residencies in Clusters

1. Each school will work with two creative practitioners (one from their own jurisdiction and one cross-border) to support creative engagement with young people.
2. Each creative practitioner will be funded to collaborate with schools in a 30-hour residency (up to 9 hours planning and 21 hours delivery).
3. Online collaboration and where possible in-person engagement are encouraged in Creative Connections with flexibility accommodated in how sessions are delivered.
4. Residencies may run consecutively or concurrently, shaped through collaborative planning in clusters between teachers, young people and creative practitioners.
5. Each school will receive €600 / £516 materials grant for both residencies.

2.4. Participation Support

1. Teacher substitution cover, accommodation and travel costs will be provided to support engagement in Creative Connections.
2. Creative Connections Celebration and Sharing Learning Day will take place centrally in May 2027, this event invites participating young people, teachers, creative practitioners and facilitators to gather, connect and exchange practice and learning. Dates and venue to be confirmed.

2.4.1 Vetting & Successful Applications

1. Successful creative practitioners will be Garda Vetted by Tralee Education Support Centre and AccessNI Vetted by the Education Authority. They are also required to complete the Children's First online course and EA Safeguarding course.
2. Successful schools will be required to sign a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with their Creative Connections, Tralee Education Support Centre accepting the terms and conditions prior to commencement. Successful residencies can begin when both school and creative practitioner have returned signed SLAs, Garda vetting/AccessNI is in place, and Residential and online Professional Learning Events are complete. It is a specific condition of Creative Connections that teachers, creative practitioners and students work closely and collaborate to plan, develop and evaluate the residencies.

3. Creative Connections Eligibility

Creative Connections is seeking to invite 6 participating schools from Northern Ireland and 6 participating schools from Ireland in 2026/27. Final number of participating schools will be dependent on overall applications and programme capacity.

Applications for Creative Connections are welcomed from all primary, post primary and special education schools in Northern Ireland and Ireland, with a particular welcome to DEIS schools in Ireland and schools located in RAISE areas in Northern Ireland.

Schools currently participating or joining the following programmes in 2026/27 **are not eligible** to participate in Creative Connections:

- School currently participating in Creative Connections 2025/26
- School currently participating or joining Creative Schools Partnerships Northern Ireland
- School currently participating or joining Creative Schools Ireland (Arts Council)
- Schools currently participating or joining Creative Clusters Ireland (DEY)

4. Creative Connections Application

Applications to Creative Connections 2026/27 will be accepted through online application form only (link below). **Only one application will be accepted per school.** In recognition of Creative Connections' aim to empower and support children and young people's participation in decision-making, for the first time in Creative Youth this programme will facilitate a youth led application process in addition to the established teacher and principal led applications. The Creative Connections Applications Form will facilitate the following:

1. Teacher and/or Principal led applications
- OR**
2. Children and young people's applications made with the support and oversight of the principal/teacher

Further detail on application questions and required information below. Please note that both teacher/principal led, and children/young people led, applications to Creative Connections will be subject to the assessment and scoring process outlined below.

4.1. Applications Outline

It is strongly recommended that applications are developed as word documents prior to online submission, as responses do not automatically save. Only online applications will be accepted (see appendix 1). Please note that all applications must be made with the support and approval of the principal (a copy of responses will be emailed to the principal).

4.2 Questions, Assessment and Scoring

Applications will be evaluated against the criteria outlined below. Responses should be provided to either the Teacher/Principal questions or the Youth-led questions, in line with the chosen application pathway.

1. Learning, Teaching and Assessment:

- **Teacher/Principal Question:** How will this programme support learning, teaching and assessment in your school?

Scoring based on proposed linkages to curriculum, pedagogical approaches and strategies that foster young people's engagement and ownership in learning or linkage to SSE and SDP.

- **Youth-led Question:** Why would you like your school to take part in this project?

In the Youth-led question, scoring is based on what children and young people want to gain in their school and learning experience and the strength of their reason for applying.

2. Youth Participation in Decision-Making:

- **Teacher/Principal Question:** How will you facilitate young people's involvement and leadership in decision making from initial project planning through to final assessment and evaluation?

Scoring based on proposed strategies for enabling young people's agency and participation in decision-making, creativity and collaboration. The project may specifically support young people with least access to creativity or who might fall within the 'seldom heard' cohort (Creative Youth Plan p.41 and (<https://hubnanog.ie>).

- **Youth-led Question:** How could young people in your school take part in leading this project?

In the Youth-led question, scoring is based on children and young people's aims and ideas for working together with teachers and the school community in leading learning and engagement.

3. Partnership and Collaboration:

- **Teacher/Principal Question:** How will you facilitate and support this partnership during the programme?

Scoring based on proposed strategies for facilitating and supporting partnership between

staff, young people and schools, which may include families and the wider community.

- **Youth-led Question:** How could this project help students work with teachers to learn together?

In the Youth-led question, scoring is based on children and young people’s aims and ideas for working collaboratively.

4. Capacity and Commitment:

- **Teacher/Principal Question:** How will you facilitate and support this partnership during the programme?

Scoring is based on clear rationale for participation, and commitment to sustained support for Creative Connections Shared Island Pilot Programme and commitment to building creative learning communities.

- Capacity and commitment to fully participate
 - Rationale for participating and building creative learning communities on a Shared Island
 - Senior leadership support
 - Dissemination in school or to the wider community
- **Youth-led Question:** How would you like your school to support this project?

In the Youth-led question, scoring is based on children and young people’s ideas on how they would like their students, teachers and community to participate. This will also include the Principal’s Supporting Statement.

Questions 1-5 Scoring	Criteria
0	Does not meet the criteria. No evidence.
5	Meets the criteria. Provides satisfactory evidence.
15	Meets the criteria. Provides strong evidence.
20	Meets the criteria. Provides exceptional evidence.
Other Scoring	
10	Supporting access to creativity (Creative Youth Plan, p41)
10	Up to 10 marks allocated based on overall cohesion, proposed aims and quality of the application.

4.3 Creative Connections Timeline

Applications to participate in Creative Connections are made by schools in both jurisdictions through this online form below hosted by National Arts in Education, Tralee Education Support Centre.

Applications for Creative Connections 2026/27:

[Schools: Creative Connections 2026/27 - Fill out form](#)

Please note only online applications will be accepted. Closing date 6 May 2026.

Creative Connections	Timeline
Applications open	Wednesday 22 April 2026
Applications close	Wednesday 6 May 2026
Schools notified of application status	Week commencing 18 May 2026
CCo Professional Learning Events	September 2026
Programme completion and review	May/ June 2027

Appendix 1

Creative Connections 2026–27 – Applications for Schools

Structure:

If your school takes part, you will join a cross-border cluster of 4 schools (2 in Northern Ireland and 2 in Ireland) working together under a shared creativity theme of connection. Your school will also take part in a funded in-school residency, with one creative practitioner from Northern Ireland and one from Ireland delivering two 30-hour residencies in your school. (up to 9 hours planning and 21 hours online or in person delivery per Residency) Youth leadership and participation in Design of the projects is essential.

The programme also includes:

- Cross-border meetings and collaboration
- Professional learning events for teachers and creatives
- A mix of online, in-person and residential learning and partnership opportunities

Creative Connections runs from September 2026-June 2027, it is a broad creativity cross-border pilot programme which supports schools in Northern Ireland and Ireland to work collaboratively through creativity and in partnership with creative practitioners and in Clusters. Please complete this form to express your interest in taking part.

1. **Email address:**
 - A copy of your response will be sent to the email address entered below.
 - Please check your junk mailbox and contact our team if you require support.
2. **Please select the jurisdiction applicable to your school:**
 - a. School in Northern Ireland
 - b. School in Ireland

The online form branches for Schools in Northern Ireland and Schools in Ireland

School Information

1. **School Name:**
2. **School Department of Education Northern Ireland Number / School Roll Number** (Use this link to find participating schools' Roll Number, Address and Eircode: <<https://www.gov.ie/en/directory/category/495b8a-schools/>>)
3. **School Address, County and Postcode / Eircode**
4. **School E-mail**
5. **School Contact Number**
6. **Please select which category is relevant to your school** (Tick box response)
 - Primary / Post Primary / Special Education / Primary with Special Education Classes / Post-

Primary with Special Education Classes

7. Please select all options relevant to your school. School in a RAISE area (if known) / DEIS / Rural /Urban/ All subjects through Irish / Not applicable
8. Girls / Boys / Co-Educational
9. **School Principal Name**
10. **Principal Email Address** (A copy of your responses will be sent to the email address provided)
11. **School Teacher Representative Name**
12. **School Representative E-mail (A copy of your responses will be sent to the email address provided)**
13. **School Representative Contact Number**
14. **Who is applying to Creative Connections?**
 - I am a Teacher / Principal (You will be led to Teacher/Principal Questions)
 - I am a Pupil / Student (You will be led to Youth-Led Questions)

The online form branches for Teacher/Principal and children/young people applications.

[Teacher / Principal School Application Questions](#)

Please note that all applications must be made with the support and approval of the principal.

Applications must also nominate a Teacher Creative Connections Representative for your school. Please nominate a Creative Connections Teacher Representative for your school. This role would ideally be fulfilled by a full-time teacher who is passionate about the opportunity to embed creative pedagogy and approaches through their practice. The representative will partner and host the creative practitioner in their class during the in-school residency and will be supported to play a leadership role during Creative Connections. They must also attend programme workshops and meetings on behalf of their school. Your application will be assessed using the Creative Connections Scoring Criteria outlined in the Creative Connections Schools Guidelines.

Maximum word count per question:150 words

1. Learning, Teaching and Assessment

How will this programme support learning, teaching and assessment in your school?

Responses may consider:

- Identified areas of need and focus through School Self Evaluation/ School Development Plan
- Curriculum development
- Staff professional development

2. Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making

Young voices participating in decision-making is a key aspect of Creative Youth policy.

How will you facilitate young people's involvement and leadership in decision making from initial project planning through to final assessment and evaluation?

The project may also specifically support young people with least access to creativity or who might fall within the 'seldom heard' cohort (Creative Youth Plan p.41). For guidance, please see link to Hub Na nÓg's Participation Framework here: <https://hubnanog.ie>

3. Partnership and Collaboration

The Creative Connections, Creative Youth programme enables and celebrates partnerships between students, creative practitioners and educators in schools.

How will you facilitate and support this partnership during the programme?

4. Capacity and Commitment

Creative Connections provides funded support to enhance opportunities and access to creativity and the arts in education through curriculum.

Why is your school applying to participate in Creative Connections and what benefits do you hope to gain?

Responses may consider:

- Capacity and commitment to fully participate
- Rationale for participating and building creative learning communities on a Shared Island
- Senior leadership support
- Dissemination in school or to the wider community

Children and Young People / Principal School Application

Please note that all applications must be made with the support and approval of the principal.

Maximum word count per question:150 words

- 1. Why would you like your school to take part in this project?**
- 2. How could young people in your school take part in leading this project?**
- 3. How could this project help students work with teachers to learn together?**
- 4. How would you like your school to support this project?**
- 5. Principal's Supporting Statement**

The principal verifies the support of staff and school leadership to the children and young people's application by providing their email address for correspondence and a supporting

statement confirming the school community's commitment to the Creative Connections application and support to the programme should the application progress to participation.

Youth-Led Application Questions Guidance

1. **Why would you like your school to take part in this project?** This application is your chance to share ideas about creativity, learning and your school. There are no perfect answers — we are interested in your thoughts, your experiences, and what matters to you.

Helpful hints:

- Talk about things you already enjoy in school, or things you wish there was *more* of.
- Think about creativity, art, music, drama, storytelling, making things, or working with artists.
- You might want to improve how students feel at school, how they learn together, or share their ideas.
- There's no right or wrong answer — we want to hear **your reasons**.

2. **How could young people in your school take part in leading this project?**

Helpful hints:

- Leadership means having a say and helping make decisions.
- Students could help plan ideas, choose themes, or share opinions.
- You might already have a student council, class reps, clubs, or groups that could be involved.
- Young people could help decide what the project looks like and take part by:
 - Sharing ideas in meetings
 - Voting on themes
 - Working with teachers and artists

3. **How could this project help students work with teachers to learn together?**

Helpful hints:

- Think about learning as something you do together
- This project could help you:
 - try new ways of learning
 - be creative together
 - listen to each other's ideas
- It might make learning more interesting, fair, and enjoyable

4. **How would you like your school to support this project?**

Helpful hints:

- Think about how your school could help make the project happen
- This could include:
 - giving time for activities or meetings

- encouraging students to take part
- listening to students' ideas
- helping with space or materials

5. Principal Supporting Statement - needed for quality and verification (Brief statement)

What this means (for young people):

- The Principal Supporting Statement shows that your school knows about the application and supports it.
- You do **not** need to write this part — your principal or school leader will do it.
- Their email address will be included at the top of the form so they can confirm support.

Why this is important:

- It helps make sure the project can happen safely and properly.
- It supports young people to share the lead, while adults help in the background.