

Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

Water Quality Improvement Strand

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.



FAQ – Water Quality Improvement Strand

No	Question and Answer
Q1	What is the total budget for 24/25 WQIS?
	We have bid for £250k for the WQIS but we will not know until the budget is approved if this is the confirmed amount.
Q2	Is it possible there will be no budget and I've wasted my time applying?
	That is a possibility, budgets can be cut but we have no way of knowing that at this current time.
Q3	Budget approval
	Projects will be assessed by the assessment panel but letters of offer will not be issued until the budget is approved. The business case for the environment fund is currently with the Dept. of Finance for sign off.
Q4	Why have you launched so early without budget approval?
	The early launch is to maximise time for projects and ensure budget drawn down. The 22/23 WQIS had limited uptake due to a lack of time for groups to spend the grant after it was awarded due to previous delays in budget allocation and launch. They was better uptake 23/24 when launched on 8 February and closed 10 March. 21 applicants but only available budget for 12 projects to go ahead.
Q5	When will I know if I have been successful?
	The closing date for applications is COP 10 March. The assessment panel will assess the projects and once approved by the Head of WMU and endorsed by the NIEA CEO, letters of offer will be prepared. These will not issue until the budget has been approved (normally May time but that could change too)
Q6	Match Funding
	Cannot be from another government grant. However it can be from, for example Heritage Lottery Fund or Council Fund or own money/staff time as 'contribution in kind'.
Q7	Do we get the funding at the start of the project and in advance?
	No, funding is paid once invoices for the work have been submitted
Q8	We wouldn't have the 85% funding to initially spend then claim back, is there anything we can do?

No	Question and Answer
	<p>Unfortunately, we cannot pay contractors or other groups directly the funding would go directly to the organisation who applied, once you have submitted evidence the work is completed alongside invoices and receipts.</p> <p>There is also an option for payment in instalments based on milestones throughout the project delivery, this can all be agreed during the letter of offer stage.</p>
Q9	Will we get feedback if we are unsuccessful?
	Basic feedback will be given to each unsuccessful applicant as part of a dialogue to enable potential projects to be better aligned with future catchment goals.
Q10	How does the reserve list work?
	<p>The Water Quality Improvement Strand is an annual strand of the Environment Fund. As a result the reserve list is only for the financial year the application was made in. The purpose of the reserve list is to re-allocate funding if a successful applicant turns down the offer due to no longer being able to deliver the project. Each year projects are assessed fairly against other proposals and previously unsuccessful projects have to reapply. It is understood, that the NIEA Board is considering the issue for the Environment Fund and further guidance is expected to be available for this funding round. However, this does not affect the allocation of funding in the first instance.</p>
Q11	Who is eligible?
	The grant scheme is open to a range of groups and organisations, including community groups, schools, Rivers Trusts, environmental charities, other interested not-for-profit organisations and local councils
Q12	What proof is needed for eligibility?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of constitution • Evidence of not-for-profit (e.g. copy of constitution) • Registration or proof of being in the registration process for the government funding database • Evidence of public and employers liability insurances
Q13	We are a volunteer group but we do not have a constitution, how can we get this?
	The first stage in becoming a more formal organisation may be to adopt a constitution. A constitution is a simple set of rules which for you or your group to help make it clear to everyone involved what you intend to do and how you intend to operate. There are no

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	<p>legal rules about what your constitution should say, but there are good examples here and there.</p> <p>If you are going to apply for grant funding, this document will show funders that you are well organised. The sorts of things you need to set out in your constitution include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The name and purpose of the group • Who the members of the group are • Who makes the decisions –the committee or board members • How the committee will work with processes for decision making/resolving disputes • Any designated roles such as Chair, Treasurer & Secretary • Who has responsibility for Health & Safety • How money is to be managed • What powers the group has – for example: to raise funds, to give out grants, to manage buildings, to employ staff and so on. • As a constituted group – sometimes called an association – you are now able to apply for funding, set up a bank account, buy insurance, rent property, own equipment and even employ staff. You can also apply for charitable status. <p>Council's sometimes offer advice to community groups around becoming constituted. Try the Community Development/Community Planning Team at your local Council.</p> <p>or</p> <p>Local Rural Support Networks (RSNs) are a strong and unique rural infrastructure which provides support to communities in all rural areas of Northern Ireland.</p> <p>http://localruralsupportnetworks.org</p>						
Q14	Procurement procedures						
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="311 1713 630 1758">Estimated Value</th> <th data-bbox="630 1713 1444 1758">Tender Action Required</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="311 1758 630 1870">Up to £5,000</td> <td data-bbox="630 1758 1444 1870">2 Oral quotations – with fax or email confirmation. Every attempt should be made to obtain more than one quotation.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="311 1870 630 1926">£5,001 - £20,000</td> <td data-bbox="630 1870 1444 1926">4 Selected Tenders</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Estimated Value	Tender Action Required	Up to £5,000	2 Oral quotations – with fax or email confirmation. Every attempt should be made to obtain more than one quotation.	£5,001 - £20,000	4 Selected Tenders
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Q15	Assessment method						

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	<p>Projects are initially assessed by the client officer through consultation with other teams and other experts e.g. Forestry/fishery experts – then the projects are presented to G7 board is WMU and approved by the Head of WMU – endorsement by the NIEA directors and the CEO of NIEA</p>
Q16	Assessment criteria
	<p>Projects score higher if they can provide multiple benefits e.g. address conservation objective for a protected areas, help alleviate run-off in an Area of Potential Significant Flood Risk</p> <p>Key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting people with the aquatic environment to achieve behavioural change • Conservation and restoration of our aquatic environments • Nature-based solutions, particularly for climate change mitigation and adaptation <p>Key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Management Areas: Roe, Strule, South Down, Lagan and Belfast Lough • Protected Areas – SACs, Drinking Water Protected Areas, Bathing Waters, Shellfish Protected Areas • Areas of potential significant flood risk
Q17	If I am outside a priority area how likely is it that I will get funding?
	<p>The first assessment criteria assesses how effective the project will be at improving water quality – the protected areas are incorporated into this criteria. So if the project is assessed as having a significant objective to improve water quality which will lead to long term improvements, considering multiple benefits – it can score the max points between 8-10, if in a ‘Priority Area’. If assessed as having a significant objective to improve water quality and not within a ‘Priority Area’ then it can only score 8 max. The other 4 assessment criteria are not affected by the ‘Priority Areas’.</p>
Q18	When can you do ‘In-river’ works?
	<p>Work can be carried out outside the salmon spawning season, which is usually from end of End of Sept – Beginning March. However, that varies in each river and a Section 46 permit from DAERA Inland Fisheries/ Lough Agency is required. Schedule 6 from DFI Rivers may also be required if putting anything into the river.</p>
Q19	What are the permits/ authorisation required from Inland Fisheries (or Loughs Agency)

No	Question and Answer
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Section 46 permit of the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1952 required from Inland Fisheries or Loughs Agency (if in Loughs Agency area). This is a written permit with specific conditions which must be adhered to. 2. Schedule 6 from DFI RIVERS (Department of Infrastructure) the Drainage Order - onerous conditions are often applicable and are likely to involve advanced modelling, detailed method statement with reference to CIRIA C763, River Weirs – Design, Maintenance and Removal and confirmation that there is sufficient Public Liability Insurance in place to cover any potential flooding that may occur when the works are taking place
Q20	If my project was unsuccessful last year should I apply again?
	If your project was unsuccessful last year, you should look at the assessment criteria again and try to make the project incorporate multiple benefits and meet more of the themes as outline in the guidance document and also take on board the additional themes this year e.g. behavioural change and the priority locations. If you would like to discuss our proposal with one of the team, we may be able to help shape the project proposal.
Q21	The guidance mentions a discussion with catchment officers, can we get contact details of the relevant people?
	<p>Yes, the catchment officer info can be found here: Catchment Officers or you can email relevant team: RiverBasinPlanning@daera-ni.gov.uk</p> <p>Please note if you previously dealt with a catchment officer this individual may have changed as we currently have a reduced number of officers.</p>
Q22	Is there equal weighting across the funding themes?
	Yes all themes have equal weighting in the assessment criteria as discussed in the Guidance notes: Section 5
Q23	Can the project cover more than 1 theme?
	Yes, it is possible to link to more than 1 of the 3 themes, projects which link to more than 1 theme will likely receive a higher score.
Q24	Fencing is an effective method of protecting river banks and preventing poaching. However, this is potentially an environmental aspect which could be funded through farming schemes. Would this be considered double funding or match funding?

No	Question and Answer
	<p>A limited amount of fencing can be funded through the scheme if you have clear evidence for the requirement of fencing to address a specific pressure. Prior to any works you would be required to ensure fencing has not been installed on land that has previously been funded for fencing by DAERA’s Environmental Farming Scheme. Check with the landowners prior to the project commencing and get written landowner permission.</p> <p>Any fencing must be to the same specification as stipulated in the Environmental Farming Scheme Guidance Final EFS information sheet - (W) - Watercourse stabilisation with fenc....pdf (daera-ni.gov.uk)</p>
Q25	<p>Are you trying to achieve geographical spread of projects, and will you consider NI wide projects?</p>
	<p>Geographical spread is not considered in the assessment process, guidance notes will highlight areas we prefer projects to be in.</p> <p>Yes NI wide projects will be considered.</p>
Q26	<p>Is it a portal application (like Challenge Fund) or document based (EF Fund)?</p>
	<p>The application form can be downloaded from this page, once available in early Jan Environment Fund - Water Quality Improvement Strand - 2024/25 Pre-launch webinar Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (daera-ni.gov.uk)</p> <p>Then emailed or posted back to the catchment planning team</p>
Q27	<p>I have concerns about the application timeline, can I discuss this?</p>
	<p>Please contact us directly at catchmentplanning@daera-ni.gov.uk</p>
Q28	<p>Where can I see the guidance documents etc.?</p>
	<p>The eligibility criteria, guidance documents and the application are available on the link below: Environment Fund - Water Quality Improvement Strand - 2024/25 Pre-launch webinar Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (daera-ni.gov.uk)</p>
Q29	<p>How can one persuade local farmer(s) to allow the creation of a buffer strip on their land adjacent to a lake?</p>
	<p>We would recommend liaising with landowners to make them aware of the impact of not having a buffer strip and the benefits of having them, depending on the reason you think the buffer zones should be installed you could look at the following information:</p>

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	<p>https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/nutrientsactionprogramme2019-2022</p> <p>Infosheet Catchment V9 (catchmentcare.eu)</p> <p>It could also be worthwhile encouraging them to avail of the EFS if eligible as buffer zones are included. However ultimately it is the landowner's decision, unless a legal requirement. If you suspect that regulations are not being followed you can make a report to the pollution hotline, more information can be found here: The NIEA and water pollution Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (daera-ni.gov.uk)</p>
Q30	<p>Is aeration considered beneficial and cost effective for water quality in terms of increased oxygenation, algal bloom dispersal/prevention and its role in dealing with stratification?</p>
	<p>Aeration equipment will improve the dissolved oxygen levels and may improve water quality by mixing the stratified water (if the lake is stratified). However, low oxygen levels are a symptom not a cause of a water quality pressure i.e. aeration can be used to reduce the establishment of algal blooms, but does not address the source of the problem i.e. excess nutrients which could be from, for example septic tanks, agricultural inputs, surface run off.</p> <p>We would support actions taken to identify and reduce the source of nutrients to the water environment rather than an "end of pipe" solution such as aeration installation. Additionally, there are wider considerations around the carbon footprint of the equipment being used, installed and maintained which could lead to "pollution swapping" i.e. addressing one pressure (water quality) at the cost of another (carbon).</p>
Q31	<p>Do you get extra points for a partnership/collaboration approach to a project?</p>
	<p>We welcome a partnership approach and accept joint applicants. For further details contact: catchmentplanning@daera-ni.gov.uk</p>
Q32	<p>Would a research element be eligible i.e. evidence of the effectiveness of intervention?</p>
	<p>Yes, research can be funded through the WQIS. For further details contact: catchmentplanning@daera-ni.gov.uk</p>



For further information:

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