Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

about the call for applications

What is Community Engaged Research and Learning (CERL)?

Community Engaged Research and Learning (CERL) is an innovative approach which gives students the opportunity to participate in research and learning projects based on community ideas and needs, through the curriculum. CERL has been identified as a high-impact learning and teaching activity that educational research suggests increases student engagement and student retention.

The term CERL captures a wide range of different terms for community engaged research and learning. CERL can be taken to include community-based learning, service-learning, community service learning, community-based research, participatory action research, community-based participatory research, and science shop projects.

What is the CIRCLET project?

CIRCLET is the acronym for Curriculum Innovation through Research with Communities: Learning circles of Educators and Technology. This Erasmus+ project aims to strengthen the capacity of higher education, especially lecturers, to improve learning outcomes for students by rethinking curricula to incorporate CERL, enhanced by educational technology.

Who are the people in the CIRCLET co-ordinating team?

The International co-ordinating team for CIRCLET comprises the local co-ordinating teams, who are your colleagues in the science shop/civic engagement office of your university.

Queen's University Belfast Science Shop: Dr Emma McKenna; Ms Eileen Martin

Corvinus University of Budapest, Corvinus Science Shop: Judit Gáspár, PhD; Réka Matolay, PhD; Andrea Toarniczky PhD

TU Dublin Programme for Students Learning With Communities: Dr Catherine Bates; Dr Sinead McCann

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya: Dr Amalia Susana Creus, Ms Nadja Gmelch

Vrije Universiteit Brussel Science Shop: Dr Floor Keersmaekers, Ms Linde Moriau, Ms Jozefien De Marrée

What is an International Learning Circle?

Learning circles involve people coming together to share and reflect on learning and experience as they address a particular issue – in this case how to rethink courses/modules to include CERL projects, enhanced by educational technology. The international learning circle will involve lecturers from the participating universities across Europe coming together online to share their experiences, ideas and questions, to learn together, in a structured way.

The exact format of the international learning circle will be shaped in collaboration with participants, and will draw on the learning from the local learning circles. Potential outcomes of international learning circles are international publications by members about their process for rethinking courses to incorporate CERL, sharing and/or developing examples of CERL.

Do I need to be experienced in CERL/technology/module revision/design?

No – we will recruit participants with a mix of experience so you can learn from your peers as well as from the re-sources and facilitators. The project will also bring in expertise from relevant colleagues at institutional level, as well as community partners.

Do I need to be experienced in reflection?

Not formally, as we will provide templates, supports etc. We are looking for people who already have some self-awareness and who look to learn from their experiences.

Where will I find community partner(s) for a CERL project?

Your local CIRCLET co-ordinating team will help you with this.

What criteria will be used to assess the applications?

♦ Interest and/or experience in: CERL; in revising modules/courses; and in educational technology

♦ Potential to develop and sustain a CERL project in a course/module

♦ Clear personal goals for the module/Learning Circle

♦ Awareness of strengths and potential challenges.

For more detail see table in appendix 2.

Can I withdraw?

If possible, we would ask that once you have confirmed the offer of a place, you honour that commitment. As this is a competitive process, if you withdraw it means you have taken a place that someone else might have used to the full.

What happens if something goes wrong?

Contact your local CIRCLET co-ordinating team as soon as possible, so they can work with you to provide support.

I still have questions, what do I do?

For questions about the online module: visit us online for our drop-in question and answer webinars about the Online Module: Monday 20 April 1-2pm Irish and UK time, 2-3pm Central European Time (Click here to join) and Tuesday 5 May 12-1pm Irish/UK time, 1-2pm CET (Click here to join).

For general or learning circle questions: Contact Emma McKenna at e.mckenna@qub.ac.uk

If you need a more detailed comparison to help you decide between the learning circle and the online module, please see the table in Appendix 1 below.

Appendix 1: More detail on the differences between the Learning Circle and the Online Module

	Learning Circle	Online Module
Description	Regular scheduled meetings (in person and/or online), supplemented with independent and small group learning, in collaboration with local and - if desired - international peers	Weekly webinars with regular small assessments, individual and group work, alongside local and international peers. These lead to a final reflection and report/presentation.
Timing	Academic year 2020/2021	Semester 1, Autumn 2020, with final assignment due early January.
Planning and delivering your CEL project	Semester 1 involves planning the CERL project on the course/module, and semester 2 focuses on delivering it with the community partner. Peer and science shop support for the CERL project in both semesters in various forms and using various communication media.	The module focuses on planning for CERL project delivery. One of the module requirements is that participants must agree and sign a project timeline agreement form with a community partner, to run a CERL project in the following 12 months. There is likely to be an optional pathway from the module into the learning circle in semester 2 to support the CERL project delivery.
Number of participants	Max 10 in each local Learning Circle, max 50 across all project partners	Max 20

Facilitators and contributors involved	Experts on
	    CERL,
	    course design,
	    educational technology;
	Community partners (locally variable);
	Facilitators of collaboration and peer learning process
		Experienced CERL staff will facilitate discussions in webinars, these will include presentations from participants, and inputs from experienced CERL stakeholders (live or as recorded videos).

International dimension	Local learning circles will be connected internationally, offering collaboration opportunities for interested participants, where possible clustered around broad teaching subject areas.	Participants and facilitators will be from 5 European universities. Small group work will involve a mix of partners from different universities, where possible clustered around broad teaching subject areas.
What supports will I receive?	Your local CIRCLET co-ordinating team will support the Learning Circle participants in a variety of ways, from facilitating sessions to providing resources and feedback, as well as co-ordinating small group micro-learning circles. Participants who choose to take part in the international learning circle will also receive appropriate supports.	Technological support for webinars from your own university as well as from TU Dublin. A wide range of online resources. A designated drop-in weekly webinar hour for any questions. Weekly feedback from peers and/or module facilitators. Online discussion boards for questions and answers. In each participating university, at least one face-to-face meeting of the local participants in the online module may be facilitated, to build the local support network.
What will I be expected to do?	Plan for a reimagined course/module by the end of the first semester, which contains CERL and Technology-enhanced learning. Active reflective evaluation of the process Deliver a course/module with a CERL project responding to a research question from a community partner.	Ongoing assignment submissions, including reflection on learning, and group work assignments. Signed timeline agreement form with a community partner outlining the CERL project you will complete together within the next year. Final assignment report/presentation.
What optional elements are offered for me?	Participation in the International Learning Circle. Receiving feedback and assessment.	There will be some choices within assignments given, but all assignments are compulsory.

	Learning Circle	Online Module
What do I receive at the end?	Certificate of participation. (The CIRCLET team is exploring the possibility of accrediting digital badges for participants.)	Certificate from TU Dublin confirming your 5 ECTS (subject to successful completion of all assignments).
Do I need particular technological skills and/or access to hardware/ software?	Access to your own virtual learning environment (e.g. Moodle, Brightspase, Canvas), and to online meeting tools commonly used in your university (e.g. MS Teams).	Recommended browsers for Brightspace (the TU Dublin virtual learning environment): Chrome, Firefox, Safari. Internet Explorer is not suitable - (see Video 1 - Getting started in Brightspace as a student). Also access to your own virtual learning environment, to use technology to enhance your CERL project
How much time will I need to commit?	No more than 20 hours contact time and around 5-8 hours independent learning across 2 semesters. International learning circles will involve additional time.	9 weekly lunchtime webinars, with regular small individual and group assignments. Around 100 learning hours are required for 5 ECTS.
Do I have to attend every session?	Yes, where possible, in semester 1. In semester 2 the sessions will address particular challenges, so you will have the option of attending some but not others.	Each participant must attend 9 webinars over 11 weeks. Two of the nine webinars will be repeated in different weeks, so participants can choose the most convenient date to attend.
Are the session times set?	These will vary in different partner universities, but will certainly be set before semester 1. Contact your local CIRCLET representative if this is of concern to you.	Fridays from 1-2pm Irish/UK time, 2-3pm Central European Time.

Appendix 2: Rubric for evaluating applications.

	Not yet at level required	At level required	Above level required
Clear personal goals for the module/Learning Circle	No clear goals, and/or clear goals not related to module/learning circle	Clear goals, related to module/learning circle	Very clear goals, very closely related to module/learning circle
Awareness of strengths and potential challenges.	Little or no articulation of strengths and potential challenges, and/or strengths and challenges given but unrelated to module/learning circle	Clear articulation of strengths and potential challenges, related to module/learning circle	Very clear articulation of strengths and potential challenges, very closely related to module/learning circle
Potential to develop and sustain a CERL project in a module (they need to teach and assess the module)	Does not teach and assess a suitable module	Teaches and assesses at least one suitable module.	Teaches and assesses at least one suitable module with clear potential for sustainability
Relevant experience/interest in CERL	Interest not clearly expressed	Quite Interested	Very interested
Relevant experience/interest in educational technology	Interest not clearly expressed	Quite Interested	Very interested
Relevant experience/interest in revising modules	Interest not clearly expressed	Quite Interested	Very interested

Note we will select participants for maximum diversity (gender, level of teaching experience, subject(s)/discipline(s) taught, level of experience (CERL, technology, developing courses/modules), university (CPD module only)).

We also need to recruit a minimum number of participants with a level of interest in the transnational learning circle, as it is a requirement of our funding.

To maximise sustainability, we may prioritise: programme coordinators; module coordinators; course leaders