

RDS Branchardière Lace Bursary

Applicant Guidance

1. About the Bursary

The Branchardière Fund was established in 1890 under the will of Mademoiselle Eleanor Riego De La Branchardière (1829–1887), an internationally recognised lace designer and author who played a significant role in promoting Irish lace and crochet. In her will, she directed that the residue of her estate be used “*for the benefit of poor Irish female workers*”, with a particular emphasis on those engaged in Irish lace and crochet. Since its establishment, the Fund's income has supported initiatives that sustain and develop Irish lace-making, with the Royal Dublin Society being a long-standing recipient in support of awards and programmes aligned with the original charitable intent of the bequest.

The RDS Branchardière Lace Bursary supports individuals working in Irish lace or Irish crochet, providing up to €2,000 per year for innovative, educational, creative, or research-driven projects that advance, reinterpret, or preserve Irish lace in the 21st century.

The bursary model draws on international best practice in craft-sector funding, supporting forward-looking and developmental activity such as training, research, creative experimentation, residencies, mentoring, and collaborative projects, while maintaining the principle that funding supports future activity rather than retrospective costs.

2. Who Can Apply (Eligibility Criteria)

A. Craft Discipline

Applicants must be actively practising in Irish lace (e.g., Carrickmacross, Limerick, Kenmare, Youghal) or Irish crochet lace. Traditional or contemporary practice is eligible, provided the heritage lineage is clear.

B. Professional Pathway

Applicants must be developing or intending to develop a professional practice, defined as:

- Generating income through lace/crochet work, OR
- Having a credible plan to move toward paid work, teaching or commissioned activity.

C. Residency

Applicants must be resident on the island of Ireland.

D. Training-Led Applications Only

Funding is for future training or skills development only.

Retrospective costs cannot be funded (reflecting RDS's requirement that funding must cover training taking place in the future).

3. What the Bursary Can Fund

We are seeking strong and clear proposals which demonstrate:

- innovative, creative, or experimental uses of lace
- new relevance for lace in the 21st century
- approaches that promote, preserve, or document the story of Irish lace in innovative ways

The bursary may be used for a wide range of professional development activities, including:

- further education, technical training, or upskilling
 - research or skills-led investigation
 - development of new lace work or ambitious creative projects
 - mentoring or coaching with a recognised expert
 - artist residencies or structured learning placements
 - collaborative or group projects directly relating to Irish lace
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4. Eligible Costs

Priority Areas

Proposals may include any combination of the following priority activities and cost types. There is no requirement for training to form the majority of the request.

A. Priority Activities Supported by the Bursary

The bursary supports proposals involving:

1. **Further education, technical training, or upskilling**
Such as accredited or non-accredited courses, specialist technique training, or advanced lace-making instruction.
2. **Research or skills-led investigation**
Including structured exploration of historical lace techniques, pattern reconstruction, or experimental material research.
3. **Development of new lace work or ambitious creative projects**
New pieces, bodies of work, experimental methods, or contemporary reinterpretations of Irish lace.
4. **Mentoring or coaching with a recognised expert**
One-to-one or small-group specialist guidance, technique refinement, or portfolio development.

5. Artist residencies or structured learning placements

Opportunities that support focused development, research, experimentation, or community engagement related to Irish lace.

6. Collaborative or group projects directly relating to Irish lace

Collective experimentation, community-based knowledge transmission, co-creation projects, or documentation initiatives.

B. Eligible Cost Types

Proposals may include the following cost categories:

1. Training / Tuition Fees - Courses, masterclasses, workshops, structured programmes, or 1:1 training.

2. Travel (economy) - Necessary travel for training, residencies, mentoring sessions, research, or collaborative projects.

3. Modest accommodation - Accommodation required for training, research, residencies, or project work.

4. Essential materials - Materials needed specifically for:

- training activities
 - research or experimentation
 - creation of new work
 - producing “trial pieces”
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Ineligible Costs

These items cannot be funded:

- rent, household bills, general living costs
- studio or business overheads

- retrospective payments for training or activity already undertaken
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5. Application & Judging Process

01. Application Submission

Applications must be submitted online through the RDS application portal (Jotform). Applicants will be asked to provide:

1. Completed online application form
 2. Six photographs of recent lace or crochet work
 3. A short training/research/project proposal - dates, provider, course/trainer description, expected skills outcomes
 4. Budget and cost breakdown - clear itemisation and quotes where possible (RDS requires accurate budgeting and quotes for assessment.)
 5. One professional reference
 6. Agreement to take part in RDS publicity, which may include:
 - Being filmed for a short RDS profile segment
 - Sharing a profile image and work images
 - Engaging with RDS social media features
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02. Judging Process

- All verified applications are assessed by a judging panel
 - Total prize fund for the overall RDS Branchardière Awards is up to €2,000
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03. Assessment Criteria

Applications are scored using the following criteria:

1. Heritage Alignment

Authenticity and strength of connection to Irish lace or Irish crochet traditions; clarity of lineage and cultural relevance.

2. Project Quality & Feasibility

A well-structured, realistic proposal whether training, research, creative development, mentoring, residency, or collaborative work with credible partners, clear aims, and a feasible timeline.

3. Craft Skill & Potential

Technical skill demonstrated through submitted images, and evidence of artistic or technical potential for further growth.

4. Budget Clarity & Suitability

A clear, well-reasoned, realistic budget that is appropriate to the scale and aims of the project.

5. Public Benefit

A willingness and capacity to share learning, outcomes, insights, or creative results with the public or the Irish lace community (e.g., demos, talks, online content, pattern notes, sharing outcomes with RDS).

04. Awardee Requirements

Awardees must deliver:

- A short mid-point update
- A final report with images
- One public-benefit action, chosen from:
 - A small demo at an RDS event

- Short online tutorial/pattern note
 - A written reflection or technique insight for RDS audiences
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05. Timeline

- Fund Opens: 2 March 2026
 - Deadline: 13 April 2026
 - Panel Assessment, Decision and Announcement: by 19 November
 - Project Start: Any time from December 2026 onwards
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