Version **1.1**

SCIENCE FOUNDATION IRELAND & IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL

SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024

Call for Submission of Proposals

Key Dates	
Call launch:	5th December 2023
Research Body nomination of candidates:	20th February 2024, 13:00 Dublin local time
Full proposal deadline:	10th April 2024, 13:00 Dublin local time
Applicant Response:	August 2024

Terms of Reference

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All responses to this Call for Submission of Proposals will be treated in confidence and no information contained therein will be communicated to any third party without the written permission of the applicant except insofar as is specifically required for the consideration and evaluation of the proposal or as may be required under law, including the Industrial Development (Science Foundation Ireland) Act, 2003, the Industrial Development (Science Foundation Ireland) (Amendment) Act 2013 and the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

1 Introduction

The "Our Shared Future" Programme for Government sets a vision for Ireland "*to be a global leader in research and innovation across the art, humanities, social sciences and STEM*". Part of that vision includes a commitment to develop career pathways for early-career researchers with starting grant funding rounds to be issued on an annual basis from each of our funding institutions.

Science Foundation Ireland funds excellent and impactful research and talent and shapes the future of Ireland through anticipating what's next and widening engagement and collaboration. SFI's 2025 strategy Shaping Our Future[1] sets out the vision that Ireland will be a global innovation leader in scientific and engineering research for the advancement of Ireland's economy and society. The strategy has two ambitions: Delivering Today and Preparing for Tomorrow. As part of Delivering Today, SFI aims to foster diverse **Top Talent** by building, attracting, and retaining the academic and research talent that powers Ireland's innovation society.

The Irish Research Council Strategic Plan 2020-2024 sets out its mission to support excellence in research talent, knowledge and engagement by, *inter alia*, funding excellent discovery and enterprise research across all disciplines; and supporting exceptional individual researchers and their development. The strategic plan commits the IRC to continuing to make a significant contribution to Ireland's education, research and skills needs by growing the pipeline of exceptional researchers across all disciplines and career stages.

Through collaboration, the SFI and the IRC also aim to contribute to a **cohesive ecosystem** that is embedded in the fabric of society and realises the potential of research with and for all of Ireland's people.

To support these collective goals, SFI and the IRC are pleased to launch the **SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024**, which will support talented postdoctoral researchers from all research disciplines to develop their track record and transition to become independent research leaders. These grants will enable postdoctoral researchers to conduct independent research for a four-year period and will provide funding for a postgraduate student who will be primarily supervised by the applicant.

Objectives of the SFI-IRC Pathway programme

- To enable talented postdoctoral researchers to develop their track record and establish themselves as independent investigators, with the support of an eligible research body.
- To provide a mechanism for Irish Higher Education Institutions to retain and attract excellent early-career researchers from all disciplines and support their development towards becoming research leaders of the future.
- To fund excellent research with potential impact across all disciplines.
- To contribute to further development of the Higher Education system through knowledge creation, training, and skills development.
- To support early-career researchers in securing non-Exchequer funding and develop their network within the European Research Area.

[1] https://www.sfi.ie/strategy/

- To increase the representation of women in the higher education sector and promote alignment with international policies including research assessment, Open Science and equality, diversity and inclusion.
- To contribute to a cohesive research ecosystem in Ireland and support SFI and the IRC in achieving their strategic objectives, as described in the strategic plan for each agency.

The SFI-IRC Pathway programme will be coordinated through the SFI Grants and Awards management system, SESAME. The programme will have 2 streams, determined by the primary research discipline. The programme stream will determine the primary expertise of the reviewer pool and applicants should apply to either the **Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics**-led (STEM-led) or **Arts, Humanities or Social Sciences-**led (AHSS-led) stream of the programme. Interdisciplinary proposals are welcomed, and consideration will be given to ensure an appropriate panel of reviewers. SFI and the IRC reserve the right to move the application to another stream if appropriate.

Research Bodies will be permitted to put forward a maximum of **16 candidates to the STEM-led stream** and a maximum of **eight candidates to the AHSS-led stream**. SFI and the IRC are aware of the need to address gender imbalance in academia and are supportive of the **Athena SWAN**[2] initiative, which is endorsed by Irish Research Bodies. In recognition of this, **a maximum of eight applications to the STEM-led stream, out of the 16 permitted from each eligible research body, can be submitted by men.** Similarly**, a maximum of four applications to the AHSS-led stream, out of the eight permitted from each eligible research body, can be submitted by men** (see Section 3.1 and the FAQs for further details). Upon submission to SFI and the IRC, all applications will be treated equally regardless of the gender of the applicant.

SFI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and IRC Gender Strategy

As described in SFI's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy[3] and the Gender Strategy of the IRC,[4] each agency is committed to increasing the number of grants held by women. Towards achieving this goal, the SFI-IRC Pathway programme will encourage eligible research bodies to seek applications from excellent women. To this end, **each research body may nominate a maximum of eight applications (out of a possible 16) to the STEM-led stream and a maximum of four applications (out of a possible 8) to the AHSS-led stream, from men.** Upon submission to SFI and the IRC, all applications will be treated equally regardless of the gender of the applicant.

For the purpose of this Pathway Programme Call, SFI and the IRC have decided to continue with the objective of increasing the representation of women in the higher education sector. Therefore, the capped (or quota) approach previously deployed, which has proven to be successful in meeting this objective, has been retained for this Call. Both SFI and the IRC acknowledge the limitations of focusing on gender in the binary, particularly in the context of meeting the needs of the community and meeting those objectives described in SFI's External EDI Strategy, which aims to be a key driver of an inclusive research culture, lead in minimising barriers, and ensure that its investment reflects the input of researchers that are representative of society, and thus the outputs are relevant to society.

As such, applicants may elect to nominate that they identify with another gender. This will be facilitated at the point the applicant/Research Body makes a submission in SESAME. This gender data, in aggregate, will inform the diversity of the applicant group. It will help to inform future iterations of this and similar programme calls. The data gathered will also inform how we can best improve the representation of other Historically Underserved Communities, including individuals from under-

[2] http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/
[3] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/
[4] https://research.ie/assets/uploads/2013/01/irish_research_council_gender_action_plan_2013_-2020.pdf

represented genders, in our portfolio of grants awarded. Consultations will be undertaken with the community as we adapt the gender quotas and tie breaker approaches to ensure they are fit for purpose and providing the supports anticipated.

Women are strongly encouraged to apply to this funding call. Details on SFI's data on application submission and success rates by gender can be found on the SFI website.[5] The IRC has recently published a Review of its first Gender Strategy and Action Plan assessing the impact of its gender-related policies and practices to date.

Furthermore, SFI and the IRC also aim to increase awareness of the sex and gender dimension in research, by requesting that researchers demonstrate that they have considered any potential biological sex and/or socio-cultural gender aspects in their proposed research programme.

SFI and the IRC are signatories to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA),[6] and as such are aligning their review and evaluation processes with DORA principles. In January 2022, SFI reinforced its existing commitment to its core principles by joining DORA as a member.[7] To this end, all types of research output are recognised, and the agencies are committed to assessing the quality and impact of research through means other than journal-based metrics and research-performance-based metrics such as impact factors and h-indices. In the spirit of supporting open research, SFI[8,9] and the IRC[10] also recognise commitments to making data and other types of research, open and accessible. SFI and the IRC are also signatories to Ireland's National Action Plan for Open Research 2022-2030.[11] To complement these activities and further reinforce SFI and the IRC's commitment to the overarching objectives of the Narrative CV, during 2022, SFI and the IRC became signatories to the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment[12] and thus became members of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).[13]

2 Programme Details

2.1 Funding

The SFI-IRC Pathway programme provides up to **€495,000** total direct costs over a four-year term. The budget requested should include the applicant's salary, to which the funding agency will contribute over the duration of the grant, the fees and stipend of the PhD student and costs for materials and consumables, equipment, and travel (see Section 3.8 for more details).

2.2 Programme Remit

The programme welcomes research proposals from any discipline within the STEM or AHSS domains. Applications of an interdisciplinary nature that draw together insights and approaches from one or more research disciplines will also be welcomed.

[5] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/
[6] https://sfdora.org/read/
[7] Contributor level membership
[8] https://www.coalition-s.org/
[9] https://www.sfi.ie/research-news/news/open-access-policy/
[10] https://research.ie/assets/uploads/2017/05/irc_open_access_policy_final_1.pdf
[11] National Action Plan | National Open Research Forum (norf.ie)
[12] https://coara.eu/app/uploads/2022/09/2022_07_19_rra_agreement_final.pdf
[13] https://coara.eu/

Applicants will **not** be asked to select a National Research Prioritisation area but will be required to select a primary and secondary research area relevant to their research discipline. These will assist SFI and the IRC in identifying appropriate reviewers.

2.3 Co-Funding Partnerships

Met Éireann, Environmental Protection Agency and Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland

The SFI-IRC Pathway programme includes a co-funding partnership with the Met Éireann, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). The partnership between SFI, IRC and the co-funders is based on alignments to research topics that are of particular significance to the partners' research objectives (see details below).

Following the submission of proposals, SFI and the IRC will reach agreement with the co-funding partners on which proposals may be supported through the partnership. All applications that potentially align to the research topics outlined by the co-funders below will be considered for support under this partnership. There is no requirement for applicants to indicate specifically that funding through the partnership is sought. Partnership and non-partnership applications to this call will be treated the same with respect to the review process.

Met Éireann	The overall aim of the SFI-IRC-Met Éireann Partnership for the Pathways Programme is to co-fund impactful research into weather and climate to develop services in support of the protection of life and property and the promotion of wider societal and economic wellbeing. Research priority areas of strategic interest include: • Applications of AI, Machine Learning, Data Analytics to weather & climate services; • Climate services; • Climate modelling; • Specialised weather & climate research, e.g. impact, satellite, marine-, agri-meteorology; • Weather & climate monitoring and observing systems and instrumentation; • Numerical Weather Predication (NWP) modelling; • General forecasting & flood forecasting; • Dissemination & communication of weather & climate information; • Perception & interpretation of weather & climate information;

	• Decision making & emergency management in extreme weather events; • Socio-economic impact of weather & climate information; • Multi-hazard early warning system.
	The aim of the SFI-IRC-EPA Partnership for the Pathways Programme is to co-fund research that will *contribute to addressing climate change, support our transition to a sustainable society,* and protect and improve our natural environment and human health. The remit areas of the SFI-IRC-EPA Partnership are listed below: • **Addressing climate change evidence needs**: Climate change is already having an impact in Ireland and strong mitigation and adaptation measures are needed. Research is essential in providing the evidence necessary to improve our knowledge systems and inform policy decisions that will advance our ambitions to be carbon neutral and resilient to climate disruption. • **Facilitating a green and circular economy**: Environmental and sustainability challenges are inextricably linked to economic activities and lifestyles. Research is needed to support the mainstreaming of sustainable management of natural resources and waste, unlock the potential of the circular and bio-economies, and boost competitiveness through resource efficiency and deployment of innovative technologies and solutions. **Delivering a healthy environment:** A clean, vibrant and safe environment is a prerequisite for good health and wellbeing. Environmental degradation, pollution, as well as known and emerging substances of concern threaten our health and that of our supporting ecosystems. Research will advance our understanding of environmental risks and benefits for our health, as well as identifying appropriate policy and behavioural responses. • **Protecting and restoring our natural environment**: Our natural environment provides us with clean air and water, food and the raw materials to sustain us and our economy. Research is required to inform and

	support a cross-sectoral approach to managing our natural environment and for the development of policies relating to the regulation of emissions and activities, and the protection of our water, land and ecosystems.
	SEAI is Ireland's national sustainable energy authority. The co-funding partnership with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland aims to support excellent scientific research that will contribute to Ireland's transition to a clean and secure energy future. Successful grants under the SFI-IRC-SEAI Partnership are expected to: • accelerate the development and deployment in the Irish marketplace of competitive energy-related products, processes and systems • support solutions that enable technical and other barriers to energy market uptake to be overcome • grow Ireland's national capacity to access, develop and apply international class R&D • provide guidance and support to policymakers and public bodies through results, outcomes and learning from supported projects. The partnership between SEAI, SFI and the IRC aims to support excellent scientific research that will contribute to Ireland's transition to a clean and secure energy future, aligning with research topics that are of particular relevance to SEAI: • Wind Energy • Smart buildings • Decarbonising heat • Smart Grids • Transport • Offshore / Ocean • Energy efficiency • Sustainable energy behaviours • Emerging technologies

By submitting an application to the SFI-IRC Pathway programme, an applicant is accepting that SFI and the IRC have the right to share information (including the application and any post-award reports

submitted to the agencies) with existing and potential co-funding partners, on a confidential basis, without the need to obtain any further consents from such applicants.

2.4 State Aid and SFI Grant Funding

In line with SFI's Grant Conditions (inclusive of SFI's General Terms and Conditions,[14] Letters of Offer and SFI policy documents[15]), all SFI funding granted is subject to, and must be compliant with, State aid legislation based on Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).[16]

Namely, research activities undertaken as part of a Grant awarded under the SFI-IRC Pathway programme, and agreed to subject to SFI's Grant Conditions, must be "non-economic" in nature and be designed to ensure that any funding received does not, directly or indirectly, give rise to the granting of State aid.

Where an application for funding involves an 'undertaking'[17] or industry party, recipients of Grant funding under the SFI-IRC Pathway programme are required to demonstrate compliance with the conditions of "effective collaboration" and the conditions relating to the allocation between the parties of the results and/or intellectual property rights arising from the collaboration as per the 2022 Framework for State aid for research, development and innovation (2022/C 414/01) (the "Framework").[18] SFI has set out guidance to support how the programme of research or project is developed and undertaken in accordance with these conditions. See 'Guidance on State aid for applicants to, and recipients of, SFI Grant funding' for further information.[19] Where a proposed programme of research activities involves a collaboration with an industry party or "undertaking",[20] for all or part of the term of the Grant, applicants must demonstrate compliance with the conditions of "effective collaboration" and complete an "Industry Collaboration Form" (ICF). The ICF is used to assist applicants in defining the relationship with the relevant industry partners in order to comply with the conditions of "effective collaboration".

SFI requires that the ICF is completed and returned to SFI on or before the date that the Collaborative Research (or Intellectual Property Rights) Agreement has been 'agreed' with, or signed by, the relevant partner(s). A copy of each CRA arising from the Grant must be held on file by the relevant Research Body. SFI may request a copy of the signed CRA to be provided (as advised in the Grant Terms and Conditions) and held on file by SFI for audit purposes. Further information on the role of the CRA and SFI's ex-post State aid verification checks (i.e., on-going checks after the granting of funds / partial funds) can be found in 'Guidance on State aid for applicants to, and recipients of, SFI Grant funding' on the SFI website.[21] The ICF and related guidance, inclusive of an FAQ document, can be found on the SFI website.[22] Applicants are advised to seek independent legal advice in advance of applying to SFI for funding where further clarification is sought.

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[14] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/sfi-general-terms-and-conditions/
[15] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/
[16] Commission Notice on the notion of State aid as referred to in Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union TABLE OF CONTENTS (europa.eu)
[17] The concept of an "undertaking" under EU competition law rules is an entity that is engaged in an "economic activity" regardless of its legal status or the way that it is financed. An activity is economic in nature when it involves offering goods or services on a market.
[18] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2022.414.01.0001.01.ENG
[19] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/state-aid
[20] The concept of an "undertaking" under EU competition law rules is an entity that is engaged in an "economic activity" regardless of its legal status or the way that it is financed. An activity is economic in nature when it involves offering goods or services on a market.
[21] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/state-aid/State-Aid-Guidance.pdf
[22] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/state-aid

2.5 Definitions of Applicant, Mentor and Collaborator

2.5.1 Applicant

The Applicant must have held a PhD or equivalent qualification[23] for at least two years at proposal submission. The official date of a PhD is defined as the year that the degree was conferred (i.e., the year printed on the official PhD certificate). The number of years is determined by calendar year (e.g., **only individuals with an official conferral date of 2022 or earlier may apply to the SFI-IRC Pathway programme 2024 Call**).

The Applicant will be responsible for the research direction of the research programme, the supervision of the PhD student and the submission of reports to SFI or the IRC as appropriate. **The Applicant has primary responsibility for carrying out the research within the funding limits awarded and in accordance with the terms and conditions of the funding agency.[24] The Applicant will serve as the primary point of contact on the grant during the review process and, if successful, during the course of the grant.**

2.5.2 Mentor

The Mentor will be an established researcher within the research body who will give advice and provide laboratory space (where applicable) and related infrastructure to both the applicant and the PhD student. The Mentor will also take the role of co-supervisor for the PhD student; however, it is the Applicant who will act as the primary supervisor. The Mentor does not play a supervisory or presiding role to the applicant but acts as an advisor and host. The Mentor will work with the applicant to ensure that all fiduciary and ethical approval aspects, where relevant, of the grant are managed successfully.

2.5.3 Collaborators

An **Academic** Collaborator is an individual working in an academic institution who is committed to providing a valuable intellectual and/or technical contribution to the proposed research. As appropriate, Academic Collaborator(s) based in an eligible research body within the Republic of Ireland may receive funding through the grant (see the budget section for details), but the funding allocated should reflect the supporting role that such Collaborator(s) are expected to play in the research programme. CVs **must** be provided for Academic Collaborators.

Collaborators in industry, public bodies, civil society / non-governmental organisations, and other entities can be included in the application where relevant. CVs should be provided and failure to do so may disadvantage an application during the review process. Each collaborator **must** provide a letter of support with the grant application, and this must clearly outline the role of that collaborator in the programme of research proposed. Applicants who have included an Industry Collaborator should consider whether they are required to complete an Industry Collaboration Form, as described in Section 2.4.

The role of any Collaborators must also be referenced in the main body of the research proposal (for example: Will the Collaborators be supplying samples, data, etc.? Will the Collaborators be providing training in techniques or the use of equipment? Will the Collaborators directly participate in specific projects? Will Collaborators be acting in a purely advisory capacity?). Please see Section 3.10 for

[23] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/eligibility-related-information/PHD-equivalence-policy_September_2018.pdf

[24] SFI Grant Conditions will apply to awards funded by SFI and IRC Terms and Conditions will apply to awards funded by IRC

details on letters of support and Section 2.4 on State aid and SFI Grant funding where an Industry Collaborator is involved.

2.6 Applicant Profile

The SFI-IRC Pathway Programme is targeted towards talented postdoctoral researchers who are poised to transition to an independent research career. As such, the applicant should demonstrate a proven record of research accomplishments appropriate to their research field and career stage. Reviewers will be asked to consider the quality of the applicant's track record in the context of an applicant's research-active years. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Publications in major international peer-reviewed journals;
- Research monograph(s) and any translations thereof;
- Other forms of peer-reviewed recognition of achievement;
- Publication of datasets, software, code;
- Innovation and commercialisation activities (e.g., patents, licenses, novel assays and reagents);
- Participation in consortia;
- Invited presentations to internationally established conferences; and/or
- International advanced schools.

2.7 Applicant Requirements

SFI-IRC Pathway grants are intended to be the primary source of funding for the grant holders and as such the expected time commitment to the research supported through this grant should represent the majority of the time of the grant holder. SFI and the IRC understand that grant holders will actively seek further funding for their research. It is expected that grant holders will dedicate almost all of their time to the SFI-IRC Pathway programme in the first year. In cases where further funding has been obtained, the expectation of the lead agency is that the awardee's commitment to the SFI-IRC Pathway grant should never drop below 50%. The lead agency must be notified of any other grants won by the applicant and, where necessary, reserves the right to approve any expected changes to the applicant's time commitments. **Holders of SFI-IRC Pathway grants are not permitted to apply to any SFI or IRC programmes during the first 12 months of the grant unless specifically indicated in the relevant call documentation that it is permissible to do so**.[25] Potential applicants are advised to contact the relevant funder in advance of submission to ensure eligibility.

2.8 Eligibility Criteria of Applicant

The SFI-IRC Pathway Programme is targeted towards talented postdoctoral researchers who are poised to transition to an independent research career. To this end, applicants must:

- have held a PhD or equivalent qualification for at least two years at proposal submission.[26]
- not be considered an independent investigator.

[25] Grant holders participation as a proposed supervisor in an application to Irish Research Council postgraduate programmes (GOI, EPS, EBP) will be permitted.

[26] *The official date of a PhD is defined as the year that the degree was conferred (i.e., the year printed on the official PhD certificate). The number of years is determined by calendar year (e.g., only individuals with an official date of 2022 or earlier are eligible to apply to the SFI-IRC Pathway programme 2024 Call). There is no upper limit for PhD duration.*

- not hold, or have held, an academic contract (e.g., lecturer, assistant professor, professor, or similar) of greater than, or equal to, 36 months in duration.[27] Teaching-only academic contracts greater than or equal to 36 months in duration are permitted.
- not hold, or have held, a significant peer-reviewed, independent research grant, or a grant providing similar support to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme. Personal grants, including student, postdoctoral or individual fellowships, travel grants, and bursaries are permissible.
- have identified a mentor, who will give advice, co-supervise the PhD student and provide access to laboratory space (where relevant) and related infrastructure for the duration of the grant.

Applicants currently under active review by SFI or the IRC as either Principal Investigator (PI) or co-Principal Investigator (co-PI) under certain programmes are not entitled to apply to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme. These programmes include, but are not limited to: IRC COALESCE, SFI Frontiers for the Future, SFI Research Centres and Spokes programmes. Please contact pathway@sfi.ie in advance of applying to discuss your eligibility for this call where you are currently under review for another SFI or IRC programme.

In addition, researchers who have been confirmed as independent investigators by a research body (e.g., Funded Investigators in SFI Research Centres) are not eligible to apply.

Where an applicant fails to meet the eligibility criteria outlined above, the application will be deemed ineligible and will not be accepted for review. Where uncertain, potential applicants are advised to contact their host research office, prior to contacting SFI, in advance of submission to ensure eligibility.

2.9 Research Body Requirements

The Research Body must confirm that the applicant meets the above criteria prior to the submission of a candidate list and must also provide assurance that the space and infrastructure to carry out the proposed research are available for the duration of the grant. Please see Section 3.10 for more information.

SFI[28] and the IRC have stringent requirements for the reporting by awardees on the grants that they make. Failure to satisfactorily complete reporting requirements on current or historic grants may result in an applicant being deemed ineligible for the SFI-IRC Pathway programme.

[27] *Applicants who hold, or have held, academic positions will be required to articulate why they do not consider that these positions represent research independence in their statement of eligibility and career development.*
[28] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/sfi-general-terms-and-conditions/

2.10 Eligibility of Research Body

The Research Body of the applicant is the body responsible for the overall financial and administrative co-ordination of research programmes supported by funding from SFI or the IRC. Details of Eligible Research Bodies are available on the SFI[29] and IRC[30] websites.

3 Application Procedure

3.1 Nomination of Candidates by Research Bodies

The research offices of potential host research bodies will be expected to instigate a procedure to select candidates for this call. Those wishing to apply to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 call should first contact their intended host research body, informing the Research Office about their identity and credentials, the identity of their chosen mentor, and an outline of their intended research plan. Research Bodies are asked to ensure consistent support is provided to applicants on drafting their proposals, particularly in areas such as impact and budget management and preparation.

In selecting excellent candidates, research bodies should consider the evaluation criteria described in the call document. Research bodies are **expected to plan for the integration of the awardees into established staff positions beyond the duration of this** grant and therefore may also consider the strategic vision of the research body and its plans for the retention and development of internationally competitive faculty and research leaders.

Eligible research bodies may nominate a maximum of **16 candidates to the STEM-led stream** and a maximum of **eight candidates to the AHSS-led stream**. Nominated candidates will then be invited to submit a Full Proposal. **No more than eight of the 16 STEM-led, and four of the eight AHSS-led candidates may be men**. See FAQs for further details.

Eligible research bodies should submit the names and genders of their approved candidates, provisional titles, primary/secondary research areas, keywords, and abstracts for their applications. Should a nominated candidate withdraw from the process prior to the full proposal deadline, the research body may nominate a replacement. The maximum numbers with respect to gender must be maintained, the agencies must be notified of the change and the full proposal must be submitted through SESAME in advance of the full proposal deadline. Any proposals submitted by applicants not featured in this document, or replacements accepted by SFI and the IRC, **will be deemed ineligible and not reviewed**.

To provide useful information and assist SFI and the IRC with future calls, research offices will also be asked to submit aggregated details of **all** applications they received, including the primary and secondary research areas and gender of the applicant, along with a description of the selection process that was undertaken to select their nominated candidates. Consideration should be given to the suitability of the candidates, research body strategy, and strategic talent management.

[29] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/eligibility-related-information/
[30] https://research.ie/funding/eligible-higher-education-institutions-and-research-performing-organisations/

Please note that Research Bodies must provide the agencies with their list of approved applicants by 13:00 on the 20th February 2024. The document should be sent by email to pathway@sfi.ie, and may nominate a maximum of 16 STEM-led and eight AHSS-led applications. No more than eight of the 16 STEM-led, and four of the eight AHSS-led, nominated applications may be from men. If the nominated list breaches the prescribed limits for either stream, all applications from that institution, under the infringed stream, will be deemed ineligible.

Following successful selection of candidates by the associated host research body, approved candidates will be required to submit a proposal. Full details of the information required are provided in the following section. **Proposals must be submitted to SFI online through SESAME by the Research Office of the applicant's research body before the call deadline.**

Only applicants that submit a proposal in the format described above, and before the deadline of 10th April 2024 at 13:00, will be eligible.

Only proposals submitted by applicants and approved in advance by their research body will be eligible for this call. Any other submitted proposals will not be reviewed.

3.2 Submission

Proposals will only be accepted through SESAME, SFI's grants and awards management system.

The SFI-IRC Pathway programme is the subject of a Data Sharing Agreement, and therefore by submitting an application to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme an applicant is accepting that SFI has the right to share information (including the application and any post-award reports submitted to SFI) with the IRC and existing and potential co-funding partners, on a confidential basis, without the need to obtain any further consents from such applicants.

Access to SESAME is controlled by staff at the Research Office of your host Research Body. Please follow your internal organisational process to request this access. Once you have been registered by your research office, **you will receive an email** containing the following:

1. Username
2. Password
3. SFI PIN number
4. SESAME website address

Your **username** and **password** are needed to log in to SESAME. This PIN number is also stored in your **contact profile** on SESAME.

SESAME is accessed using the internet; no additional software needs to be installed. You can access SESAME online from any location. SESAME supports Internet Explorer, Chrome and Firefox. With Mac we recommend that you use either Firefox or Chrome. The configuration of some browsers and internet infrastructure (popup blockers, firewalls, etc.) can restrict an individual's access to the internet and as a result, to the SESAME system. If you are having any such difficulties, please contact your organisation's internal IT support team.

The SESAME system is accessed here: https://grants.sfi.ie

Please see the SESAME Researcher User Guide[31] for more detailed information.

Once submitted by the host research body to SFI through SESAME, **an application cannot be withdrawn and subsequently modified for resubmission in the same call, regardless of the date of submission.**

Proposals must be endorsed and submitted online through SESAME to SFI by the Research Office of the Applicant's research body by 10th April 2024 at 13:00 Dublin local time.

Applicants should note that their research body may have internal deadlines before this date that must be adhered to.

Proposal submission requirements:

- **All text in uploaded PDFs** should be provided in Calibri font or similar, with minimum font size of 11, and at least single-line spacing as well as a minimum margin size of 2.5cm. Text in diagrams may be in any clearly legible font.
- Uploads in SESAME must be submitted in **Adobe or Microsoft PDF format only**. Please ensure to use unencrypted, non-password-protected PDFs with the copying function disabled, developed using either Adobe or Microsoft Word PDF convertor software only.
- The number of pages in uploads must not exceed the specifications for any given section. **Applications that do not comply with these requirements will be deemed ineligible and will be returned without review**.
- Appendices or other unsolicited documentation are not permitted. **Applications that include such unsolicited documentation will be returned without review.**
- File sizes of attachments should be **less than 5MB**.
- Hyperlinks and URLs are only allowed when specifically noted in call documents or SESAME guidance/instructions. The use of hyperlinks is typically limited to citing information already in the public domain, which is non-critical to the evaluation of the proposal. Hyperlinks and URLs may not be used to provide additional information, which would be necessary for application review, and as a means of circumventing page limits. Reviewers are not obligated to view linked sites and are cautioned that they should not directly access a website (unless the link to the site was specifically requested in application instructions). When allowed, you must reference the actual URL text such that it appears on the page, for example, in brackets or in a footnote, rather than embedding the URL in a specific word or phrase.
- Applicants must complete all mandatory SESAME profile fields (marked in red) before submitting an application. It is not possible to submit an application without this information.

Applications not adhering to these requirements, or with incomplete content, will be deemed ineligible and will not be accepted for review, regardless of the date of submission.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that eligible proposals are received by SFI before the deadline indicated. In order to safeguard against ineligibility, applicants are reminded to adhere rigorously to the guidelines in the call documentation and to review the proposal document prior to submission in SESAME.

Please note that proposal eligibility checks will be completed by SFI and IRC staff. Applications cannot be withdrawn and subsequently modified for re-submission in the same call.

[31] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/award-management-system/

3.3 ORCID ID

ORCID[32] provides a unique identifier for all researchers, which can then be linked to their different research works across different platforms. There are a number of benefits to creating an ORCID iD, which include the following:

- ORCID allows you to pull information from different platforms, creating a centralised reference to your different works (e.g., publications, patents, awards) in one location using a single sign in.
- Your ORCID iD is a unique identifier, which distinguishes you from other researchers with a similar name.
- Using the ORCID iD helps to make your research works more visible to funders and publishers. You are able to build a complete picture of your research in one location.

As part of the integration of SESAME with ORCID, it is possible for researchers to import publication data from ORCID directly into their SESAME Research Profile. Applicants are **required** to link their SESAME Research Profiles to an ORCID iD **before an application can be submitted**.

3.4 Proposal Summary

Please populate the following required proposal sections on SESAME, as outlined below.

- **Proposal Title (max. 30 words)**
  The Research Proposal title should clearly convey the nature of the research to be undertaken and should not contain confidential details, given that the titles of funded proposals are published by SFI and the IRC.

- **Duration of Grant Requested**
  All SFI-IRC Pathway grants are supported for a period of 48 months.

- **Total Funding Request (in €)**
  This figure will be populated from the requested budget submitted.

- **Resubmission Statement**
  Applicants must declare whether a new submission relates to a previous unsuccessful application to any SFI or IRC scheme. If the application is a resubmission, a statement referencing the previous application and explaining the differences must be provided and must make reference to reviewer comments where relevant. This statement will assist SFI and IRC Staff in the assessment of the eligibility of a revised application and will not be shared with reviewers. See SFI's Resubmission Policy for further details.[33]

- **Research Area (Primary)**
  Applicants should select a primary research area from the drop-down menu, which best describes the proposed research. This will assist SFI and the IRC in identifying appropriate reviewers.

- **Research Area (Secondary)**
  Applicants should select a secondary research area from the drop-down menu, which in combination with the primary research area already selected, best describes the proposed research. This will assist SFI and the IRC in identifying appropriate reviewers.

[32] http://orcid.org/
[33] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/eligibility-related-information/

- **Alignment to Programme Remit (max. 250 words)**
  Applicants should describe how the application is within the programme remit as described in section 2.2. **This statement will not be shared with reviewers**.

3.5 Lead Applicant Details

- **Location of Applicant at time of Submission**
  Applicants must insert the country in which they are employed at the time of submission.

- **Time Commitment to Grant**
  Indicate the Lead Applicant's time commitment to the proposed research project as a percentage of their total working time. See Section 2.7 for SFI and the IRC's expectations concerning the time commitment required.

- **Lead Applicant Narrative CV (Upload)**
  A CV of the Lead Applicant, using the template provided in the Downloads section of the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme website,[34] must be completed and uploaded **(upload; max. 5 pages). Please click on "Save Draft" after upload.** The current template allows for the provision of additional information such as that relating to periods of leave from research, where relevant. **Also, reference to metrics such as journal impact factors, h-indices, and total numbers of publications are not permitted. If these metrics are included, they will be redacted prior to expert review.**

  Failure to use this template may result in an application being deemed ineligible.

- **Statement of Eligibility and Career Development Plan (max. 750 words)**

  Applicants must clearly articulate why they do not consider themselves as independent investigators and how an SFI-IRC Pathway grant will support them in building an independent research career.

  Applicants who have been awarded grants or fellowships must address how these do not represent significant, independent research grants or similar support to that offered by the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme.

  Applicants who hold, or have held, academic positions should articulate why they do not consider that these positions represent research independence.

  Applicants should state why the aims of this grant will be beneficial at this stage in their career, articulate how they intend to build an independent research career through this grant, and how the grant will help them to reach their defined goals.

- **Supervisory Experience**
  Provide summary information on supervisory experience to date for the Lead Applicant.

[34] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/pathway/

- **Research Funding History**

    - The Lead Applicant must provide a report on expired, current and pending funding. Funding details may be added from the applicant's existing SESAME profile or can be created in this section.

    - If the applicant is a Collaborator on a research project, the grant should not be included here; only grants where the applicant is either the Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator should be listed.

    - The applicant should include details of any financial support pending or received, over the previous ten years. This should include competitive research funding received from funding agencies (international and national), charities, industry, etc.

    - The applicant must include details of any financial support currently provided, or currently being sought. Applicants must detail the total funding allocated to the grant and **the amount of this funding that is allocated to the Applicant. SFI and the IRC will not support research currently being funded through another source.**

    - For each current and pending grant listed, the applicant should provide a brief description of the research. Applicants must also indicate their time commitment to these other projects, as a percentage of their total working time.

    - For pending grants, please include the expected decision date in the description box.

    - Please complete the requested details for each expired, current, or pending financial support. Fields coloured red are mandatory. Certain field labels are underlined and contain further information concerning the details that are required; hover the mouse pointer over these labels to view this information.

    - The portion of research funding claimed in an applicant's name must be an accurate and fair reflection of their responsibility in the projects listed and will be verifiable as such. SFI and the IRC may conduct audits to verify such claims and reserves the right to reject proposals where the above principle of proportionality is not observed.

    - **This section of the proposal will support SFI and the IRC in determining the eligibility of the applicant** and will also be reviewed as part of the applicant's track record.

Research funding may be added directly to the application or added from the applicant's profile (see the SESAME Researcher User Guide).[35] If this section is left blank it will indicate that the applicant has NO expired, current or pending funding.

Please ensure that research funding added to the profile of the Lead Applicant has been included in the application via SESAME.

The applicant should complete the textbox detailing potential overlap between current and pending funding and the proposed research in this application, where relevant. For each current and pending

[35] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/award-management-system/

grant listed above, the applicant must clearly indicate any overlap with this application, based on the methodologies being employed and the stated objectives of the funded project(s).

3.6 Collaborator and Mentor Details

- **Addition of Collaborators**

Applicants can include Collaborators as part of their SFI-IRC Pathway Programme application. It is expected that the number of collaborators is kept to a minimum and that their role within the research programme is **clearly defined**. Include the name, contact information and other requested details of Collaborator(s), if any. Please see Section 2.5 for further information on the role of Collaborators. Once details regarding the name and institution of the Collaborator have been added and saved, which is achieved by clicking on the "Save Draft" button at the bottom of the application form, it will be possible to upload the Collaborator CV (**maximum of two pages**) by clicking on the appropriate button. Please see Section 2.4 on State aid and SFI Grant funding where an Industry Collaborator is involved.

CVs (max. 2 pages) must be uploaded for all Academic Collaborators. CVs may also be provided for other Collaborators, where relevant. Where a non-academic collaborator has been included, failure to provide a supporting CV may disadvantage an application during the review process. The use of a template is not mandatory for Collaborator CVs, however we recommend that the Narrative Collaborator CV template available on the programme webpage is used.[36] **References to metrics such as journal impact factors, h-indices and total numbers of publications are not permitted. If these metrics are included, they will be redacted prior to expert review.**

Collaborator letters of support **must** be provided; further details are provided in Section 3.10 of this document.

- **Addition of a Mentor**

Information about the Mentor must be included in this section. Clicking on the "Add" button will open a form into which details about the Mentor should be completed. Ensure that "Mentor" is selected in the 'Collaborator Type' drop-down menu. Only one Mentor may be assigned in the proposal. Once details regarding the name and institution of the Mentor have been added and saved, which is achieved by clicking on the "Save Draft" button at the bottom of the application form, it will be possible to upload the Mentor's CV **(maximum of two pages)** by clicking on the appropriate button.

CVs (max. 2 pages) for Mentors **must** be uploaded. The use of a template is not mandatory for the Mentor or Collaborator CVs, however we suggest that the Narrative Collaborator CV template available on the programme webpage is used.[36] **References to metrics such as journal impact factors, h-indices and total numbers of publications are not permitted. If these metrics are included, they will be redacted prior to expert review.**

Mentor letters of support **must** be provided; at proposal stage – further details are provided in Section 3.10 of this document.

3.7 Main Body of Proposal

The following section outlines the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme proposal requirements.

[36] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/pathway/

1. **Keywords (max. 15)**

These should be descriptors that best characterise the proposed research.

2. **Abstract (max. 200 words)**

This should be a succinct and accurate summary of the proposed work when separated from the application.

3. **Lay Abstract (max. 100 words)**

This should be a succinct and accurate summary in lay, non-technical language of the proposed work when separated from the application.

4. **Ethical Issues**
    - **Use of Animals**

    Applicants must indicate whether animals are to be involved in any of the research planned. Further details can be found on the SFI Ethical Policies webpage.[37]

    - **Research Involving Human Participants, Biological Material or Identifiable Data**

    Applicants must complete the questionnaire indicating whether their research programme will involve human participants, human biological material or the use of identifiable (or potentially identifiable) human data. Further details can be found on the SFI Ethical Policies webpage.[29] Clinical trials and investigations requiring approval by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) will not be permitted through the SFI-IRC Pathway programme.

5. **Sex and Gender Dimension in Research Statement (max. 1000 words)**

In line with international best practice and aligned with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy of SFI[38] and the Gender Strategy of the IRC,[39] all applicants must complete a statement articulating the consideration of biological sex and/or social gender variables in their research programme. Applicants must consider how the sex and/or gender dimension impacts your research. Please consult the Guidance for Applicants on Ethical and Scientific Issues[37] for resources on how to address the sex and/or gender dimension of research in your grant.

Do not include information on how you have addressed gender equality, diversity and inclusion in your research team/environment; this should be addressed in Section 1B of your CV, should you choose to highlight this.

To complete this section, please consider the following questions:

1. Is sex as a biological variable taken into account in the research design, methods, analysis and interpretation, and/or dissemination of findings?
2. Is gender as a socio-cultural factor taken into account in the research design, methods, analysis and interpretation, and/or dissemination of findings?

If the answer is yes, please describe how sex and/or gender considerations will be integrated into your research proposal. If no, please explain why sex and/or gender are not applicable to your research proposal.

[37] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/ethical-and-scientific-issues/
[38] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/
[39] https://research.ie/assets/uploads/2018/08/04108-IRC-Gender-flyer-proof03-single.pdf

6. **Research Programme (upload; max. 8 pages)**

Applicants are requested to **provide sufficient detail** for peer reviewers to comment on the quality of the proposed ideas. It should be noted that a lack of appropriate and sufficient detail within the research programme is a recurring issue raised by reviewers.

The following points should be considered when describing the proposed research:

- Describe clearly and concisely **the specific aims and objectives** of the proposal. These aims should be coherent, well-planned and should be linked with real deliverables.
- Explain the **background** and **significance** of the problem – does the study address an important research problem? How and why is the proposed work important for the field? What is the current state of the art in the area? Describe and explain how the proposed work, if successful, will advance the state of the art. The background section should reference the state of the art in this research field.
- Are the concepts described **novel**? Ensure that the novelty of the approach is clearly explained, again with reference to the state of the art.
- The **methodology** of the proposed programme should be well developed, and how this proposed methodology advances the current state of the art should be described in detail. Is the proposed approach (including the competencies and activities of the team members) feasible and realistic?

The application should also include:

- **Appropriate timelines, milestones** and **expected outputs** for the proposed research (e.g., a Gantt chart), and the **roles of the Applicant, PhD student** and **Collaborators** in the work programme need to be **clearly described**.
- Relevant **preliminary data**, if available, which may either take the form of (a) supporting reference(s) from the applicants' previous research, or (b) a summary of results where the data has yet to be published. In the latter case, this should be included within the research programme as evidence that the applicant has a track record in the field of the proposed research.

7. **References (upload; max. 1 page)**
   Appropriate references and citations for the proposed research must be provided in a separate PDF document. A one-page limit is permitted for uploaded references.

8. **Data Management Plan (upload; max. 2 pages)**
   Good data governance and stewardship are key components of good research practice. Applicants to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme are required to provide a short (2-page) Data Management Plan (DMP) as part of their full proposal application. In preparing this plan, consideration should be given to SFI's Guidance on Data Management Plans[40] and the IRC's guide for the preparation of Data Management Plans.[41] A DMP is a living document, which details the procedures for careful handling of data and other research outputs. A DMP follows

[40] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/open-research/SFI-DMP-Guidance-FINAL-140322.pdf
[41] https://research.ie/assets/uploads/2017/05/Data-Management-Plans-Tips-Advice.pdf

the data through the lifecycle of the programme of research,[42] from collection to analysis and interpretation, sharing and dissemination, and long-term storage.

Data Management Plan Requirements

DMPs will be evaluated by reviewers to ensure that they contain sufficient information on practices and standards as guided below; this assessment will be incorporated into the overall scoring criteria for the Research Programme section of the application. Although practices and standards vary across disciplines, SFI and the IRC recommend the use of Science Europe DMP templates and guidelines.[43] Each DMP should include the following as appropriate to the programme or project:[44]

1. Data description and collection or re-use of existing data
2. Documentation and data quality
3. Storage and backup during the research process
4. Legal and ethical requirements, codes of conduct
5. Data sharing and long-term preservation
6. Data management responsibilities and resources including institutional or project-specific resources dedicated to managing data and ensuring adherence with the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Re-usable).

9. Impact Statement (upload; max. 2 pages)

Each year the Irish Government spends in the region of €750M on research, training and development. As with all public spending, it is necessary to demonstrate and articulate the potential impact and benefits of research. Impact embraces the diverse ways in which research-related knowledge and skills benefit individuals, organisations and nations and can be described as the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to the society and economy[45] and higher education.

The Impact Statement should articulate the planned and potential impact of the proposed research. SFI and the IRC recognise that depending on the nature of the research, the impacts may be short-term, medium-term or longer-term. In many cases impact is unforeseen; as such, it is not possible to predict all impacts at the time of submission. Applicants are advised, however, to make full use of the space provided to make a strong, unambiguous, and **realistic** plan outlining the **pathway** to impact with appropriate plans, milestones and deliverables.

The Impact Statement should be written primarily in lay, non-technical language and it should be as specific and comprehensive as possible. It should describe the *potential* benefits of the proposed research including (but not limited to) societal, economic, cultural, knowledge, political, health, technological, environmental and educational impacts by answering the following overarching questions:

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[42] *SFI-funded research programmes, as described in call documents, can range from a single research project to a collection of research projects encompassed in several work packages. The data management plan should reflect the relevant standards for individual research projects while describing a cohesive approach to managing data across the overall programme of research as appropriate.*

[43] https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-priorities/research-data/research-data-management/

[44] *Based primarily on guidance provided by Science Europe: https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-resources/practical-guide-to-the-international-alignment-of-research-data-management/ and supplemented by guidance from the European Research Council of the European Commission: https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/ERC_info_document-Open_Research_Data_and_Data_Management_Plans.pdf*

[45] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/award-management/research-impact/

- **Who will benefit from this research and how?**
- **How will you engage with relevant beneficiaries and stakeholders?**
- **What plans will you put in place to increase the chances of impact from the proposed research?**
- **Over what timeframe might the benefits from your research be realised?**
- **How will the impact be demonstrated (what evidence will you collect)?**

In critically appraising various possible impacts, the following points should also be considered:

- Are there potential beneficiaries / stakeholders within the public sector, private sector, third-level sector or any others (e.g., professional or practitioner groups, charities or patient groups)?
- Are there potential international beneficiaries or collaborations with international organisations?
- How will the proposed research impact on the education, training and career of Ireland's students and research team members? Will there be infrastructural benefits for further research and education (e.g., facilities and instrumentation)? Applicants should note that all Pathway programmes will offer training opportunities of some degree, therefore it is important to highlight the **added value** that will be provided from the training provided under your grant.
- How will the proposed research impact on society, culture and the quality of life for Ireland's citizens and internationally?
- How will the potential impacts of your research be best realised?
- If applicable, how will collaborators increase the likelihood of potential impacts?
- What benchmarks or metrics can be applied to clearly demonstrate in the future that the various impacts outlined in the Impact Statement are both realistic and achievable?

The statement should consider some or all of the above to give confidence to reviewers that clear thought and realistic ambition have been employed to assess the likely or potential longer-term benefits of the research, including, and going beyond, the training aspects for both the applicant and the associated PhD student.

Applicants should briefly outline previous indicators of impact to provide reviewers with confidence that the potential impacts described can be realised. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Advances to the state of knowledge within a field
- Training and development of others, including wider curricular/teaching and learning benefits
- Stakeholder/external interest in their past or current work
- Collaborative projects
- Documented changes to public policy, guidelines or services
- Improvements in public health / welfare / quality of life
- Changes to behaviours or opinions
- Enhancing culture and creativity
- Operational or organisational change (e.g., processes and procedures)
- Non-exchequer funding obtained
- Problems / challenges solved or new insights gained

For more information and guidance on how to successfully articulate impact, detailed information including a webinar on research impact is available on the SFI website[46] and applicants are encouraged to refer to this information in advance of preparing their Impact Statement.

3.8 Budget

The costs eligible for grant support under the SFI-IRC Pathway programme are those costs that can, uniquely and unambiguously, be identified with the proposed research programme. Applicants must give details of all relevant costs, including staff, equipment, materials and consumables, and travel. Applicants should ensure that the final total provided includes all costs. All grants are made directly to the applicant's research body. Please also refer to the SFI General Terms and Conditions[47] and also the SFI Grant Budget Policy (Version March 2023).[48]

SFI-IRC Pathway grants are funded to a maximum value of **€495,000** direct costs for a period of four years. In addition to direct costs, SFI and the IRC also make an indirect or overhead contribution to the host research body, which is reflected as a percentage of the direct costs (excluding equipment). Overheads are payable as a contribution to the research body for the indirect costs of hosting research programmes funded by SFI or the IRC and are intended to enable the research body to develop internationally competitive research infrastructure and support services. General overheads should not be included in the requested budget.

See notes for completion of the budget table in the SESAME Researcher User Guide.

- **Staff**

The budget requested **must** include the applicant's salary, to which SFI or the IRC will contribute over the duration of the grant. The maximum contribution to the applicant's salary each year must be set at a point on the Experienced Postdoctoral Researcher scale (Level 2B) of the SFI Grants Team Member Budgeting Scale. Applicants are permitted to start (Year 1) at any point within Level 2B (that is, either at Point 1, Point 2, Point 3 or Point 4, but not at an intermediate value between these points). It is permissible to progress to the next point on the Level 2B scale in subsequent years, up to Point 4. However, it is also permissible to remain at the same point over consecutive years; reductions in salary contributions over consecutive years are not expected. Note that at no stage in the lifetime of the grant may the salary contribution be greater than Point 4 of the Level 2B scale. Regardless of how the salary contributions are planned, it is important to explain the reasoning for the chosen plan in the budget justification (see Section 3.10). Please see the SFI Grant Budget Policy for full details, and note that the applicant's salary contribution includes pension contributions and PRSI at 11.05%.

The requested budget should cover the fees and stipend of the PhD student as below:

- STEM-led stream – in line with the SFI Grant Budget Policy. Please note that the annual PhD stipend request should be €22,000.
- AHSS-led stream – a contribution to fees, including non-EU fees, of €5,750 per annum and a stipend of €22,000 per year.

[46] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/award-management/research-impact/
[47] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/sfi-general-terms-and-conditions/
[48] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/budget-finance-related-policies/

It is important to note that researchers funded by SFI or the IRC are employees of the research body. The lead agency makes a *contribution* to the overall staff budget for the programme. Please refer to the guidance above and the salary scales provided as part of the Grant Budget Policy with regard to the funding of applicant's salary (noting the 'Cost to Grant' figures).[49] Salaries for Collaborators are not permitted. It is advised to seek guidance from the applicant's nominated Mentor and the host Research Office when preparing the requested budget.

- **Equipment**

As applicants will have an identified Mentor, who will provide laboratory space and necessary equipment to both the applicant and the PhD student (where relevant), it is not expected that applicants will include significant items of equipment within their budget request. Therefore, requests for equipment in proposals should be very carefully considered, and full justification should be provided. Small equipment of a value of **less than €2,000** should be included in the materials and consumables section. The exception to this is costs associated with computers/laptops, which must be listed in the equipment section regardless of cost.

- **Materials and Consumables**

An outline of all materials and consumables that will be used in the research programme should be provided. The following research costs may be sought but are not limited to: books and journals; animal costs; bench fees; laboratory fees; workshop/focus group organisation; recruitment fees; survey costs; training; etc.

A contribution to access charges may be sought for the use of infrastructure, including knowledge-based resources such as collections, archives, collections/archives of scientific data, e-infrastructures such as data and computing systems and communication networks. Access charges may also be sought for the use of infrastructure where SFI pre-approved access charge plans are in place. Note that these may include, with SFI approval, access to facilities and services not available to the applicant within their host institution, such as the costs associated with accessing international databases or commissioning specific experiments in national facilities.

Access charge requests must be included as a separate line item in the budget and, where relevant, must include the grant code and name of the infrastructure to be used. A rationale for the amount of use proposed must be provided in the budget justification.

Costs relating to Education and Public Engagement activity, organisation of conferences, and hosting of visiting researchers and fellowships may be included in this budget category as outlined in the SFI Grant Budget Policy (version March 2023). These costs must be directly related to the research programme and must not be in excess of €15,000.

- **Travel**

Only travel costs for journeys directly related to the progress of the research programme may be requested as a direct cost on the research grant. The applicant should outline the details of travel expenses directly related to, for example, conferences, collaboration on the research programme, workshops / focus groups, or learning special research techniques. Where possible, please supply the conference name and location. In the case of working visits, the rates sought for subsistence and other

[49] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/budget-finance-related-policies/

allowances may be no more than those which the research body's permanent staff may claim. Please refer to the SFI Grant Budget Policy (Version March 2023) for guidance.

3.9 Budget Justification

The applicant must upload a Budget Justification as a PDF document. This is achieved by clicking on the "Upload" button in the application form and adding the appropriate file. Justification for requested salary, stipend, fees, equipment, consumables and travel should be provided in **no more than two pages**. Only eligible research bodies will be entitled to receive direct funding through the grant and all funding will be administered through the applicant's research body. If funding is sought for overseas services, this should be clearly justified and the rationale for not carrying out this activity in Ireland must be explained. As noted in Section 3.8, the applicant's salary contribution over the lifetime of the proposed grant should be well justified.

Clear indication should be given where funding is apportioned to Collaborators. Please note that Collaborators outside the Republic of Ireland or those not located within eligible Research Bodies in the Republic of Ireland are not eligible to receive funding through the Programme.

3.10 Letters of Support

The following letters of support **must** be included:

- A letter of support from the **Mentor** outlining the support offered to the applicant, commitment to the co-supervision of the PhD student, and the availability of laboratory space (where relevant) and infrastructure available to the applicant and student is required. The letter should include a statement outlining the applicant's potential to become an independent investigator and their ability to lead a research programme.

- A letter of support from the **host research body**. In recognition of the career stage of the applicant and to demonstrate the commitment of the research body, the proposal must include one letter of support from the Vice President for Research (or equivalent organisational official) of the nominating research body. The letter should be on headed paper and should:

    a) Describe the research body's support for the candidate's career and professional development (e.g., teaching, professional development, training, etc.).
    b) Outline the measures that will be taken to ensure that the candidate is not overburdened with teaching commitments in the early part of their appointment and should describe the candidate's maximum teaching commitment, if successful.
    c) Contain a brief description of the institutional policy regarding the management of conflicts of interest (see Section 6.1 for details).
    d) Provide a brief description of the Department's/School's/Institution's research/academic strategy and describe how the candidate will be integrated into this strategy.
    e) Describe the support and facilities (both building and equipment) which the department/research body will provide for the applicant and PhD student. This could include, but is not limited to, commitments for instrumentation, laboratory facilities and research support.

f) Confirm that for the duration of the grant, a successful candidate will be eligible to apply and compete for any and all permanent faculty positions which arise within this institution appropriate to their field of research.
g) Confirmation of the date of award of the PhD degree.
h) Confirmation that the candidate has not previously held or is currently employed on a faculty contract greater than or equal to **36 months in duration.** Where the candidate has been employed on a faculty contract, details should be provided in the Research Body Letter of Support.
i) Confirmation the applicant is not an independent investigator.

- **Collaborator letter of support.**
  - Letters from Academic Collaborators should provide full details of the intended intellectual and/or technical input to the proposal. In addition, Academic Collaborators seeking funds through the grant must describe how these funds will be utilised.
  - Letters from other collaborators including Industry, public bodies, civil society / non-governmental organisations and other entities should provide full details of the intended intellectual input and, where relevant, the level of financial (cash, in-kind or both) contribution to the research programme. Similarly, letters of support from International Academic Collaborators should provide details of any cash and/or in-kind contributions.
  - Letters of support that do not originate from officially listed Collaborators will be removed from the proposal, as will letters from listed Collaborators that merely provide theoretical or general support without specifically describing a meaningful and impactful contribution to the proposal.

Letters of support may be a maximum of two pages in length; extraneous pages will be removed from the letter and the proposal. Letters of support may not be included from other bodies and individuals who are not Collaborators. Unsolicited letters of support will be removed from the proposal.

3.11 Applicant Acknowledgement of Terms and Conditions

Submission of an application confirms that SFI's Grant General Terms & Conditions and/or IRC Terms and Conditions for PI-led Awards have been read and understood; that the applicant meets eligibility requirements; that the project is in full agreement with all legal and regulatory matters governing research in Ireland; that no aspect of this project is already being funded from another source and that all details provided are correct; that the information supplied in the application is correct and the research proposal is the applicant's own work. Failure to do so, or to comply with requirements outlined in this call document, will deem an application ineligible resulting in its withdrawal prior to expert review.

SFI's Grant Conditions shall govern the administration of SFI grants and awards to the exclusion of this and any other oral, written, or recorded statement. Similarly, grants funded by the Irish Research Council will be governed by their general Terms and Conditions.

3.12 Submission to Research Office

Once all sections of the application form have been completed, applicants must submit their proposal to their Research Office by clicking on the "Submit for RO Review" button. Following submission, it will not be possible to edit the proposal while its status is given as "*Full Proposal - Pending RO Approval*". The Research Office may require applicants to make revisions to their proposals before they submit the application to SFI; a notification will be sent to applicants where such revisions are mandated, and the status of the proposal in SESAME will revert to "*Full Proposal – In Preparation*", thus allowing the required revisions to be made.

A PDF of the proposal is available in SESAME and should be reviewed prior to submission to enable validation of an application. The responsibility for verifying that the proposal is ready for submission lies with the Applicant in this regard.

It is the responsibility of applicants to ensure that their Research Office has successfully submitted their proposal to SFI before the stated deadline of 13:00 on the 10th April 2024. After the submission deadline, applications will not be accepted by SESAME. Therefore, they will not be accepted by SFI or the IRC.

Please contact the Research Office well in advance, to become familiar with any internal Research Body submission deadlines.

Applicants will receive a notification from SESAME periodically when the status of their proposal changes. Alternatively, if you wish to track the status of your proposal (e.g., when the proposal is pending Research Office approval or under review with SFI or the IRC), this information will be displayed in SESAME.

3.13 Research Body Approval

The submission of an application must only be made by an authorised research body representative and reflects that SFI's Grant General Terms & Conditions have been read and understood by all relevant parties. Further, the research body is confirming:

- The eligibility of the applicant.
- That the requested budget including salaries/stipends, equipment, consumables and travel is in line with accepted institutional guidelines.
- The availability of infrastructure within the institution as outlined by the applicant in the research proposal.
- That the proposed research programme has not been funded by other sources.
- That relevant ethical approval will be in place prior to the grant or relevant component of the research programme commencing.
- That the relevant licences will be in place at the time of grant.
- That the details provided in relation to research funding history (i.e., current, pending or expired grants, as detailed in the application) are valid and accurate.
- That the details provided in relation to previous employment history are valid and accurate.
- That permission from all team members and collaborators has been obtained, such that SFI may receive their personal information, and may process such data for the purpose of peer review.

For SFI-IRC Pathway Programme applications, the research body is also approving:

- The suitability and willingness of the Mentor to host the applicant.
- That the research body is responsible for supporting the applicant and PhD student, if successful in the application.
- That, if successful, the applicant will have a contract of employment in place that accounts for 100% of the applicant's time and covers the duration of the requested Grant.

Submission of an application through SESAME serves as the research body's endorsement of the eligibility of the applicant as well as approval of the budget requested, the infrastructure to be provided by the research body, and furthermore, confirms the validity and accuracy of the details provided in relation to the current, pending and expired grants as detailed in the application and in relation to the applicant's year of PhD.

3.14 Deadlines

Applicants selected by their intended research body must ensure that their proposal is submitted to SFI no later than the **10th April 2024** at **13:00** by their Research Office. **Applications cannot be submitted through SESAME after this deadline**.

3.15 Proposal Checklist

PROPOSAL CHECKLIST		
SECTION	**DESCRIPTION**	**REQUIREMENTS**
Proposal Summary	Title	Up to 30 words
	Duration of Grant Requested	48 months
Resubmission	Resubmission statement (if relevant).	Max. 1000 words
Research Alignment	Research area (Primary and Secondary)	Select from list for each
	Alignment to programme remit	Max. 250 words
Lead Applicant details	Complete mandatory SESAME Profile information	Mandatory profile fields marked in red
	ORCID iD	Link SESAME profile to ORCID iD
	Percentage Time Commitment	Insert time commitment (%)
	Narrative CV	Max. 5 pages (use template provided)
	Statement of eligibility and career development plan	Max. 750 words
	Supervisory Experience	Enter details
	Research Funding History	Enter details
Mentor (collaborator) details	Name/Contact details etc.	Add contact name, details etc.
	CV (SFI and the IRC recommend using the 2-page Narrative CV template provided) Letter of support also required (see section below)	Upload CVs (max. 2 pages)
Collaborator(s) details	Name/Contact details etc.	Add contact name, details etc.
	CV for **each** collaborator (SFI and the IRC recommend using the 2-page Narrative CV template provided) Letters of support also required (see section below)	Upload CVs (max. 2 pages)
Main Body of Proposal	Keywords	Max. 15 words
	Abstract	Max. 200 words
	Lay Abstract	Max. 100 words
Ethical Issues	Answer questions regarding ethical issues (Use of Animals, Research involving Human Participants, Biological Material or Identifiable Data)	Select relevant answers
Sex & Gender Dimension in Research	Sex & Gender Dimension in Research Statement	Max. 1000 words
Programme Documents	Research Programme	Max. 8 pages
	References	Max. 1 page
	Data Management Plan	Max. 2 pages
	Impact Statement	Max. 2 pages
Budget	Details of all relevant costs	Budget Table in SESAME
	Upload the budget justification	Max. 2 pages
Letter(s) of Support	Mentor	Max. 2 pages
	Host Research Body	Max. 2 pages
	Collaborator Letter of Support	Max. 2 pages
Declaration	Acknowledgement of SFI Terms and Conditions	**Tick box to agree**

4 Review Process

SFI and the IRC are signatories to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA).[50] As such, the agencies are aligning their review and evaluation processes with DORA principles. In January 2022, SFI reinforced its existing commitment to the core principles by joining DORA as a member.[51] To this end, all types of research output are recognised by SFI and the IRC and we are committed to assessing the quality and impact of research through means other than journal-based metrics and research performance-based metrics such as impact factors and H-indices. The SFI-IRC Pathway programme utilises a Narrative CV template to assist with compliance to DORA principles. Furthermore, in the spirit of supporting open research,[52,53] SFI and the IRC will positively consider where there is a commitment to making data and other types of research open and accessible. SFI and the IRC are also signatories to Ireland's National Action Plan for Open Research 2022-2030.[54] To complement these activities and further reinforce SFI and the IRC's commitment to the overarching objectives of the Narrative CV, during 2022, SFI and the IRC became signatories to the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment[55] and thus became members of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).[56]

4.1 Proposal Review Process and Evaluation Criteria

All proposals will be assessed by international peer reviewers under the review criteria described below. These criteria will be applied at each stage of the review process.

- **Quality, significance and novelty of the research plan (weight 40%)**
  Novelty, importance, timeliness of the intended research; communication and description of the research; comprehension of the current state of the art; clearly delineated roles of the applicant and the PhD student; suitability and achievability of the programme based on the experience of the applicant; appropriate use of the available budget, the sex and gender dimension, etc.

- **Quality, significance and relevance of the applicant's key achievements, research track record and career development plan, considering the research discipline and commensurate with their career stage and years of research experience, taking any periods of leave into account (weight 30%)**
  Applicant's track record and career development goals described in their personal statement. The following areas will be considered in evaluating the applicant's track record: 1) Generation of Knowledge, 2) Development of Individuals and Collaboration, 3) Supporting Broader Society & the Economy and, 4) Supporting the Research Community and higher education.

- **Potential impact, and value to Ireland (weight 15%)**

[50] https://sfdora.org/read/
[51] Contributor level membership
[52] https://www.coalition-s.org/
[53] https://research.ie/assets/uploads/2017/05/irc_open_access_policy_final_1.pdf
[54] National Action Plan | National Open Research Forum (norf.ie)
[55] https://coara.eu/app/uploads/2022/09/2022_07_19_rra_agreement_final.pdf
[56] https://coara.eu/

- Appreciation of how research may be developed and exploited; realistic and convincing evaluation of the benefits that will result from a successful project; areas and fields where impacts are likely to be made; etc.
- **Quality of institutional and mentor support and infrastructure provided (weight 15%)**
  Support for the candidate's career and professional development; necessary space and equipment in place to carry out the programme of research; assurance from the support letters that the team will be looked after appropriately, clear rationale for the applicant and mentor working together; coherent plan between applicant and mentor; confidence that the applicant will have significant independence and that it will be respected by the mentor, etc.

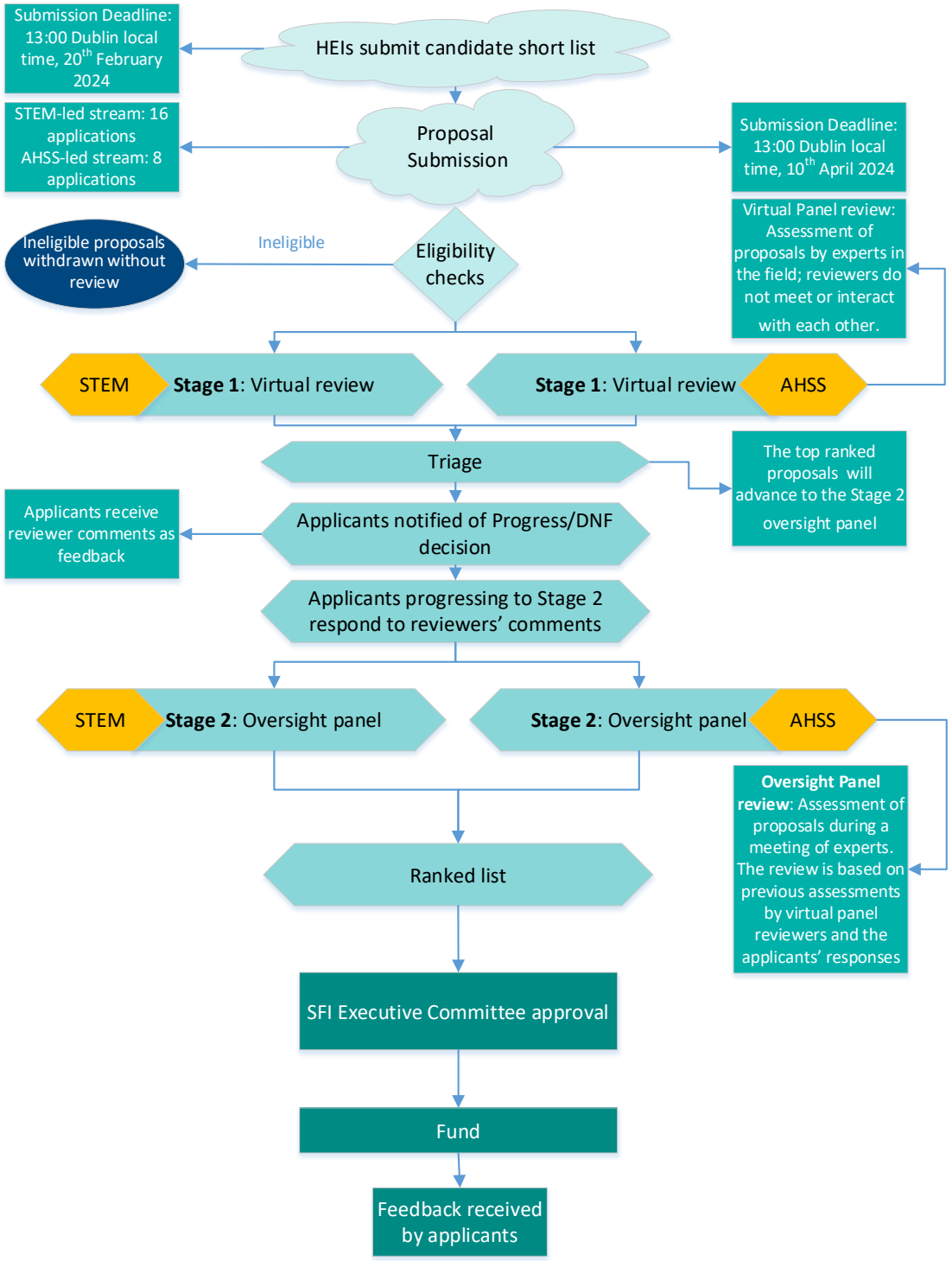
Weighted scores will be rounded to the nearest quarter point.[57] When ranking applications, in the event of applications receiving the same final score, ties will be decided based on the quality, significance and novelty of the research plan. If additional tiebreakers are required, SFI and the IRC will inform applicants what these tiebreakers are.

Reviewers engaged by the agencies are required to abide by the SFI Reviewer Code of Conduct.[58] The submission of an application to SFI shall be construed as consent by the applicant to participate in the peer-review process. SFI and the IRC reserve the right to not **review applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria.** A schematic of the review process is provided below. Full details on the review process are provided in Appendix A.

All appeals will be conducted in accordance with SFI's Appeals Policy (see section 6.1).[45]

[57] SFI and the IRC reserve the right to adjust this rounding based on the number of applications received. Applicants will be made aware of any changes to the review process.
[58] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/review/

SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 Review Process



Other Review Information
The identity of international experts who conduct reviews shall remain confidential and will not be disclosed to the applicants. SFI and the IRC shall not be liable for the release of information concerning proposals to third parties by those international peer reviewers involved in the merit review process.

SFI and the IRC reserve the right to modify the review process. Applicants will be notified of any relevant modification to the review procedure. The final funding decisions are at the sole and exclusive discretion of SFI and the IRC.

Pre-award progress reviews, conducted by SFI staff, to examine infrastructure may take place, where appropriate. **The final funding decisions are at the sole and exclusive discretion of SFI and the IRC**.

5 Project/Award Management

5.1 Reporting Requirements

The State has made a significant investment via SFI and the IRC into research and, as such, it is the responsibility of the agencies to monitor the progress and outcomes of all funding they administer. The progress reporting requirements for grants made under the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme include the completion of an Annual Report, which is used to monitor the progress of individual grants against the overall objectives of the programme and associated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

All SFI grant holders are required to report on outputs and impacts arising from their research programme for the duration of their grant and for up to five years after the grant end (close) date. Therefore, awardees funded by SFI will also be required to complete SFI Research Outputs (formerly referred to as the SFI Census) and a Researcher Snapshot.

Specific reporting guidelines will be published by the agencies at a future date.

5.2 Progress Reviews

SFI-IRC Pathway Programme awardees may be subject to a progress review conducted by international peer reviewers during the period of the grant. These progress reviews are typically held at the midway point on the grant. The review panel, which comprises two to three international subject matter experts, will be asked to review the progress and direction of the research, the quality of the team (including gender balance) and partnerships, the management of the budget and progress towards generating impact. In relation to the latter, the panel will be guided to review progress against the impact statement provided by the applicant in their original proposal. Progress reviews will also involve a data provenance review, where a dataset will be reviewed in the context of experimental design, data capture, analysis, storage and curation. The research team will also be assessed on matters concerning training, mentoring and supervision. The outcome of the review will be taken into consideration in the assessment of future applications made to SFI. As stated in the Terms and Conditions for each funder, SFI[59] and the IRC[60] reserve the right to terminate a grant if, in the reasonable opinion of the relevant funder,[61] progress is not deemed to be satisfactory.

[59] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/sfi-general-terms-and-conditions/
[60] https://research.ie/assets/uploads/2017/07/IRC-PI-TCs-Final-1.pdf.
[61] SFI is the relevant funder for the STEM-led stream therefore SFI policies and Grant Terms & Conditions apply. The IRC is the relevant funder for the AHSS-led stream and therefore IRC policies and terms & conditions apply

6 Relevant Policies

Science Foundation Ireland Grant Conditions shall govern the administration of SFI grants and awards to the exclusion of this and any other oral, written, or recorded statement. Similarly, grants funded by the Irish Research Council will be governed by their General Terms and Conditions.

6.1 SFI's Policies and Positions

In addition to complying with the Grant Terms and Conditions, applicants are expected to be familiar and consult with SFI policies/positions and with all relevant national policies when preparing their application to any SFI programme. All members involved in the funded research should be apprised of the following non-exhaustive list of relevant policies, which may be revised from time to time:

Clinical Trials

Research programmes that include clinical trials as part of the study (see Section 3.7) must adhere to the **SFI Clinical Trial and Clinical Investigation Policy**,[62] as well as with the requirements set out by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA).

Animal Usage

Applicants intending to use animals in their research projects are obliged to comply with the **SFI Use of Animals in Research Policy**,[63] and should also ensure that their studies align with the HRPA's position on the use of animals in research.

Research Integrity

SFI places paramount importance on ensuring that the highest standards of research integrity underpin all aspects of the research that it supports. To this end, SFI endorses the **National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland**;[64] that is, all institutions and SFI grant holders are expected to abide by this statement and the **European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity**,[65] in addition to their respective institutional policies and procedures for handling research misconduct allegations.

Doctoral Education

For postgraduate students funded by SFI, the host Research Body is expected to adopt the principles, standards and good practice for doctoral education described in the **National Framework for Doctoral Education (2023)**.[66]

Intellectual Property Management

Intellectual Property (IP) should be managed according to the policies set out in the Government publication: **Ireland's National IP Protocol 2019**, and must comply with State aid Regulations.[67] The IP arrangements are the responsibility of the Research Body and shall reflect the collaborative nature of the project and the level of cash and in-kind commitment made by the Industry Partner. IP arrangements should be explicitly described in collaborative research agreements (CRAs).

[62] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/ethical-and-scientific-issues/
[63] http://www.sfi.ie/resources/SFI-Policy-on-the-Use-of-Animals-in-Research_June_2016.pdf
[64] https://www.iua.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/National-Policy-Statement-on-Ensuring-Research-Integrity-in-Ireland.pdf
[65] https://allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/European-Code-of-Conduct-Revised-Edition-2023.pdf
[66] https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2023/02/National-Framework-for-Doctoral-Education-2023.pdf
[67] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/national-policies-sfi-positions/

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

SFI's ambition is that the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2028 will be a key driver of an inclusive, engaged research culture and, through this Strategy, SFI will be an agent of change. As such, the SFI EDI Strategy presents a vision and strategy for SFI, as a leading research funder, to help reduce systemic barriers to participating in the research endeavour.

SFI has already demonstrated leadership in improving the representation of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) research more broadly in the entire education talent pipeline. Whilst gender will remain a central tenet of the new EDI Strategy, SFI will now proactively consider other areas of inequality or disadvantage to support an intersectional approach, in keeping with our values and best practice.

In the SFI Strategy 2025 *Shaping Our Future*,[68] targets are set for 35% of SFI's funded leadership positions (PIs and Co-PIs) to be women and for research teams to be composed of at least 40% of the underrepresented gender by 2025. As such, applicants should consider and describe how these targets can be achieved at all levels of the research team.

Research should fully consider potential biological sex and socio-cultural gender dimensions as key analytical and explanatory variables. As articulated in the SFI EDI Strategy, applicants are advised to demonstrate that they have considered any potential sex/gender aspects in their proposed research programme.

Maternity Supplement

SFI is committed to removing and mitigating any existing or perceived factors that may limit the participation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers. SFI invites its grant holders to apply for a supplemental discretionary allowance to support their SFI-funded grant when either an SFI grant holder or a team member, including PhD students funded by an SFI grant, takes a period of maternity or adoptive leave.[69]

Appeals Process

The Appeals Process Policy establishes procedures and responsibilities for the appeal of the declination of a proposal by SFI.[70]

State Aid

Please refer to the **State aid** section (section 2.4) above.

Child Protection

Where relevant, applicants and Research Bodies are required to comply with the provisions of the **Children First Act 2015**,[71] and the **National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017**.[72] It is the responsibility of the Research Body to ensure that they are compliant with all applicable law.

[68] https://www.sfi.ie/strategy/
[69] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/
[70] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/review/
[71] http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/36/enacted/en/pdf
[72] http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Children_First_National_Guidance_2017.pdf

Data Protection Policy

The General Data Protection Regulation[73] is a legal framework that sets out guidelines for the collection and processing of personal information of individuals within the European Union.[74] Applicants are advised that they must be compliant with this regulation if they collect or process personal data.

SFI may collect, use and disclose personal data provided in the application and/or otherwise obtained under, or in connection with, the application for processing the submission, for the performance of its statutory powers and functions, and for the general activities of SFI. Further details regarding SFI's collection, use and disclosure of personal data, and the rights of individuals with respect to any personal data held by SFI, are available in the **SFI Privacy Statement**.[75]

During peer-review procedures, information may be sent to external experts in countries outside of the European Economic Area, including countries that are not recognised by the European Commission as having adequate data protection laws. By submitting an application to SFI, the Research Body and members of the Research Team are agreeing that they consent to the processing and transfer of personal information in this way.

During the application process or at any time thereafter, SFI may contact the Research Body, the Principal Investigator, or any member of the Research Team with regard to funding opportunities, activities or events organised by SFI or other relevant bodies, or for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation (including, but not limited to, the collection of scientific data or data relating to the application process). SFI may choose to authorise a third party to contact the Research Body, the Principal Investigator or any member of the Research Team on its behalf.

Conflict of Interest

SFI recognises that applicants may have a prior relationship with an industry partner engaged in an application for funding to SFI (e.g., industry consultancy role, founder of an academic spin-out company) which may be perceived as a conflict of interest. Where a potential conflict of interest exists, SFI requires that it is disclosed by the applicant to SFI and their Research Body and that any such situations are managed by the Research Body in accordance with the principles and mandates laid out in **Ireland's National IP Protocol 2019**.[76]

Open access

In line with the principles espoused by Plan S[77] and as a signatory to the National Action Plan for Open Research 2022- 30,[78] SFI is committed to ensuring that all publicly funded research articles are openly available. Where a research publication arises in whole or in part from SFI-funded research (i.e., where at least one of the researchers concerned receives SFI funds in support of their endeavours), the researcher(s) should adhere to **SFI's Open Access policy.**[79] SFI monitors compliance with this policy through scientific and financial reporting, financial audits and other reviews, and data gathered through Research Outputs.

[73] https://www.dataprotection.ie/
[74] https://www.eugdpr.org/
[75] http://www.sfi.ie/privacy/
[76] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/national-policies-sfi-positions/
[77] https://www.coalition-s.org/principles-and-implementation/
[78] https://norf.ie
[79] Open Research (sfi.ie)

Data Management

Good data governance and stewardship are key components of good research practice. Science Foundation Ireland is part of an initiative for the voluntary international alignment of research data management policies.[80] Applicants may find it helpful to consult with this and Science Europe's framework for discipline-specific research data management if preparing a data management plan as part of their application for funding to SFI.[81] Applicants should review individual programme funding call requirements regarding data management plans and timelines as to when they are required to be submitted.

Current SFI policies and positions are reviewed on a regular basis; applicants are advised to consult the policy information in advance of submission of a proposal.

6.2 IRC Policies and Positions

In addition to complying with the IRC's General Terms and Conditions,[82] awardees are expected to be familiar and consult with both IRC and national policies, where relevant. Please note that the following is a non-exclusive list and that the IRC reserves the right to review and amend these policies at any time.

Dignity in the conduct of research

The IRC supports a research system in which individual researchers are enabled to reach their full potential at all stages of their career. At the heart of research is people, and respect for the dignity of the person, whether a student or a member of staff, is a principle that all stakeholders have a collective responsibility to safeguard. The IRC's full statement on dignity in the conduct of research is available here.

Research integrity

The IRC places paramount importance on ensuring that the highest standards of research integrity underpin all aspects of the research that it supports. To this end, the IRC endorses the National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland; that is, all institutions and IRC award holders are expected to abide by this policy statement and the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

Doctoral education

It is the IRC's ambition to ensure that the early-stage researchers it funds are equipped with the relevant disciplinary and transferrable skills to allow them to pursue diverse career paths and establish themselves as independent researchers and thinkers. The IRC's career development policy statement is available here. The IRC also endorses the principles, standards and good practice for doctoral education as described in the National Framework for Doctoral Education.

Intellectual property management

Intellectual property should be managed according to Ireland's National IP Protocol 2019 and must comply with State aid regulations. The IRC does not make any claim to intellectual property arising from the award.

[80] https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-resources/practical-guide-to-the-international-alignment-of-research-data-management/

[81] https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-resources/guidance-document-presenting-a-framework-for-discipline-specific-research-data-management/

[82] https://research.ie/assets/uploads/2017/07/IRC-PI-TCs-Final-1.pdf.

Gender strategy

The IRC is committed to promoting gender equality in order to guarantee the highest standards of rigour, transparency, and diversity of knowledge. The IRC was the first research funding agency in Ireland to publish a gender strategy, which aims (1) to support gender equality in research careers across all disciplines; and (2) to support the integration of sex and gender analysis into research content. The IRC's Gender Strategy seeks to provide equal outcomes to both men and women so that Ireland can attract and retain the most talented, creative and innovative researchers thereby maximising its collective research intelligence. The IRC has recently published a Review of its first Gender Strategy and Action Plan assessing the impact of its gender-related policies and practices to date.

Policy on leave for parents and carers

The IRC's Policy on Leave for Parents and Carers is available here.

State aid

All IRC funding granted under this call will be subject to, and must be compliant with, State aid law. As such, proposals must be designed to ensure that any funding received from IRC does not, directly or indirectly, give rise to the granting of State aid. Potential applicants are referred to the guidance provided by the European Commission in Section 2 of its 2022 Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation (2022/C 414/01) and that which has been developed by Knowledge Transfer Ireland. If in any doubt as to the interpretation or application of this guidance, potential applicants are advised to seek independent legal advice.

Child protection

Where relevant, awardees and host institutions are required to comply with the provisions of the Children First Act 2015 and the National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017. It is the responsibility of the host institution to ensure that they are compliant with all applicable law.

Data protection notice

The General Data Protection Regulation is a legal framework that sets out guidelines for the collection and processing of personal information of individuals within the European Union. Applicants are advised that they must be compliant with this regulation if they collect or process personal data. The IRC's Data Protection Notice sets out the basis on which any personal data we collect from you, or from others, will be used by us. During the course of our activities, the IRC will collect, store and use personal data in respect of individuals ("data subjects") participating in our funding application and award processes. We may also collect, store and use personal data on individuals who engage with us in relation to our activities. The IRC is committed to reflecting best practice in complying with data protection regulation.

Open access

The IRC's Open Access Policy is available here. All awardees must lodge their publications and other research outputs, resulting in whole or in part from IRC-funded research, in an open access repository and should make such publications publicly discoverable, openly accessible and re-usable as soon as is possible. The IRC is a member of the National Open Research Forum (NORF) Funders Forum and is committed to working with NORF and other stakeholders to enhance open access for all disciplines.

Data management

The consideration of data management requirements at the start and, indeed, during the project ensures research integrity and reproducibility. The IRC's guide for the preparation of data management plans is available here. In addition, awardees are advised to consult Science Europe's Practical Guide to the International Alignment of Research Data Management for more information on core requirements for data management plans, criteria for the selection of trustworthy repositories and guidance for researchers to comply with organisational requirements. Applicants should review individual programme funding call requirements regarding data management plans and timelines as to when they are required to be submitted.

Acknowledgement of funding

Showcasing awardees and their achievements is the most effective means that a funding agency has of demonstrating the value of publicly funded investment in research. For the IRC, it is imperative that the source of funding is acknowledged in all dissemination activities to bolster the commitment to funding research activities in Ireland. The IRC's Publications Policy is available here.

7 Further Information

All information related to the SFI-IRC Pathway programme is available on the programme webpage:

http://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/pathway/

For all additional queries please contact: pathway@sfi.ie

Appendix A: SFI-IRC Pathway Programme Review Process

The review criteria detailed in Section 4 will be applied at all stages of the review process. In addition, a weighting and scoring system will be applied.

Score Weighting System:

Review Criteria	Weighting
Research programme	40%
Applicant	30%
Impact	15%
Mentor / Institutional support	15%
Total	100%

Weighted scores will be rounded to the nearest quarter point.[83] When ranking applications, in the event of applications receiving the same final score, ties will be decided based on the quality of the proposed research. If additional tiebreakers are required, SFI and the IRC will inform applicants what these tiebreakers are.

SFI-IRC Pathway Programme Review Process

All proposals submitted to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme will be assessed for eligibility and proposals meeting the eligibility requirements will be reviewed as outlined below.

Stage 1 Review

The assessment will be carried out by **'virtual panels'** comprised of a large number of international reviewers; where each member of the virtual panel receives a number of proposals, typically six, to review. The panel members will exhibit a **broad range of expertise** relevant to the proposals under review. All proposals will be forwarded to a minimum of three distinguished international peer reviewers for written evaluation and rating under the review criteria outlined below. A copy of the review form is provided in the table below.

[83] SFI and the IRC reserve the right to adjust this rounding based on the number of applications received. Applicants will be made aware of any changes to the review process.

Review Type	Virtual Panel review
Review Questions	**Question pertaining to Applicant(s)** SFI and the IRC are signatories of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)[84]. As such, the agencies are aligning their review and evaluation processes with DORA principles. In January 2022, SFI reinforced its existing commitment to the core principles by joining DORA as a member.[85] To this end, all types of research output are recognised by SFI and the IRC and we are committed to assessing the quality and impact of research through means other than journal-based metrics and research performance-based metrics such as impact factors and h-index. Furthermore, in the spirit of supporting open research SFI and the IRC will positively consider where there is a commitment to making data and other types of research open and accessible. SFI is also a signatory to Ireland's National Action Plan for Open Research 2022-2030.[86] To complement these activities and further reinforce SFI's commitment to the overarching objectives of the Narrative CV, during 2022, SFI became a signatory to the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment[87] and thus became a member of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).[88] Please take these positions into account during your assessment of the Narrative CV(s) submitted by the applicant(s). Please comment on the quality, significance and relevance of the applicant's key achievements, research track record and career development plan, as demonstrated in the CV and personal statement, commensurate with their career stage and research discipline, years of research experience and taking any periods of leave into account. Please include in your review comments how the applicant(s) has addressed each of the following areas: 1) Generation of Knowledge, 2) Development of Individuals and Collaborations, 3) Supporting Broader Society & the Economy and, 4) Supporting the Research Community. With your review, please also consider whether the expertise and experience of the lead applicant is appropriate given their proposed contribution to the research programme. There are **two stages** to the scoring of the applicant(s): First, please score the quality, significance and relevance of the applicant's key achievements and research track record with regard to the individual categories in the CV(s): 1) Generation of Knowledge,

[84] https://sfdora.org/read/
[85] Contributor level membership
[86] National Action Plan | National Open Research Forum (norf.ie)
[87] https://coara.eu/app/uploads/2022/09/2022_07_19_rra_agreement_final.pdf
[88] https://coara.eu/

	2) Development of Individuals and Collaborations, 3) Supporting Broader Society & the Economy, 4) Supporting the Research Community. Half scores are permitted. • 1 = Applicant(s) not internationally competitive for this category • 2 = Applicant(s) track record has considerable weaknesses for this category • 3 = Applicant(s) track record lacking in one or two critical aspects for this category • 4 = High-quality applicant(s) in nearly all respects for this category • 5 = Outstanding applicant(s) for this category Second, taking into account the four categories referred to above, please use your judgement to provide one overall score based on the quality, significance and relevance of the applicant's key achievements, research track record and career development plan, as demonstrated in the CV and personal statement, considering the research discipline and commensurate with their career stage, years of research experience and taking any periods of leave into account. This score will be the final score used to assess the applicant. Half scores are permitted. • 1 = Applicant(s) not internationally competitive • 2 = Applicant(s) track record has considerable weaknesses • 3 = Applicant(s) track record lacking in one or two critical aspects • 4 = High-quality applicant(s) in nearly all respects • 5 = Outstanding applicant(s) **Question pertaining to Research Plan** Please comment on the quality, significance and novelty of the research plan. In your assessment, please consider points such as: novelty, importance, timeliness of the intended research; communication and description of the research; comprehension of the current state of the art; clearly delineated roles of the applicant and the PhD student; suitability and achievability of the programme based on the experience of the applicant; appropriate use of the available budget, the sex and gender dimension etc. **Data Management Plan** Drawing upon your subject matter expertise, please indicate whether the data management plan (DMP) is sufficient or insufficient (lack of information or deemed incorrect). • Is the data management plan sufficient? Yes / No • If the data management plan is **not sufficient,** please explain. **Sex and Gender Dimension in Research** **This section should not** include information on gender equality, diversity and inclusion in the research team/environment.

	• Has the applicant adequately addressed the sex and/or gender dimension/s in their proposal? Yes/No • If the applicant **has not** included a sex and/or gender dimension/s in their research proposal, are you satisfied that they have justified this position sufficiently? If not, please explain. • If the applicant **has** included a sex and/or gender dimension/s in their research proposal, is the design/analysis described sufficiently rigorously to test for differences between the sexes and/or genders? If not, please explain. • If the applicant is only studying one biological sex and/or gender, has the applicant provided sufficient justification with reference to the literature, preliminary data, or other relevant consideration in their proposal? Please rate the quality, significance and novelty of the research plan, including the Sex and Gender Statement aspects and data management plan (half scores are permitted) • 1 = Research proposed is not worthy of funding • 2 = Research proposed has serious deficiencies • 3 = Research proposed is lacking in one or more critical aspects; key issues need to be addressed • 4 = High-quality research programme in most respects • 5 = Outstanding research programme in all respects **Question pertaining to Impact** Please review the Impact Statement prepared by the applicant(s) and comment on the applicant's ability to demonstrate the potential impact and value to Ireland. In your assessment, please consider points such as: Appreciation of how research may be developed and exploited; realistic and convincing evaluation of the benefits that will result from a successful project; areas and fields where impacts are likely to be made. Please rate the applicant's ability to demonstrate the potential impact and value to Ireland (half scores are permitted) • 1 = Very low impact potential • 2 = Low impact potential • 3 = Good impact potential • 4 = High impact potential • 5 = Outstanding impact potential **Question pertaining to institutional and mentor support, and infrastructure** Please review the letters of support and comment on the quality of institutional and mentor support and infrastructure provided. In your assessment, please consider points such as: support for the applicant's career development; necessary space and equipment in place to carry out the programme of research; assurance from the support letters that the team will be looked after appropriately, clear rationale for the applicant and mentor working together; coherent plan between applicant and mentor; confidence that the applicant will have significant independence and that it will be respected by the mentor, etc. • 1 = Mentor and/or institutional support is not appropriate • 2 = Mentor and/or institutional support is weak

	• 3 = Mentor and/or institutional support is lacking in one or two critical aspects • 4 = Mentor and / or institutional support is high-quality • 5 = Mentor and / or institutional support is outstanding **Question pertaining to Budget & Team** Is the budget appropriate/realistic given the track record of the applicant? Please comment on the appropriateness of the skills, composition of the team (including collaborators) and the appropriateness of the resources requested. **Question pertaining to Ethical Issues** Please comment on any ethical issues, particularly related to any aspects of the proposed research that involves animals, human participants, human biological material, or identifiable/potentially identifiable data.

Applicant Response

Applications will be ranked following the virtual panel review. Top-ranked applications that receive an overall score of 3.5 (70%) or higher will proceed to the Stage 2 oversight panel review. Applicants that receive a final score of less than 3.5 will be informed that their application was unsuccessful. Applications with a very high standard deviation or vastly deviating reviewer opinions may also be selected to progress to Stage 2. **SFI and the IRC reserve the right to increase the scoring threshold if a surplus of high-quality applications is received**.

Anonymous reviewer comments will then be made available to applicants and those applicants proceeding to Stage 2 will be afforded the opportunity to submit a **response** to the reviewers' comments. Applicants will be given a defined period of time in which to respond (advanced notice of dates and guidelines relating to the response will be indicated to applicants).

Stage 2 Oversight Panel Review

An oversight panel involving international reviewers with generalist expertise will be convened to review the applicant response and oversee the fairness of the written reviews. Panel reviewers will receive the written reviews and scores following Stage 1 along with the applicant's response to those reviews. Panel reviewers will provide a final score for each criterion and make a funding recommendation to SFI and the IRC.

Weighted scores will be rounded to the nearest quarter point.[89] The outcome of the panel meeting is a ranked list of applications in a series of bands, and within each band, the ranking will be based on the Research Programme score (non-weighted). If additional tiebreakers are required, SFI and the IRC will inform applicants what these tiebreakers are. SFI will fund down the ranked list from the STEM-led stream

[89] SFI and the IRC reserve the right to adjust this rounding based on the number of applications received. Applicants will be made aware of any changes to the review process.

until SFI programme funding is exhausted and the IRC will fund down the ranked list from the AHSS-led stream until IRC programme funding is exhausted. Applicants will receive the panel's report as feedback.

Appendix B: Research Areas

Primary Research Area (for selection in SESAME)

Primary STEM Research Areas (Available under the STEM-led stream)	Primary AHSS Research Areas (Available under the AHSS-led stream)
Agriculture	Anthropology
Astronomy	Archaeology
Biochemistry	Business and Management
Biomedicine	Celtic Studies
Chemistry	Classics
Computational and Mathematical Biology	Cultural Studies
Computer and Information Sciences	Economics
Earth and Environmental Sciences	Education
Energy	Environmental Studies
Engineering	Equality Studies
Food Science	Film Studies
Genetics and Genomics	Folklore Studies
Immunity and Infection	French
Materials Science	Geography
Mathematics	German
Microbiology	History
Molecular and Cell Biology	Irish Language Studies
Networking and Communications Systems	Italian
Neuroscience and Behaviour	Languages
Physics	Law
	Linguistics
	Literature
	Media
	Musicology
	Philosophy
	Politics
	Psychology
	Sociology
	Spanish
	Theatre Studies

	Theology

Secondary Research Area (for selection in SESAME)

Secondary STEM Research Areas (available under either stream)	Secondary AHSS Research Areas (available under either stream)
Age-Related Research	Accounting
Agriculture	Aging
Algorithms	Ancient Greek and Latin Literature and Art
Applied Mathematics	Ancient History
Artificial Intelligence	Animal Communication
Astronomy	Archaeology
Bacteriology	Archaeometry
Biochemistry	Asset Prices
Bioengineering	Banking
Bioinformatics	Behavioural Economics
Biomedicine	Childhood Studies
Biophysics	Classics
Biosensors	Cognitive and Experimental Psychology
Cancer	Colonial and Post-colonial History
Cardiovascular	Communication Networks
Cell Cycle Regulation and Apoptosis	Comparative Law
Cellular Biotechnology	Competitiveness
Chemical Engineering	Constitutions
Chemistry	Corporate Finance
Civil and Environmental Engineering	Criminology
Communication Protocols	Cultural Dimensions of Classification and Cognition
Computational and Mathematical Biology	Cultural Diversity
Computational Chemistry	Cultural Heritage
Computer and Information Sciences	Cultural History
Computer Graphics and Visualisation	Cultural Memory
Computer Vision and Image Processing	Cultural Studies
Cryptography	Democratisation
Developmental Biology	Design
Devices	Development
Diagnostics	Development and Architecture
Distributed Systems	Discourse Analysis

Drug Formulation and Delivery	Early Modern History
Earth and Environmental Sciences	Econometrics
Ecology	Economic Growth
Electronic and Electrical Engineering	Entangled Histories
Energy	Environmental Change and Society
Energy Conservation and Waste	Environmental Regulations and Climate Negotiations
Energy Storage	Epistemology and Logic
Engineering	Evolution of Mind and Cognitive Functions
Enzymes/Catalysts	Family and Fertility
Films and Coatings	Financial Markets
Financial Mathematics	Formal, Cognitive, Functional and Computational Linguistics
Food Science	Gender Studies
Gastrointestinal	Geo-information and Spatial Data Analysis
Gene Structure and Expression	Global and Transnational Governance
Gene Therapy	Global and Transnational History
Genetic Engineering	Governance Legal Studies
Genetics and Genomics	Government
Geotechnologies	Health and Society
Glasses and Ceramics	Health Promotion
Glycobiology	Historiography
Hematology	History of Art and Architecture
High Performance and Grid Computing	History of Collective Identities and Memories
Human Disease and Pathology	History of Economic Thought
Imaging and Microscopy	History of Ideas
Immunity and Infection	History of Literature
Inflammation Research	History of Music
Information Security	History of Philosophy
Information Systems and Web Science	History of Sciences and Techniques
Inorganic Chemistry	Households
Language Technologies	Human Life-span Development
Lasers and Plasmas	Human Rights
Magnetism	Identity
Materials Science	Income Distribution and Poverty
Mathematics	Industrial Organisation
Mechanical and Structural Engineering	Inequalities
Medicinal Chemistry	Information Society

Metabolism	Infrastructure
Microbial Pathogenesis	Innovation
Microbiology	Institutional Economics
Modelling and Virtual Science	Intellectual History
Models of Disease	Interethnic Relations
Molecular and Cell Biology	International Development
Molecular Evolution	International Finance
Nanoscience	International Studies
Nanotechnology	International Trade
Networking and Communications Systems	Kinship
Neurodegeneration	Labour Economics
Neurophysiology	Land Use
Neuroscience and Behaviour	Landscape Archaeology
Optics and Photonics	Language Pathologies
Organic Chemistry	Law and Economics
Parasitology	Lexicography
Patterning and Lithographic Techniques	Library and Information Studies
Pharmacology	Literary Styles
Physical Chemistry	Literary Theory and Comparative Literature
Physics	Macroeconomics
Plant Science	Marketing
Polymer Science	Media
Population Genetics	Medieval History
Protein Structure	Microeconomics
Proteomics	Migration
Pulmonary and Respiratory	Mobility, Tourism, Transportation and Logistics Spatial
Quantum Information	Modern and Contemporary History
Regenerative Biology and Stem Cells	Museums and Exhibitions
Renewables	Music and Musicology
Reproductive Biology	Myth
RNA Processing and Regulation	Neuropsychology
Semiconductors	Organisation Studies
Sensor Networks	Palaeography and Epigraphy
Sensors	Pedagogy
Signal Processing	Perception, Action, and Higher Cognitive Processes
Signal Transduction	Performing Arts

Software Engineering	Philosophy
Spectroscopy	Philosophy of Mind
Spintronics	Political Economy
Statistics	Political Science
Structural Biology	Political Systems and Institutions
Theory of Computation	Political Theory
Theoretical Physics	Population Dynamics
Tissue Engineering	Pragmatics
Toxicology	Prehistory and Protohistory
Vaccines	Psycholinguistics and Neurolinguistics
Virology	Public Economics
Wireless Networks	Quantitative Economic History
	Regional Planning
	Regional Studies
	Religious Studies
	Research and Development
	Resources and Sustainability
	Ritual
	Second Language Teaching and Learning
	Sex/Gender
	Sex/Gender History
	Social and Clinical Psychology
	Social and Economic Geography
	Social and Economic History
	Social and Industrial Ecology
	Social Geography
	Social Mobility
	Social Movements
	Social Policy
	Social Structure
	Social Studies of Science and Technology Environment
	Social Work
	Sociolinguistics
	Statistical Methods
	Symbolic Representations
	Systems and Institutions

	Teaching and Learning
	Terminology
	Textual Philology
	Theory and Methods of History
	Theory and Strategy
	Typological, Historical and Comparative Linguistics
	Urban Studies
	Violence, Conflict and Conflict Resolution
	Visual Arts
	Women's Studies
	Work and Welfare