

# SFI CENTRES FOR RESEARCH TRAINING 2018

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Last updated 21 June 2018

### APPLICANTS, RESEARCH BODIES, NAMED SUPERVISORS AND PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

**Q1: What are the minimum and maximum numbers of applicants that are permitted?**

There should be three applicants included on each application to the SFI Centres for Research Training Programme to ensure adequate membership of the Executive Management Committee. The exception to this is in multi-institutional applications, in which there must be an applicant included from each research body at the EoI stage (please see below). Where deemed necessary, two applicants may be included at the lead research body. Please see the table below.

Number of research bodies involved in application	Number of applicants at lead research bodies	Number of applicants at each of other research bodies	Total number of applicants permitted
1	3	0	3
2	2	1	3
3	max. 2	1	max. 4
4	max. 2	1	max. 5
Etc.			

The applicant group named at the EoI stage may not be changed at the full proposal stage (except in situations where SFI has specifically contacted you with regard to significant overlap between proposed CRTs). If deemed to strengthen a full proposal, supervisors at a Research Body not included at the EoI stage may be included at the full proposal stage as Named Supervisors. In this instance, the requirement to include an applicant from this Research Body no longer applies. *Please note that the above change has been made since issuing the call document, and that the call document will not be updated to reflect this.*

**Q2: Is it mandatory to include a Co-Applicant on an SFI Centre for Research Training proposal?**

Yes. Please see Q1 for details on the number of applicants and co-applicants required on an application.

**Q3: Following submission of our EoI, we identified an additional research group that we would like to include in our application. Is this permitted?**

Yes. You may include additional researchers as Named Supervisors at the full proposal stage. If this researcher(s) is not at a Research Body named in the EoI, you may include them in the full proposal as a Named Supervisor, without the requirement of having a co-applicant included at that Research Body.

**Q4: How many applications can an individual make to the SFI Centres for Research Training Programme?**

Individuals may only submit a single proposal, as Applicant or Co-Applicant, to the SFI Centres for Research Training Programme 2018 call.

A Named Supervisor or Partner Organisation can be included and named on multiple applications.

If an Applicant or Co-Applicant submits more than one proposal to a call, both applications will be returned without review.

**Q5: Our proposed Centre for Research Training has a large number of Research Bodies involved. Must all co-applicants be included on the Management Committee?**

Multi-institutional applications must include an applicant from each institution to ensure adequate representation in the Centre (please see exception to this in Q1/Q4 following EoI submission). It is not mandatory that all applicants are members of the Management Committee, but it should have a minimum of three members. Applicants should propose a management and governance structure that is most appropriate for the effective and efficient delivery of the Centre for Research Training and includes appropriate representation of the institutions involved in the Centre for Research Training.

**Q6: Is there a limit on the number of Research Bodies that may be involved in a multi-institutional bid?**

No. Applicants from any number of Research Bodies may collaborate on an application to the SFI Centres for Research Training. However, applicants should consider the importance of the cohort structure in these programmes and that students at all participating Research Bodies are expected to be fully integrated into the cohort. For multi-institutional applications, this should be addressed in the Execution and Delivery section of the application and is part of the corresponding review criterion.

**Q7: Encouraging interinstitutional collaboration and efficiency is one of the objectives of the Programme. Must all applications be multi-institutional?**

No. SFI does not envisage funding Centres for Research Training that overlap significantly in their vision. It is therefore recommended that applicant groups and institutions collaborate in areas of mutual interest in the preparation and submission of bids. However, it is not a prerequisite for an application that it involve multiple institutions, rather collaboration should be driven by excellence. Reviewers will assess applications based on the quality and relevance of the applicant group and institutional environment and not on the number or geographical distribution of institutions involved in the bid. Please also see Q5 and Q6 regarding the management of multi-institutional bids and the integration of students from all participating Research Bodies into the cohort.

**Q8: Is it required that Named Supervisors are at an SFI Eligible Research Body?**

Yes. Named Supervisors must be based at an SFI Eligible Research Body to receive funding to support supervision of a student. However, students may be co-supervised by somebody who is not at an SFI Eligible Research Body, such as in an international institution or industry. Such co-supervision arrangements must be managed by the Centre for Research Training and may be reference in the proposal if a feature of the Centre. Co-supervisors for individual research projects do not need to be included as Named Supervisors or Partner Organisations.

**Q9: Can researchers in Research Bodies outside the Republic of Ireland (ROI) be Co-Applicants and Named Supervisors on an SFI Centres for Research Training proposal?**

Researchers in Research Bodies outside the ROI cannot be Applicants or Co-Applicants on applications to the SFI Centres for Research Training. All students enrolled in the Centre must have a primary supervisor (either an Applicant or Named Supervisor) based at an eligible Research Body within the ROI. However, they may be jointly supervised by a researcher outside of the ROI. Such co-supervision will be managed by successful Centres for Research Training and these co-supervisors do not need to be included as Named Supervisors in the application. However, if relevant to the overall research and training programme, applicants may wish to refer to such partnerships in the proposal document.

**Q10: Is it possible for Named Supervisors or Partner Organisations on the SFI Centres for Research Training to receive funding from the grant?**

Only Named Supervisors based in an SFI Eligible Research Body are eligible to receive funding through the Centres for Research Training Programme grant. Please note that co-supervisors 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 Investigators Programme.

Non-academic Partner Organisations may not receive funding from SFI Centres for Research Training Programme grants, regardless of their location. If members of Partner Organisations are acting as mentors to postgraduate students or are delivering training within an SFI Centre for Research Training, they may be eligible to participate in professional development opportunities for supervisors within the Centre, where directly relevant to their activities within the Centre and with suitable justification.

In exceptional cases, a project may require the use of facilities or services not available in Ireland. Funding for such a request may be considered, subject to a detailed justification for the funding being provided upon application.

**Q11: How many Named Supervisors are permitted on an SFI Centre for Research Training proposal?**

There is no limit on the number of Named Supervisors that may be included. Centres for Research Training should represent a critical mass of expertise that is sufficiently broad to span the research and training vision of the Centre. Applicants should also ensure that the number of Named Supervisors included at the application stage is at least sufficient to accommodate the number of students being requested in each cohort of the programme, such that students will have a choice of supervisors.

Additional Named Supervisors may be included after the award has been made and procedures for their recruitment must be put in place with oversight of the Governance Committee. Named Supervisors recruited after the award has been made are subject to the same eligibility requirements and to approval by SFI before being included in the Centre for Research Training.

**Q12: Is there a limit on the number of partner organisation that may be involved in an application?**

No. Applicants may include as many partner organisations as they wish in their application. However, all partner organisations must either contribute financially to the Centre, contribute to the design and/or delivery of the training programme, or be involved in supervision or mentoring of students. Organisations that may host students on placements do not need to be included as Partner Organisations, unless they satisfy one of the criteria above. New Partner Organisations may be included over the lifetime of the award, subject to approval by the Governance Committee and SFI.

**Q13: Do the organisations where students will undertake placements need to be identified at the application stage?**

No. Applicants should indicate in their application the types of organisations that will be targeted for students to undertake placements and what the desired learning outcomes might be. They should also outline how students will be supported in identifying placement opportunities and what measures will be in place to ensure that placements are successful. However, the actual locations of placements do not need to be known and placements may or may not be undertaken at Partner Organisations.

## **THEMATIC AREA**

**Q14: The thematic area is Data and ICT Skills for the Future, do applications to this programme have to include both data and ICT skills?**

No. An application must align with at least one of the priority areas under the Research Priorities ICT Theme, which are **“Future Networks, Communications and Internet of Things”, “Data Analytics, Management, Security, Privacy, Robotics and Artificial Intelligence (including Machine Learning)”** or **“Digital Platforms, Content and Applications, and Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality”**. As such, an application may be focused on either or both Data or ICT skills.

**Q15: My research area is not related to the thematic area of the call. Is it sufficient to align the training programme with the thematic area?**

No. Both the research and training programme of the proposed Centre for Research Training must be aligned with the thematic area of the call. In the 2018 call, the thematic area is Data and ICT Skills for the Future. Please see the call document for a detailed description. Applicants are required that their research and training programme have primary alignment with one of the National Priority Areas under the ICT them and potentially secondary alignment with an application area.

**Q16: I am unsure about the alignment of our proposal with the thematic area of this call, how can I be sure that it will be accepted?**

Applicants may contact SFI by e-mail ([crt@sfi.ie](mailto:crt@sfi.ie)) outlining their proposed Centre for Research Training. SFI will advise applicants on a case-by-case basis. However, a final assessment of the alignment to the thematic area will be made by SFI upon receipt of a full proposal.

**Q17: What will happen if my proposal does not align with the thematic area of the call?**

Full proposals submitted before the deadline will be assessed against all eligibility requirements before being sent for review; this will include alignment with the thematic area. Applications that are deemed not to be sufficiently aligned with the thematic area will be deemed ineligible and returned without review. If applicants are in doubt about whether their application is sufficiently aligned with the thematic area of the call, they should contact SFI by e-mail ([crt@sfi.ie](mailto:crt@sfi.ie)) well in advance of the deadline.

Applicants who have submitted an Expression of Interest will not receive feedback on alignment with thematic area, so submission of this documentation does not guarantee that a full proposal will be accepted for review.

## PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

**Q18: There are many courses already in place at my institution that would be relevant to students in the Centre for Research Training. Do all courses offered through the Centre need to be newly developed?**

No. It is not the intention of this programme to duplicate high-quality training opportunities that are already well established within the HEIs. As such it is expected that some elements of the training programme will be delivered through existing courses. The costs for taking these courses will be covered by student fees, as would be the case for students normally enrolled in a structured PhD programme.

However, SFI Centres for Research Training must be clearly differentiated from existing structured postgraduate courses offered by HEIs through a clear focus on an area of strategic need, developed and delivered in partnership with enterprise, and with a strong emphasis on the cohort approach to training. Applicants will be expected to describe the added value to the postgraduate student experience within the SFI Centres for Research Training.

**Q19: Can courses run through Centres for Research Training be made available to students who are not members of the Centre?**

Yes. Where new training is developed as part of the Centre for Research Training, it is acceptable and encouraged for postgraduate students, who are not members of the Centre but to whom elements of the training programme would be of particular relevance, to participate in those. However, such participation is only **permitted where no additional costs to the Centre for Research Training are incurred.**

**Q20: Can students funded from other sources participate in the full programme of research and training in a Centre for Research Training?**

Yes. Additional students may participate in the Centre for Research Training, provided all of their costs are covered, including any additional central costs that may be incurred through their participation.

**Q21: Are multiple placements allowed?**

Yes, subject to the cost being managed by the Centre for Research Training and the placements being compatible with the completion of the student's research degree.

**Q22: If co-supervision arrangements between Research Bodies will be a feature of the Centre for Research Training, do SFI expect that a joint degree be awarded?**

No. Students must be registered at and receive their degree from an SFI Eligible Research Body. Management of co-supervision arrangements and the nature of the degree awarded (single, joint, dual) will be at the discretion of the applicants.

## SUBMISSION

**Q23: Can the abstract submitted as part of the Expression of Interest in June differ from the abstract in the proposal submitted in advance of the September deadline?**

SFI expects the content of the abstract submitted as part of Expression of Interest to be, in the main, consistent with the abstract submitted as part of the proposal. The abstracts do not need to be identical

in terms of wording but should describe similar concepts and describe a similar programme of research and training.

**Q24: If I do not submit the requested Expression of Interest in advance of the 26 June 2018 deadline, will I be able to submit a proposal in advance of the December deadline?**

No. Only Lead Applicants who have submitted the Expression of Interest through their host institution Research Office will be permitted to submit a proposal to the call. Any information submitted directly to SFI, and not through the host institution Research Office, will not be accepted, and submission of a proposal will not be permitted.

**Q25: Will applicants be given feedback following the submission of Expressions of Interest on 26 June 2018?**

No. Expressions of Interest will not be assessed for quality or eligibility, including alignment to the thematic area. Applications will not be declined at this stage of the process and applicants will not be given feedback on their Expression of Interest.

SFI does not envisage funding Centres for Research Training that overlap significantly in their vision, so where SFI deems that there is significant overlap between the proposals outlined in the Expressions of Interest, the names and research bodies of those lead applicants, and the titles of the proposed SFI Centres for Research Training may be shared between those applicants so that they may consider submission of a combined or refocused application.

**Q26: Will all Expressions of Interest be made available to all applicants?**

No. Only where SFI deems that there is significant overlap between the proposals outlined in the Expressions of Interest, the names and research bodies of those lead applicants, and the titles of the proposed SFI Centres for Research Training may be shared between those applicants so that they may consider submission of a combined or refocused application.

## **APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY**

**Q27: Can current SFI grant holders apply to the SFI Centres for Research Training Programme?**

Investigators funded through an existing SFI award may apply to the SFI Centres for Research Training 2018 call at any stage of their award, subject to all other eligibility criteria being met.

Investigators currently funded by SFI as either a Principal Investigator (PI) or co-Principal Investigator (co-PI) under the SFI Research Centres Programme should note that their progress on the Research Centres grant(s) will be assessed if they submit an application to the SFI Centres for Research Training Programme 2018. Individuals who are funded as either a PI or co-PI under the Research Centres Programme must provide justification and rationale for how they would manage two or more major SFI grants under the heading: "Management of More Than One Major SFI Award" as part of the information concerning scientific overlap.

**Q28: Is a researcher who is currently under review as a Lead or Co-Applicant under other SFI Programmes eligible to apply as an Applicant or co-Applicant to the SFI Centres for Research call?**

Yes, subject to all eligibility criteria being met.

**Q29: Is a researcher who is a Lead or Co-Applicant on an SFI Research Centre eligible to apply as an Applicant or co-Applicant to the SFI Centres for Research call?**

Yes, subject to all eligibility criteria being met, and the researcher having sufficient time to commit to the executive management of the SFI Centre for Research Training, if successful.

**Q30: Can current SFI grant holders be included as Named Supervisors in applications to the SFI Centres for Research Training Programme?**

Yes, subject to all eligibility criteria being met. Successful Centres for Research Training may recruit additional Named Supervisors over the course of the award. Procedures must be put in place for the inclusion of new Named Supervisors, which will fall under the oversight of the Governance Committee. New Named Supervisors will be subject to approval by SFI.

Independent, early career researchers whose salary is funded by SFI, such as under the SIRG programme or SFI-Royal Society University Fellowship Programme may be included as Named Supervisors, subject to all other eligibility criteria being met.

**Q31: How does SFI define a senior author?**

A senior author is one who is that is listed as first or joint first author, reflecting the fact that he/she has provided the greatest intellectual contribution, has held the primary responsibility for collecting and analysing data, and for the writing of the manuscript and associated drafts. The last author will also be considered as a senior author, since this position generally reflects his/her overall responsibility for the study and suggests that a level of mentorship has been provided.

It will be noted that different publishers have differing rules on how the senior authorship is indicated (e.g., by using asterisks, underlining, placing the name first or last in the list of authors, etc.); of overriding importance however is that the applicant should be able to convince and reassure reviewers that they are the key author on these publications. Joint first authorship may only be claimed where the article clearly states that two (or more) authors have provided equal and significant contributions to the work described. Please note that senior authorship does not necessarily mean that they were responsible for the finance associated with the research that was reported.

**Q32: I am the corresponding author on a number of publications where I am not listed as first or last author. Is being listed as corresponding author enough to prove senior authorship for the SFI Centres for Research Training 2018 Call?**

For the purposes of eligibility for the SFI Centres for Research Training Programme, being listed as corresponding is not sufficient as evidence of senior authorship. Senior authorship is defined above.

**Q33: What qualifies as an independent research grant?**

The Lead Applicant and Co-Applicants are required to have demonstrated research independence through securing at least one independent research grant as lead investigator or as co-investigator. Eligible research grants would be expected to support the salary of at least one full-time equivalent, excluding the applicant(s), and include research team costs (e.g., materials and consumables). This excludes smaller awards such as travel grants, equipment grants, postgraduate fellowships, postdoctoral fellowships, and awards of short duration (12 months or less). Laboratory fit-out/start-up funding, and awards that have not been subject to external international peer review are also excluded. Applicants may be required to provide evidence to support the validity of an award upon request. If you are uncertain regarding the eligibility of funding you have received, please contact SFI at [crt@sfi.ie](mailto:crt@sfi.ie).



**Q34: What qualifications are necessary as a basic requirement for Applicants/Co-Applicants to the SFI Centres for Research Training Programme?**

The Applicant/Co-Applicant must:

- have a PhD or equivalent\*;
- be at least five years post the year of conferring of this qualification by the proposal deadline (i.e., the year on the certificate must be 2013 or earlier);
- be a senior author on at least 5 international peer reviewed articles;
- Hold an independent research grant;
- Have a track record of supervising postgraduate students.

\*SFI's Policy on PhD Equivalence can be found at this link: <http://www.sfi.ie/funding/grant-policies/sfi-policy-on-phd-equivalence.html>. Applicants holding an equivalent qualification may be eligible, but should nevertheless seek approval from SFI in advance of submitting a proposal.

**Q35: What qualifications are necessary as a basic requirement for Named Supervisors in the SFI Centres for Research Training Programme?**

A Named Supervisor must:

- have a PhD or equivalent\*;
- be at least three years post the year of conferring of this qualification by the proposal deadline (i.e., the year on the certificate must be 2015 or earlier);
- be a senior author on at least 3 international peer reviewed articles.

**Q36: Do abstracts, patent applications, or invention disclosures count as publications for the senior author publications requirement?**

No, they do not. Only original research publications are acceptable.

## FUNDING AND BUDGETS

**Q37: How many awards will be made under the SFI Centres for Research Training Programme?**

It is envisaged that in the region of four to six SFI Centres for Research Training will be funded under the current call. SFI does not envisage funding Centres for Research Training that overlap significantly in their vision. It is therefore recommended that applicant groups and institutions collaborate in areas of mutual interest in the preparation and submission of bids.

**Q38: Can funding for Research Masters be requested in an application to the SFI Centres for Research Training Programme?**

Yes. Although the focus of this programme is on doctoral training, it is recognised that there may be some areas that would benefit more from increased numbers of research masters postgraduates. Applicants may apply for funding for all PhD students, all Research Masters students, or a mix of both. In all cases, applicants should provide justification for their choice in terms of workforce needs and the proposed training programme should be appropriate for the degree(s) to be awarded.



**Q39: Why do host research bodies have to outline how they will use overheads under the SFI Centres for Research Training?**

In recognition of the strategic importance of these awards, the significant intra- and inter-institutional coordination that they will require and the required investment in the graduate training provision required to deliver world-class training within the SFI Centres for Research Training, SFI has chosen to pay overheads at the normal rate on these awards. It is expected that overheads will be utilized for the payment of exceptional costs in the provision of services, training and support, over and above the indirect costs of hosting students already covered by their fees. This would include facilitation of strategic institutional collaboration, international collaboration, competitive recruitment of students, and to provide a demonstrable enhancement to the postgraduate student experience in the Centre. Host Research Bodies must include a statement on how overheads will be used to support the SFI Centre for Research Training.

**Q40: It states in the call document that the maximum annual intake of students may be 30, with a maximum of 24 of those being funded by SFI. Can additional students be included if funded by other sources**

SFI will fund up to an average of 24 students per year in a Centre for Research Training. Applicants must secure a minimum of 6 additional students to meet the leverage requirements of the programme. If an applicant group can secure additional students, over and above the minimum leverage requirements of the programme, the total number of students enrolled per year may exceed 30. Reviewers will be asked to assess applications based on value for money both in terms of the budget requested from SFI as well as the contributions from non-SFI sources. Applicants must also have sufficient supervisory capacity in place to accommodate the number of students to be enrolled in the Centre.

**Q41: Are non-EU fees eligible costs under the SFI Centres for Research Training Programme?**

No. Applicants may only request EU fees at the levels set out in SFI's Grant Budget Policy.

**Q42: Can salaries for postdoctoral researchers or other team members be requested through the SFI Centres for Research Training Programme?**

No. The only eligible staff costs allowed under this programme are the stipend and fees of students that will be trained through the Centre for Research Training, and the salary of a programme manager. Stipends and fees may only be requested at the levels set out in SFI's Grant Budget Policy.

**Q43: What sources of funding may be used to meet the minimum requirement for additional non-SFI funded students?**

Funding may come from any non-SFI source, such as enterprise, philanthropy, charity, overseas organisations, public agencies, institutional funding, etc. However, funding that is already committed to existing research programmes may not be counted towards the minimum leverage requirement. Funding for additional students must cover the full costs of the student including stipend and fees, materials and consumables, travel and training as a cash contribution to the Centre for Research Training.

**Q44: Can students based in industry be included to meet the minimum number of additionally leveraged students?**

Yes, provided funding covers the full costs of the student including stipend and fees, materials and consumables, travel and training as a cash contribution to the Centre for Research Training. Students

based in industry must be fully integrated into the cohort and should participate in all elements of the research and training programme.

**Q45: Can funding be requested for the training of supervisors in the SFI Centres for Research Training?**

Yes. Where training is unambiguously aligned with an Applicant's or Named Supervisor's role in the Centre for Research Training, funding may be requested to support this. Examples of this type of training might include teaching and learning, supervision, mentorship, etc. Members of partner organisations who will be delivering training or acting as mentors to students may also participate in such training where directly relevant to their activities in the Centre.

**Q46: Is buy-out an eligible cost for the lead applicant?**

No. In line with SFI's Grant Budget Policy, buy-out is not an eligible cost.

**Q47: Are there provisions made for student's maternity leave?**

Current SFI maternity leave policy will apply, which does not include provision for a student's maternity leave. Should changes be made to this in future, these will apply to these awards.

## **RESEARCH Centres**

**Q48: I am a Centre Director of an SFI Research Centre. May I apply to this programme?**

Yes. Centre Directors are eligible to apply to the SFI Centres for Research Training as Lead or Co-Applicants or as Named Supervisors. During submission of their application, they should complete the "Management of more than one major SFI Award" section under the Funding History part of the application.

**Q49: I am a Centre Director/investigator in an SFI Research Centre. Does my application to this programme have to align with the activities of the Research Centre?**

No. SFI Centres for Research Training are separate from the SFI Research Centres and applicant groups may or may not include members of Research Centres. The SFI Centres for Research Training may also provide an opportunity for members of the SFI Research Centres to engage with researchers outside of their Research Centre and maybe outside of their own discipline. Encouraging interdisciplinary research and training environments is one of the Guiding Principles of the SFI Centres for Research Training Programme.

**Q50: If members of an SFI Research Centre are applying to this Programme, must they apply solely as members of that Research Centre?**

No. SFI Centres for Research Training are separate from the SFI Research Centres and applicant groups may or may not include members of Research Centres, may include multiple Research Centres, or may include both members and non-members of SFI Research Centres. No preference will be given to members of SFI Research Centres in the review of applications to the SFI Centres for Research Training programme. However, as part of an application, members of Research Centres may wish to describe the expertise, infrastructure, training and networking opportunities that is available through access to the SFI Research Centre(s).

**Q51: As part of our Centre there is already a structured PhD programme in place that meets the objectives of the SFI Centres for Research Training. May we apply using this programme?**

Yes. Applicants must clearly describe the needs for additional postgraduates in the workforce in this area over and above the number of students that will already be funded through the SFI Research Centre. Students funded under the SFI Centres for Research Training will be in addition to those funded under the SFI Research Centres and may not displace those students for which funding is already committed. All applications will be reviewed in the same way and no preference will be given to applications from the SFI Research Centres.