

Career Development Award (CDA) Programme FAQs

Last updated 20th Oct 2016

APPLICANT & MENTOR

Q: Under the SFI CDA Programme what is the expected profile of an applicant?

A: The Applicant will be a researcher with between 3-15 years of experience beyond the award of their PhD or equivalent qualification, who at the time of application will be either in a permanent, full-time academic position (either within the institution at which they wish to base their CDA-funded research or another elsewhere in Ireland or overseas), or employed on a temporary (fixed-term) contract. The applicant, who must not work under the guidance of a supervisor, will have already demonstrated research independence, for example, by securing a faculty position, by having several publications without the participation of their PhD supervisor, as well as having a track record with senior author publications, potentially having secured research funding and accumulated supervisory experience. The applicant has primary responsibility for carrying out the research within the funding limits awarded and in accordance with the [SFI Terms and Conditions of Research Grants](#).

Q: Under the SFI CDA Programme what is the expected profile of a mentor?

A: The mentor will be an established senior researcher within the host institution who will give advice and guidance to the award holder and associated team. The mentor may also take the role of a co-supervisor, but it is the award holder who will always act as the primary supervisor. The mentor does not play a supervisory or presiding role to the award holder, but acts solely as an advisor. Note that the nomination of a mentor is not obligatory in applications to the CDA programme, but may strengthen or formalise the institutional support to be provided to the applicant.

APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

Q: What does SFI consider as the official date of a PhD award?

A: The official date is defined as the year that the degree was conferred, i.e. the year printed on the official PhD certificate. Verification of this official date by the awarding research body must be available upon request. The number of years since the conferring of the degree is measured to the call deadline for submission of proposals (22nd March 2017).

Q: Is any allowance made for those applicants who have taken documented eligible leave?

A: Allowance is made for those applicants who have taken documented eligible leave – the maximum extension to the period of eligibility under this scheme is 4 ½ years (54 months). Please see Section 2.4.6 of the call document for further details.

Additionally, applicants may extend their period of eligibility by 12 months for each year spent working in a science or engineering related industry post award of PhD. The maximum extension to the period of eligibility under this scheme is 2 years (24 months).

Note that career breaks (i.e., to go travelling or for other reasons not in line with those described above) do not constitute eligible leave. Scanned copies of relevant supporting documents (letter on headed paper from the HR department of the company you worked in) to verify time in industry must be uploaded in Sesame.

Q: Please outline those candidates that would not be eligible for CDA 2016.

A: The CDA programme is not available to the following:

- Researchers whose proposal/area of work is not aligned to SFI's legal remit
- Those who do not hold a doctorate level degree e.g. Ph.D. or equivalent
- Those whose doctorate level degree was awarded before 2002 or after 2014, subject to any periods of documented leave (see above);
- Those who work under the guidance of a supervisor and have never held an independent research position;
- Those who do not meet the stated peer-reviewed publication requirements as detailed in the call document;
- Former or current holders of ERC Consolidator Grants or ERC Advanced Grants;
- Former or current holders of SFI PIYRA awards;
- Current holders of a Research Career Development Fellowship (RCDF – SFI HRB Wellcome Trust Biomedical Research Partnership), a Royal Society-SFI University Research Fellowship or an ERC Starting Grant who are not in the last 24 months of their award.
- ***Please note that it is the responsibility of Research Bodies to ensure that applicants meet the eligibility criteria as outlined in Section 2.4 of the Call document.***

Q: Is there a minimum percentage of commitment required for the CDA award?

A: No. Although a minimum threshold is not set, reviewers are likely to question commitment below 25-30% of total available time.

Q: I am a team member funded on an SFI research grant but I am not the PI and do not have a faculty position. Am I eligible to apply for a CDA?

A: Yes, assuming you meet all other eligibility criteria and the Research Body will recognise you as an employee of the institution for at least the duration of the CDA grant and that your salary will be provided from a source other than a SFI-funded award. PI salaries are not eligible costs. If your application is successful and you accept the CDA grant, your participation in the existing research grant must terminate. For example, this may be relevant for Research Fellows funded by an SFI Research Centre or an Investigator award.

Q: I am an independent researcher with a temporary contract and my salary is sourced from a Fellowship award in my own name, am I eligible to apply?

A: Researchers on temporary contracts may be eligible to apply, assuming all other eligibility criteria are met and the Research Body will recognise you as an employee of the institution for at least the duration of the CDA 2016 grant. Where the applicant is salaried by an alternative source other than the Research Body for either part or for the entire funding period, SFI requires written confirmation from the funder of his/her salary that they are permitted to hold additional funding. This written confirmation must be submitted to cda@sfi.ie in advance of the full proposal deadline and pre-approval will be granted on a case by case basis.

Q: I hold a tenure-track faculty position, am I eligible to apply?

A: Yes. Researchers in tenure-track faculty positions are eligible to apply, assuming all other eligibility criteria are met and the Research Body will recognise you as an employee of the institution for at least the duration of the new CDA 2016 grant, if successful.

Q: I hold a SIRG award. Am I eligible to apply to the CDA programme?

A: SIRG awardees can apply for the CDA 2016 call in the last 24 months of their award once all other eligibility criteria are met. It is expected that they will have moved into a salaried academic position and if this is not the case, applicants will require evidence that their salary will not be sourced by their SIRG award, if successful.

Q: I hold a Royal Society SFI University Research fellowship. Am I eligible to apply to the CDA programme?

A: Current award holders of a Royal Society-SFI University Research Fellowship in the last 24 months of their award may be eligible to apply to CDA 2016 assuming all other eligibility criteria are met and the Research Body will recognise you as an employee of the institution for at least the duration of the new CDA programme 2016 grant. The researcher must demonstrate that taking up a CDA award would not be detrimental to achieving the aims and objectives of the current award. SFI requires written confirmation from the Royal Society that they are permitted to hold additional funding in advance of the full proposal deadline and pre-approval will be granted on a case by case basis.

Q: Are Funded Investigators (FIs) in SFI Research Centres eligible to apply to the CDA programme?

A: Yes, providing all other eligibility criteria are met. For the avoidance of doubt please note that co-PIs in SFI Research Centre awards are ineligible.

Q: I hold a 2015 H2020 Catalyst award. Am I eligible to apply to the CDA programme?

A: Yes. Receipt of a H2020 Catalyst award does not preclude you from applying to the 2016 CDA programme call.

Q: Is co-supervision of PhD/MSc students considered eligible to satisfy the criterion of supervision/mentoring?

A: Co-supervision of PhD/MSc students may be permitted once the applicant is formally recognised by the Research Body as a co-supervisor.

Q: Can unsuccessful applicants to the 2015 CDA programme, submit an application to the 2016 CDA programme?

A: Yes, unsuccessful applicants to the 2015 CDA programme are eligible to apply to the 2016 CDA programme providing all other eligibility criteria are met. Full details on SFI's Resubmission Policy are available [here](#). Applications to any call that are based primarily on unsuccessful submissions (following peer review) to any SFI programme must demonstrate that the review comments resulting from the initial application have been taken into account in the preparation of the new submission. SFI will not review resubmissions that have failed to take into account the major comments or concerns resulting from the prior review; such proposals will be withdrawn from the review process. Applicants to an SFI call for proposals must declare whether a new submission relates to a previously submitted application to any SFI scheme. If the application is a resubmission, a statement referencing the previous application and explaining the differences must be provided and make reference to reviewer comments where relevant. This information can be provided within the relevant section of the Sesame application. This statement will assist SFI Scientific Staff in the assessment of eligibility of a revised application and will not be shared with reviewers.

Q: If an applicant submits the Preliminary Information for the Investigators Programme to SFI by 30th September, does this preclude them from applying to the CDA 2016 programme?

A: If an applicant submits the Preliminary Information required for the Investigators Programme, they will not be precluded from applying to CDA 2016. Submission of a full proposal to the Investigators Programme will preclude them from applying to the CDA programme call. For planning purposes, we would appreciate it if a researcher who has submitted the preliminary information would let us know if they decide against applying for the Investigators Programme.

Q: Does the CDA applicant have to be in place in the host Institution at time of application?

A: No, it is permissible for the applicant to carry out their work under a CDA at a different institution. However, they will need to first contact the research body where they intend to work and be selected as one of the institution's approved applicants. Furthermore, they will need to provide assurance in their application that the new institution is able to provide the necessary infrastructure and support.

Q: Is there an age limit for CDA?

A: No.

Q: Can you explain what being senior author on five publications means?

A: A senior author is one who is listed as first or joint first author, reflecting the fact that s/he has provided the greatest intellectual contribution, has held the primary responsibility for collecting and analysing the data, and for the writing of the manuscript and associated draft. Essentially, the applicant must be able to demonstrate that they were primarily responsible for the research that is described in each of three peer-reviewed publications. The last author (or joint last author) will also be considered as a senior author, since this position generally reflects his/her overall responsibility for the study and suggests at a level of mentorship has been provided. 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.); what is important is that the applicant could convince and reassure reviewers that they were the key author on these publications. Please note that this does NOT mean that they were responsible financially for the research that was reported. Note also that only primary research articles are considered – secondary research articles such as reviews, essays and book chapters in which the research of peers is discussed rather than the author's own results, will not contribute to the required five senior-author publications.

Q: Would there be any exceptional circumstance where applicants who do not have 5 senior author publication would be considered or are there any allowances made for manuscripts under review?

A: No. All eligibility criteria set out in the CDA call documents must be adhered to. Research articles under review are not permitted. Each original research article must have a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) to be counted.

Q: 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 2016 CDA call?

A: For the purposes of eligibility for the 2016 CDA programme, being listed as corresponding author is not sufficient as evidence of senior authorship. Senior authorship is defined in the question above.

Q: Can first-author publications published during the period of an applicant's doctoral studies count towards their required five senior-author publications?

A: Yes, senior-author publications can originate from an applicant's pre- or post-doctorate career.

Q: Do the publication requirements apply to applicants who have spent time in industry?

A: Yes.

Q: When listing peer-review publications including conference proceedings, does this include conference abstracts which have been published in peer review journals and conference proceedings published in book format (i.e. IFMBE proceedings).

A: Yes. Such proceedings articles may be included.

Q: Do international peer reviewed conference proceedings count towards the five senior author publication requirement?

A: In fields where publication in international peer reviewed conference proceedings is the norm, such publications count towards the publication requirement.

MENTOR

Q: Can the applicant choose as mentor his/her supervisor during previous postdoc years?

A: Yes, this is possible, if the chosen individual is the most appropriate mentor. The role of a mentor is to provide advice and guidance to the award holder and associated team.

Q: Does the mentor have to be located within the host institution?

A: Yes. The role of the mentor is to provide advice and guidance to the award holder and associated team within the host institution and therefore this role may strengthen the institutional support to be provided to the applicant. However, it is not obligatory to nominate a mentor for the CDA programme.

COLLABORATORS

Q: Can collaborators (academic or industrial) be added in the application form?

A: Yes. Collaborators can be added in the application but they are not mandatory.

Q: Can a collaborator be from outside of the Republic of Ireland?

A: Yes, but funding cannot be allocated to a collaborator from outside the Republic of Ireland.

Q: Could an Industry Collaborator be a voluntary organisation?

A: Yes. A non-academic collaborator may be added as an industry collaborator, once a clear involvement in the research programme is demonstrated.

ELIGIBLE RESEARCH BODY

Q: Which research bodies are eligible to apply for CDA?

A: Please see the list of SFI eligible research bodies [here](#).

Q: Can I submit multiple expression of interest to different Higher Education Institutes/SFI eligible Research Bodies?

A: You may contact as many HEIs/SFI Eligible Research Bodies as you wish; this is a matter for you and the Research Body. Selection of candidates for the CDA 2016 Programme Call is the responsibility of the Research Body. However, only one proposal may be submitted to the SFI CDA Programme Call.

Q: How many applications can an individual make to the SFI CDA programme?

A: Applicants may only submit one proposal to the SFI 2016 CDA Programme Call through the SESAME online system, and only if they have first been approved by the Research Office of the host institution.

Q: What is the institutional cap on the number of applications?

A: Eligible Bodies may nominate up to a maximum of 12 applicants, who may then submit a proposal to the CDA 2016 call.

Q: Can you explain why an institutional cap is in place?

A: An institutional cap is in place in order to identify the most suitable and competitive candidates in advance of the submission of full proposals to SFI. In addition to ensuring strategic alignment of selected candidates, limiting the number of applications has the effect of ensuring the applications are processed in a timely manner and also ensures success rates are maintained within an acceptable range. For the 2016 call the institutional cap is 12 applicants per research body.

REMIT

Q: I'm not sure if my research topic aligns with SFI's legal remit?

A: Additional guidance on SFI's Legal Remit is available [here](#).

Q: Can SFI fund clinical trials through the CDA programme 2016?

A: No. SFI only permits early-stage regulated clinical trials (Phase I or combined Phase I/II) and investigations to be undertaken under the scope of the following SFI programmes: SFI Research Centres, Spokes, and Strategic Partnerships in addition to SFI Research Professorship where the successful candidate will become a Co-Principal Investigator within an SFI Research Centre. Clinical trials and investigations requiring approval by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) will not be permitted through other SFI funding programmes, including CDA 2016. Funding requests for early-stage research involving human volunteers and/or human samples that does not require regulatory approval are permitted under CDA 2016. Where there is any doubt, applicants are advised to contact the HPRA prior to submission to ensure eligibility and are required to indicate in their application that the proposed study does not require HPRA approval. SFI's Clinical Trial and Clinical Investigation Policy can be found [here](#).

Q: Does my research require ethical approval?

A: SFI will require evidence that relevant ethical and regulatory approval has been granted for studies involving human or animal subjects prior to an award commencing. In exceptional cases where such research may not commence until a late stage of an award, SFI may permit submission of ethical and regulatory approvals following the award start date but prior to commencement of the research involving animal and/or human subjects. See Section 7 of the call document for further details.

FUNDING

Q: Are relocation expenses an eligible cost in the 2016 CDA call?

A: Relocation expenses are ineligible under the 2016 CDA call.

Q: Can large scale equipment be funded under the CDA programme?

A: The upper limit of funding for a CDA award is €500,000. Therefore, it is unlikely that large scale equipment could be funded through the CDA award once team member salaries, consumables etc are budgeted for.

Q: Are publication costs allowed in CDA 2016 applications?

A: Yes, publication costs are allowed. You must provide sufficient justification.

Q: In a CDA Programme application, is it possible to request funds to support a post-doctoral researcher in the proposal?

A: Yes. Funding requests to support a post-doctoral researcher is permitted in CDA, providing the role is clearly justified in relation to the level of expertise required. The overall budget must not exceed the maximum budget of €500,000.

Q: Can PhD students be funded for only two years?

A: No, SFI requires that PhD students be funded for four years.

Q: Do team members, (e.g. post docs, PhD students) have to be in place at the time of application or are they recruited following award?

A: Team members are recruited once the award has been made.

Q: Can the CDA applicant, if successful, receive salary from this award?

A.: No. (Exceptions may apply for Tyndall National Institute applicants).

Q: Are salary requests for team members inclusive of PRSI?

A: Yes, PRSI at 10.75% are factored into these salary contributions.

Q: Can team members be recruited from Ireland or abroad?

A: Either. However, it should be noted that different fees for non-EU PhD students may apply and cannot be covered from the CDA staff budget unless they are named in the proposal in advance.

Q: Is it possible for Collaborators on the SFI CDA Programme to receive funding from the grant?

A: Only Academic Collaborators based in an SFI Eligible Research Body are eligible to receive funding through the CDA programme award. The funding allocated should reflect the supporting role that such Collaborator(s) are expected to play in the research programme. 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 CDA programme.

Industry Collaborators may not receive funding from CDA grants, regardless of their location. 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.

REVIEW PROCESS

Q: Can you describe the CDA 2016 review process?

A: Proposal evaluation is a two-step review process as outlined [here](#). The first stage is a postal review by a virtual panel comprising international scientific experts. Proposals will be assessed on the basis of three key evaluation criteria.

- *Quality, significance, and relevance of the research record of the applicant commensurate with their career stage (weight 40%)*
- *Quality, significance, novelty, and strategic relevance of the research plan (weight 40%)*
- *Potential impact and value to Ireland (weight 20%)*

Reviews received from peers will be collated and forwarded to applicants. Applicants will then be afforded the opportunity to submit a response to the reviewers' comments. The second stage of the review process will be an evaluation of the comments of the virtual postal review panel and the applicant's response by a sitting panel comprising of international scientific experts.

Q: Who reviews the potential impact and value to Ireland?

A: Potential impact and value to Ireland is assessed by international scientific experts as described above.

Q: Will priority for funding be given to permanent staff over staff who have the appropriate institutional support in place but are on temporary contracts?

A: No, all eligible applications whether from permanent staff or temporary staff with appropriate institutional support will be reviewed on their own merits.

Q: Is the research record of an applicant evaluated with respect to career stage?

A: Yes. Reviewers are guided to evaluate the track record and suitability of an applicant for a CDA award, commensurate with career stage.