SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 FAQs

Contents

Section A   APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

Q A.1   Please outline those applications that would not be eligible for the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 Call.

SFI-IRC Pathway Programme grants are not available to the following:

- Applications that do not involve a programme of research (e.g. events / public engagement applications).
- Applicants recognised as independent investigators.
- Applicants who have previously held or are currently employed on a faculty contract of greater than or equal to 36 months in duration.
- Those who do not hold a doctorate level degree e.g. Ph.D. or equivalent or received this qualification after 2022.
- Holders of significant independent research grants (see below for further details).

Please note that it is the responsibility of Research Bodies to ensure that applicants meet the eligibility criteria as outlined in Section 2.8 of the Call document.

Q A.2   How do you define research independence?

An independent researcher would be one who holds, or has held, an academic contract (e.g. lecturer, assistant professor, professor, or similar) of greater than, or equal to, 36 months in duration (excluding teaching-only academic contracts of any duration) and/or 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 awards, and bursaries are not usually considered as independent research grants. A significant independent research grant is typically a multi-annual (≥ 3 years in duration) grant or fellowship that provides support for research costs and may include staff / team member(s) in addition to the applicant.

Q A.3   What is considered a "significant peer-reviewed, independent research grant, or grant providing similar support to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme"?

A significant independent research grant is typically a multi-annual (≥ 3 years in duration) grant or fellowship that provides support for research costs and may include staff / team member(s) in addition to the applicant. See Q A.4 & Q A.5 for examples. If you are not sure that you fulfil the suitability criteria, please contact your research office or pathway@sfi.ie to discuss further.

Personal grants, including student, postdoctoral or individual fellowships, travel awards, and bursaries are permissible.

Q A.4   What types of personal grants do not affect eligibility to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 Call?

The following are examples of personal grants that would **not** render the recipient ineligible for the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme:

- Marie Curie Fellowships
- Irish Research Council Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellowships
- Irish Research Council Enterprise Partnership Scheme Postdoctoral Fellowships
- Irish Research Council New Foundations Awards

- Irish Research Council DOROTHY COFUND programme
- Enterprise Ireland Innovation Partnership Awards
- College/Institutional Awards
- EPA Fellowships
- Sir Henry Wellcome Postdoctoral Fellowship
- SFI Technology Innovation Development Award
- SFI Industry RD&I Fellowship

Q A.5   What types of independent research grants, or a grant providing similar support to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme, would make me ineligible for the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 Call?

The following are examples of independent research grants, a grant providing similar support to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme, that would render the recipient **ineligible** for the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme:
- ERC Starting Grant
- IRC Laureate Award
- SFI Starting Investigator Research Grant
- Royal Society University Research Fellowship
- SFI Frontiers for the Future awards / projects
- MRC New Investigator Research Grant
- Sir Henry Dale Fellowships
- Wellcome Research Career Development Fellowships

Q A.6   If I submit an application to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 Call, can I apply to the RS-SFI University Research Fellowship scheme, the Research Career Development Fellowship (SFI-HRB-Wellcome Trust Biomedical Research Partnership) or the Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellowship Programme?

Yes. Subject to eligibility requirements, individuals may submit an application to the Royal Society-SFI University Research Fellowship, the Research Career Development Fellowship (SFI-HRB-Wellcome Trust Biomedical Research Partnership) or the Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellowship Programme whilst under active review under the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme. However, as these are all examples of career development type awards funded by SFI or the IRC, applicants will not be permitted to accept both awards, if successful.

For example, should an applicant be successful under the Royal Society-SFI URF programme, they would be required to withdraw their application from the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme call.   *Please contact pathway@sfi.ie if you are under review under these calls at the point of application or if you are planning a future application to these calls.*

Q A.7   Is an applicant eligible to apply to the SFI-IRC Pathway programme 2024 call if they are currently on the reserve list of the 2022 call??

Providing they meet all eligibility criteria, applicants on the reserve list for the SFI-IRC Pathway programme 2022 call can apply to the 2024 call. SFI and the IRC intend to close the reserve list in Q1 2024.

Q A.8 **If I submit an application to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 call, can I apply to the European Research Council Starting Grant?**

Yes. Subject to eligibility requirements, individuals may submit an application to the ERC Starting Grant whilst under active review under the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 call. Should an applicant be successful in both review processes, this will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Q A.9 **Is a researcher within an organisation eligible to apply from the same organisation or is mobility required?**

Mobility is not required but it is permitted.

Q A.10 **Does the applicant have to be in place in the host Institution at time of application?**

No, it is permissible for the applicant to be based in a different institution, including an institution outside of Ireland, at the time of submitting an application to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 call. However, they will need to first contact the research body where they intend to hold their award and be selected as one of the institution's approved applicants. Furthermore, they will need to provide assurance in their application that a mentor in that institution is able to provide the necessary infrastructure and support.

Q A.11 **I assisted in some lecturing duties while my main role continued to be as a supervised postdoctoral researcher. Am I still eligible to apply to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 call?**

It is appreciated that some postdoctoral researchers and research fellows are asked to assist in carrying out lecturing duties as part of their researcher role. So long as you have not moved into an independent research position and you have remained under the guidance of a mentor/supervisor, you remain eligible to apply for SFI-IRC Pathway Programme. An applicant must not have previously held or currently be employed on an academic contract of greater than or equal to 36 months in duration. Teaching-only contracts of greater than or equal to 36 months in duration are permitted. Applicants who hold, or have held, academic positions will be required to articulate why they do not consider that these positions represent research independence as part of the statement of eligibility and career development. Where the applicant has held or holds a faculty contract, details must be provided in the Research Body Letter of Support. It is important that any teaching, supervision or lecturing duties undertaken during your post-PhD career are carefully described in your CV.

Q A.12 **Do faculty contracts of greater than 36 months duration outside of Ireland make applicants ineligible to SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 call?**

Yes, applicants must not have held or currently hold a faculty contract of ≥36 months in duration. This includes faculty contracts held in institutions outside of Ireland.

Q A.13 **Is there a cumulative aspect to the 36-month faculty contract eligibility criterion? For example, could you have held or hold two contracts that are under 36 months in duration at the time of full proposal submission?**

Applicants should not hold, or have held, an academic contract of greater than, or equal to, 36 months in duration. There is no cumulative aspect to this criterion. Teaching-only academic contracts greater than or equal to 36 months in duration are permitted.

Q A.14 The title of the academic position does not automatically determine research independence. Certain Asst. Prof. may be employed on teaching only contracts.

In the statement of eligibility and career development, 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. An applicant must not have previously held or currently be employed on an academic contract of greater than or equal to 36 months in duration. Teaching-only contracts of greater than or equal to 36 months in duration are permitted. Applicants who hold, or have held, academic positions will be required to articulate why they do not consider that these positions represent research independence as part of the statement of eligibility and career development. Where the applicant has held or holds a faculty contract, details must be provided in the Research Body Letter of Support. It is important that any teaching, supervision, or lecturing duties undertaken during your post-PhD career are carefully described in your CV.

Q A.15 Should the applicant mention the number of oral presentations given at international conferences?

Yes. Applicants should demonstrate a proven record of internationally recognised research accomplishments appropriate to their research field and career stage. Reviewers will be asked to consider 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;
- Presentations

Q A.16 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 (e.g.. IFMBE proceedings)?

Yes. Such proceedings articles may be included.

Q A.17 Can you define what a 'faculty contract' is? Are postdoctoral researchers or research assistants considered faculty?

Faculty contracts include teaching responsibilities, and the salary for these positions are generally supported by the Research Body and not from a research grant (e.g., associate / assistant professor grade, lecturer or similar). Post-doctoral researchers and research assistants are generally supported through a research grant and are not considered to hold faculty positions.

Q A.18 Is there an advised number of senior author publications?

There is no publication eligibility criterion for this programme. Applicants should demonstrate a proven record of internationally recognised research accomplishments appropriate to their research field and career stage.

Q A.19 **Can you please clarify if co-applicant status on peer reviewed grants would be considered ineligible? Can you define "significant" in this case?**

Generally, Co-applicant status on an independent research grant is considered 'holding' an award. Guidance on the definition of independent research grants is available in Q A.4 & Q A.5. Applicants who hold, or have held, an independent research grant(s) as Co-applicant must address how these do not represent significant, independent research grants or fellowships of a similar career stage. If you are not sure that you fulfil the suitability criteria, please contact your research office or pathway@sfi.ie to discuss further.

Q A.20 **Will applications to Pathways affect eligibility for future IRC or SFI awards?**

SFI and the IRC will also not allow award holders of SFI-IRC Pathway grants to apply to any SFI or IRC programmes during the first 12 months of the award, unless specifically indicated in the relevant call documentation that it is permissible to do so.

Q A.21 **Are there limits to the time we can spend outside of host institutions with collaborators (e.g. international)?**

The applicant and PhD student are required to be primarily based in Ireland. Short-term visits to international collaborators will be permitted and these should be fully described within the research programme.

Q A.22 **How are part-time faculty contracts considered in the employment eligibility criterion?**

Part-time working is considered the same as full-time working (i.e., two years of half-time working counts as two full time years).

Q A.23 **Is all the eligibility criteria assessed only at the time of the submission? (e.g. what if the applicant will have 36 months of faculty contract at the start of the programme, but not on the application deadline?)**

The applicants must not have previously held, or currently be employed on, a faculty contract greater than or equal to 36 months in duration. This is related to the contract duration and not the time spent in the current contract.

Q A.24 **Is it possible to apply for (and take) an academic position during the project if it is funded?**

Yes, applicants can apply for, and accept, an academic position during the project. This will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis by the relevant funder.

Q A.25 **I am a postdoctoral researcher and PI on a SFI National Challenge Fund grant at the concept/seed phase, am I eligible to apply to the SFI-IRC Pathway 2024 call?**

Assuming that all other eligibility criteria have been met, postdoctoral candidates who currently hold or have held a SFI Challenge grant under the National Challenge Fund (NCF) as either lead-PI or Co-PI up as far as the Concept/Seed phase would be eligible to apply under the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 call.

In cases where candidates currently holding a NCF grant at Concept/Seed phase are successful under the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme call, it would not be possible to hold both grants simultaneously as it is expected that Pathway grant holders will dedicate almost all of their time to the SFI-IRC Pathway programme in its first year.

Candidates who currently hold or have held a SFI Challenge grant under the National Challenge Fund, or other SFI Challenge Funding, as either lead-PI or Co-PI at Grow or Prize Award phase would not be considered eligible to apply under the SFI-IRC Pathway programme 2024 Call.

Should a candidate under active review under the SFI-IRC Pathway programme be successful in progressing to the Grow / Prize Award phase of their active NCF grant, they would be required to withdraw their application from the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 call.

Please contact pathway@sfi.ie or challenges@sfi.ie if you are under review under these calls at the point of application or if you are planning a future application to these calls.

Q A.26 Can I apply to both the Industry RD&I Fellowship and the SFI-IRC Pathway programme?

Yes, subject to eligibility requirements, individuals may submit an application to both the SFI-IRC Pathway and the Industry RD&I Fellowship Programmes. We would ask that any applicant who is considering applying for both programmes be fully transparent about this when engaging with a potential industry partner. The industry partner contributes considerably to the development of the Industry RD&I Fellowship proposal and budget, and due consideration needs to be given to the industry partner in these circumstances. If successful, applicants will not be permitted to accept both awards. Should an applicant be successful under the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme call, they would be required to withdraw their application from the Industry RD&I Fellowship call.   Please contact irdif@sfi.ie if you are under review under these calls at the point of application or if you are planning a future application to this call.

Section B   APPLICANT, COLLABORATORS & MENTORS

Q B.1   Can the fellowship be offered as a part time?
No.

Q B.2   Is it possible to have two mentors if your research spans two different research fields? If so, can a mentor be located outside the host institution?

Only one formal mentor may be appointed and they must be based in the host institution. However, your appointed mentor could note in his/her letter of support that input may be available from an experienced researcher in the second research field. Collaborators from different research fields can also be included.

Q B.3   Is it possible for a mentor to act as mentor to more than one SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 awardee?

Yes, this is possible, provided that the mentor provides a clear plan as to how he/she could be an effective mentor to more than one SFI-IRC Pathway Programme awardee. The mentor must have sufficient time available to advise and host a second awardee and the lab capacity (where relevant) and infrastructure to mentor more than one SFI-IRC Pathway Programme awardee. This would be assessed as part of the overall application and a decision reached regarding the appropriateness or otherwise of mentoring multiple SFI-IRC Pathway Programme awardees.

Q B.4   Would it be appropriate to use a mentor who may be close to retirement?

If the mentor is due to retire during the life of the award, a new mentor would need to be identified. This would be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Q B.5 Is it possible to work with additional persons (besides the mentor) from the host institution? e.g. if technical support is provided by a non-mentor staff member are they considered a collaborator?

Yes, 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.

Q B.6 In my project I will need collaborator after 2 years. Is it possible to include the letter of support and cv from collaborator later?

Collaborator letters of support and CV must be provided with the application. The contribution of the collaborator at a designated stage in the project can be described in the research programme.

Q B.7 Is it compulsory to name a collaborator and does having collaborators benefit the application or are applications without collaborators deemed equal to those with collaborators?

Collaborators are not compulsory but can be included where appropriate. The role of any collaborator within the research programme must be clearly defined.

Q B.8 Is an industry collaborator from the UK permitted?

Yes. 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 of the call document for details on letters of support and Section 2.4 on State Aid and SFI Grant funding where an Industry collaborator is involved. 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.

Q B.9 Do collaborators have to use the same Narrative CV template as the applicants?

No, a Collaborator / Mentor CV template has been uploaded to the programme website https://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/pathway/

Q B.10 Do collaborators have to be permanent staff members, or can they be experienced post-doctoral researchers for instance?

Collaborators do not have to be permanent staff members, but they must provide a valuable intellectual and/or technical contribution to the proposed research.

Q B.11 Could applicants use a mentor that is incoming to the HEI, i.e an academic that is not an employee at the time of the application, but will be an employee by the time of the award?

Yes, the mentor can be an incoming researcher to the Research Body providing the Research Body Letter of Support confirms the mentor's position and resources within the Research body.

Section C   ELIGIBLE RESEARCH BODY

Q C.1   Which research bodies are eligible to apply for SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024?

Eligible Research Bodies are those included on either SFI or IRC's website:

- STEM-led stream - http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/eligibility-related-information/

- AHSS-led stream - https://research.ie/funding/eligible-higher-education-institutions-and-research-performing-organisations/.

Q C.2   Can I submit multiple expression of interest to different Higher Education Institutes/eligible Research Bodies?

You may contact as many HEIs/Eligible Research Bodies as you wish; this is a matter for you and the Research Body. Selection of candidates for the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 Call is the responsibility of the Research Body. However, only one full proposal may be submitted to the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024.

Q C.3   May an SFI-IRC Pathway Programme awardee move host Institutions during the award?

Yes, provided the terms and conditions of the relevant funder are met and a suitable mentor can be found at the new host Institution, an SFI-IRC Pathway Programme awardee may move Institutions during the award, along with the PhD student. This will be dealt with by the appropriate funding agency on a case-by-case basis.

Q C.4   For host bodies which are not degree awarding, e.g. DIAS, ESRI do you need to identify a body that will award the PhD candidate with their degree?

In cases where the host research body is not a degree awarding body, it would be expected that the PhD student be registered with a HEI within the Republic of Ireland, and this should be described within the proposal.

Section D   SALARIES AND BUDGETS

Q D.1   What does the contribution to the salary mean? Does it mean that the IRC/SFI contribution will not be more than point four on the Experienced Postdoctoral Researcher level (Level 2B) scale but that the university could supplement this further or not?

The successful SFI-IRC Pathway Programme applicant must include a salary contribution from the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme award. The contribution must align to the Experienced Postdoctoral Researcher level (Level 2B), as described more thoroughly in the Call Document. It is possible to support this with funding from additional sources however applicants should note that SFI-IRC Pathway grants are intended to be the primary source of funding for the award holders and as such the expected time commitment to the research supported through this award should represent the majority of the time of the award holder. It is expected that award holders will dedicate almost all of their time to the SFI-IRC Pathway programme in the first year and the expectation is that the awardee's commitment to the SFI-IRC Pathway grant should never drop below 50%.

Q D.2   Can SFI-IRC Pathway Programme award holders apply for other funding or hold other awards when starting their awards?

Applicants to SFI-IRC Pathway Programme may hold other awards in line with the guidelines discussed above. However, it should be noted that once an SFI-IRC Pathway Programme award has been granted it is intended to be the primary source of funding for the award holders and as such the expected time commitment to the research supported through this award should represent the majority of the time of the award holder. SFI and the IRC understand that award holders will actively seek further funding for their research. It is expected that award 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 relevant funder must be notified of any other awards won by the applicant and, where necessary, reserves the right to approve any expected changes to the applicant's time commitments. SFI and the IRC will also not allow award holders of SFI-IRC Pathway grants to apply to any SFI or IRC programmes during the first 12 months of the award, unless specifically indicated in the relevant call documentation that it is permissible to do so. Potential applicants are advised to contact the relevant funder in advance of submission to ensure eligibility.

Q D.3   Is there a limit of one PhD student per SFI-IRC Pathway Programme grant?

Yes, only one PhD student may be funded through a SFI-IRC Pathway Programme award. Postdoctoral researchers will not be funded through a SFI-IRC Pathway Programme award.

Q D.4   How much discretion do applicants have in setting the PhD stipend rate?

SFI and the IRC funds postgraduate student stipends at a flat rate of €22,000 per annum for up to four years.

Q D.5   Does the specific PhD student need to be identified before application, or is the PhD post advertised with the award in place?

A PhD student does not need to be identified in advance of proposal submission. SFI makes a standard €5,500 contribution towards the annual cost of postgraduate fees, for up to four years. IRC makes a standard €5,750 contribution towards the annual cost of postgraduate fees, for up to four years. In cases where, prior to application, the grant applicant to the STEM-led stream has identified a highly competitive, named non-EU candidate for a Masters / PhD position, they may request up to an additional €4,000 per annum over-and-above the standard (EU) fee contribution. Details of the recruitment process and the student's credentials must be included in the application (budget justification) and the additional funding for non-EU fees will be granted on a case-by-case basis.

Q D.6   Can the postgrad student be for a Master's programme or is it mandatory to take a PhD student?

It is mandatory to include a PhD student in SFI-IRC Pathway Programme applications.

Q D.7   Can travel budget be used for the PhD student to train in a lab abroad for 8-12 weeks?

This may be possible, please include details and a strong justification.

Q D.8   How do clinicians align salary requests with that of postdoc scales?

SFI and the IRC provide a contribution to the applicant's salary. The successful SFI-IRC Pathway Programme applicant must include a salary contribution from the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme award.

The contribution must align to the Experienced Postdoctoral Researcher level (Level 2B). Please see the call document for further details.

Q D.9   Should the collaborator(s) either provide or receive any economic contribution?

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. The budget justification should clearly indicate where funding is apportioned to Collaborators.

Letters of support from other collaborators including International Academic collaborators, Industry, public bodies, civil society / nongovernmental organisations and other entities should provide full details of the level of financial (cash, in-kind or both) contribution to the research programme, where relevant.

Q D.10   Is the cost for MRI scans an eligible research expense?

Access charges may be sought for use of infrastructure where SFI pre-approved access charge plans are in place. Applicants should refer to section 3.8 of the call document and the SFI Grant Budget Policy for further details.

Q D.11   Are costs for workshops or focus groups an eligible research expense?

Costs for workshops or focus groups associated with the research programme are an eligible expense providing these are well justified in the application.

Q D.12   Can the funding be used to support mentor and collaborator role?

Salaries for Collaborators are not permitted. Funding can be used to support the research expenses incurred through a collaboration as part of the research programme.

Q D.13   Can PhD students be recruited from Ireland or abroad?

Either. However, applicants to each stream should note the following:

- STEM-led stream: different fees for non-EU PhD students may apply and cannot be covered from the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme staff budget unless, prior to application, the grant applicant has identified a highly competitive, named non-EU candidate for a PhD position, in which case they may request up to an additional €4,000 per annum over-and-above the standard (EU) fee contribution. Details of the recruitment process and the student's credentials must be included in the application (budget justification) and the additional funding for non-EU fees will be granted on a case-by-case basis according to the terms and conditions of the award funder. Please refer to SFI's grant budget policy for further information.
- AHSS-led stream: different fees for non-EU PhD students may apply and applicants may request a contribution to fees, including non-EU fees, of €5,750 per annum and a stipend of €22,000 per year.

Q D.14 Is it possible to include a Research Assistant position in the staff cost of a SFI-IRC Pathway programme application?

Support for additional staff is not an ineligible cost for the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme, however the applicant should ensure that all costs required to deliver the Research Programme, including those associated with development of the PI and PhD student, are included in the budget before considering additional personnel. Additional salary costs would need to be strongly justified in the context of the research proposal.

Q D.15 What would happen with the PhD student fellowship if the applicant leaves the fellowship (for instance, because they get a more permanent position in a different institution)?

Instances such as these would be dealt with by the appropriate funder on a case-by-case basis.

Q D.16 Are funding requests to support teaching buyout costs considered an eligible cost?

Teaching buyout is not an eligible cost in the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme 2024 call. It is expected that award holders will dedicate almost all of their time to the SFI-IRC Pathway programme in the first year and the expectation is that the awardee's commitment to the SFI-IRC Pathway grant should never drop below 50%.

Section E   REMIT

Q E.1   I'm not sure if my research topic falls under the programme remit – how is the remit defined?

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

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.

Section F   REVIEW PROCESS

Q F.1   Will reviewers receive any specific training or guidance on how to evaluate a narrative CV?

All reviewers are provided with guidance on SFI and IRC expectations during the review process and relevant policies, including the narrative CV.

Q F.2   Do you get feedback even if you are not selected for stage 2?

Applicants that are not progressing to Stage 2 will be informed that their application was unsuccessful and will receive anonymous reviewer comments.

Q F.3   Has there been any previous calls and what was the success rate?

The overall success rate for the SFI-IRC Pathway programme 2021 call was ~20%. The overall success rate for the SFI-IRC Pathway programme 2022 call was 19%.

Section G   APPLICATION PREPARATION

Q G.1   Will there be an application template like with the IRC postdoctoral fellowship?

There is not an application form to upload. The application form consists of drop-down menus, text boxes and PDF uploads in SESAME. The relevant fields and required documentation are described in the call document.

Q G.2   Is the inclusion of a PhD researcher under the supervision of the applicant mandatory for all applications (including in AHSS)?

It is mandatory to include a PhD student in SFI-IRC Pathway Programme applications.

Q G.3   Is teaching permitted and/or recommended during funding?

It is understood that successful awardees may undertake some teaching duties to gain experience however these should be minimal and not detract from the research programme. The Research Body Letter of Support must 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.

Q G.4   Should the percentage of workload be divided between the applicant and the PhD student? Or can the applicant have 100 % of the workload?

The research programme should clearly delineate the role of the applicant, PhD student and collaborators and the PhD student will require a defined programme of work that is appropriate for completion of a PhD.

Q G.5   If a research paper is under review/revisions but not available as a pre-print, can we add it in the publications and attach a copy of the manuscript to the application?

No. These data can be included in the research programme as preliminary data where relevant.

Q G.6   Is it possible to continue or extend research from previous/present projects?

The concepts described in the research programme should be novel and the applicant should ensure that the novelty of the approach is clearly explained with reference to the state of the art. When reviewing the research programme, reviewers are asked to consider the suitability and achievability of the programme based on the experience of the applicant. In addition, when rating the applicant, reviewers are asked to consider whether the expertise and experience of the applicant is appropriate. Applicants should consider these criteria when preparing their research proposal.

Q G.7   How important is the presence of preliminary data in the application?

The application should also include relevant preliminary data, if available. This can 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.

Q G.8   Can you give more details about stakeholder engagement? What level is expected?

Stakeholder engagement should be appropriate to the research proposal and can be articulated in the research programme and impact statement.

Q G.9   The project is 4 years, which is the duration of a PhD programme. Is it assumed that a PhD student will be recruited before the project starts and that the applicant and student will start at the same time?

The agencies understand that it may take time to recruit a PhD student and that this may be dependent on Institutional policies with respect to PhD start dates. The agencies will consider no cost extensions to accommodate delays in recruiting PhD students on a case-by-case basis.

Q G.10   Is the Potential Impact, and Value to Ireland assessed on commercial grounds or on the basis of academic factors such as enabling further research? Is "value to Ireland" exclusive to Ireland, or can benefits which would be internationally useful be considered?

The Impact Statement 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. SFI and the IRC recognise a range of impacts and it is understood that impact at an international level will likely have a potential value to Ireland. 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 (https://www.sfi.ie/funding/award-management/research-impact/).

Q G.11   For interdisciplinary projects how should applicants choose relevant research areas if two areas do not fully cover the nature of the work?

Applicant's 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. Applicants will also have the opportunity to provide keywords appropriate for their application and SFI and IRC programme staff will consider the details of the full proposal (abstract, keywords, etc.) when sourcing appropriate reviewers.

Section H   POLICY

Q H.1   Do open access publications refer only to research outputs published in open-access journals, or will deposition in access repositories be permissible as well?

SFI and the IRC support Open Science and are therefore committed to making data and other types of research open and accessible. As such, all outputs arising from SFI or IRC funded research must be compliant with the Open Access policy of the relevant funder:

- SFI - https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/open-research/SFIs-Open-Access-Policy-V.3.-04.05.2021.pdf
- IRC - https://research.ie/assets/uploads/2017/05/irc_open_access_policy_final_1.pdf).

For SFI-funded publications, depositing in Plan S compliant repository is permitted and the recent publication of Plan S' 'Rights Retention Strategy' provides detailed information on self-archiving and copyright licensing (https://www.coalition-s.org/rights-retention-strategy/). SFI's Open Access Policy will be updated regularly to reflect guidance arising from cOAlition S on implementing Plan S

principles. Research outputs arising in whole or in part from SFI funded Grants will be monitored for compliance with its policy from 1 January 2021.

Q H.2 **Is the sex and/or gender statement only in relation to gender issues in your proposed research i.e. using animals of both gender if relevant etc., or, does it also refer to the gender balance of the research team etc.?**

The sex and gender dimension question directly relates to the proposed research programme and **not** the team conducting it.

All applicants must complete a statement articulating the consideration of biological sex and/or social gender variables in their proposed 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 (https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/ethical-and-scientific-issues/) for resources on how to address the sex and/or gender dimension of research in your grant.

An opportunity to describe how you have addressed gender equality, diversity and inclusion in your research team/environment is provided in Section 1B of your CV, should you choose to highlight it.

Q H.3 **How should an Applicant prepare a "Sex and/or Gender in Research" Statement for an Engineering Project?**

The gender dimension of a particular research project is one that you, as the Applicant, should consider, perhaps by consulting relevant literature and guidance for the subject matter of your proposed research project. There are a number of excellent papers such as Cara Tannenbaum's 'Sex and Gender Analysis Improves Science and Engineering (DOI: 10.1038/s41586-019-1657-6) which describe areas of scientific and engineering endeavour that failed to address the gender dimension, and hence are considered flawed – most notably 'crash test dummies' which were developed for an 'average male size' - this is an excellent engineering example. You may also wish to consult the 'Gendered Innovations in Science, Health & Medicine and Engineering' website (http://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/index.html) which contains a range of useful resources regarding best practice for sex and/or gender considerations in research.

Q H.4 **There are some projects that we find difficult to find a sex and/or gender aspect in the proposal programme. Will a "no" influence the overall scoring and progression within this competitive programme?**

The Sex and/or Gender Dimension Question is a mandatory field and is scored as part of the "Quality, significance and novelty of the research plan". A statement must be provided regardless of whether a 'yes' or 'no' response is provided. What will influence the overall scoring of this statement is how effectively the applicant justifies a 'yes' or 'no' response to this question. Please see Q H.3 on additional information for preparing a response to this question.

Q H.5 **How will non-academic publications/career impact be considered?**

The narrative CV provides an opportunity for applicants to discuss their wider contribution to research under four specific categories: 1. Generation of Knowledge; 2. Development of Individuals and Collaborations; 3. Supporting Broader Society & the Economy and; 4. Supporting the Research Community. Reviewers are asked to assess the applicant based on the detail provided in all of these categories – please see Appendix A 'Questions Pertaining to Applicant(s)' in the SFI-IRC Pathway programme call document for additional information on how research outputs other than publications are considered.

The aim of this section is to enable a rounded recognition of your career to date by providing a holistic overview of your academic and professional profile. The understanding is that applicants may not necessarily have experience under all of these headings. The information provided will be assessed in the overall context of your career stage and the objectives of this programme.

Q H.6   In terms of the DORA guidelines for the CV is it possible to mention citation numbers of selected publications?

Citations of publications in the narrative CV are permitted as per the instructions provided in the CV template. They should be used to describe the impact and / or reach of your research. CV templates for Applicant(s) and Collaborators can be found under the Downloads Section of the SFI-IRC Pathway programme webpage (http://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/pathway/).

Q H.7   What specific metrics are on the banned list? E.g. the template specifically mentions H-index, i10-index, G-index, H(2)-index, HG-index, Q2-index, AR-index, M-quotient, M-index, W-index, Hw-index, E-index, A-index, R-index, W-index, J-index but are other publication metrics such as Citations per Publication allowed?

In keeping with DORA principles, no journal-based metrics, such as journal Impact Factors etc., will be used as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, when assessing an applicant's or co-applicant's scientific contributions. As such, all journal and publication metrics, with the exception of publication citations, will not be permitted and inclusion of which may result in an application being deemed ineligible.

Q H.8   Can metrics on funding, teaching and innovation be used on the CV?

Part of the application process mandates that the Applicant's provide a report on current, pending and expired research funding. Additionally, in keeping with DORA principles, applicants are asked to describe the wider impact of their research by detailing the significance and/or impact of up to 3 key achievements across four prescribed categories (see narrative CV Template). This includes but is not limited to, academic activities (e.g. teaching) in the "Development of Individuals" as well as innovation and commercialisation activities (e.g. verified invention disclosures, patents, license etc.) in the "Generation of Knowledge".

Q H.9   Can collaboration (co-authorship) metrics be used on the CV?

It is permitted to refer to the contributions an applicant has made to the success of a collaboration(s) as well as describing the significance and/or impact of a collaboration in the "Generation of Knowledge" section of the CV, including but not limited to, publications, innovation and commercialisation activity, software, and open data sets. However, in keeping with DORA principles, referring to the total number of collaborative publications and associated journal and publication metrics are not permitted.

Q H.10   Can links to other information be included on the CV e.g. links to institutional profile; ResearchGate; Google Scholar.

The use of hyperlinks and URLs are not permitted to provide additional information, which would be necessary for application review. This includes links to applicant's institutional profile, ResearchGate, Google Scholar etc., which would provide additional information to that already provided in the standardised narrative CV template used by all applicants. Further information regarding the use of hyperlinks is detailed in the Call Document for the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme.

Q H.11 How will the CVs be utilised in the evaluation process? For example, will the CVs be used to ascertain capacity and experience to carry out the proposed project?

Reviewers are asked to comment on the quality, significance and relevance of the applicant's key achievements and research track record as demonstrated in the CV(s) provided, commensurate with career stage with regard to individual categories in the CV(s): 1) Generation of Knowledge; 2) Development of Individuals and Collaborations; 3) Supporting Broader Society & the Economy, and; 4) Supporting the Research Community. The understanding is that applicants may not necessarily have experience under all of these headings. The information provided will be assessed in the overall context of your career stage and the objectives of this programme.

Reviewers are also asked to consider whether the expertise and experience of the lead applicant, mentor, and collaborator(s), if relevant, are appropriate given their proposed contribution to the research programme. Furthermore, reviewers are requested to comment on the appropriateness of the skills and composition of the team and their alignment with the proposed research programme. As such, both key achievements and publication details of the applicant is used in the evaluation process to assess the individuals track record as well as research productivity and competency with regard to the proposed research programme and his/her ability to successfully deliver on the proposed project.