

SFI RESEARCH PROFESSORSHIP PROGRAMME 2020

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

A. APPLICANT & COLLABORATORS

Who is eligible to apply to the SFI Researcher Professorship Programme?

The SFI Research Professorship Programme assists eligible Irish Research Bodies to recruit world-class researchers from outside of Ireland. As such, researchers already employed in Ireland may not apply to the programme. Full proposals are only accepted following SFI's approval of an Expression of Interest from the host Research Body, which must be accompanied by a letter from the candidate (see Section B).

In addition, for the 2020 call, while applications are accepted in all areas under SFI's legal remit, proposals aligned to one of the following preferential themes are strongly encouraged:

Theme 1: Female Research Professors

Theme 2: Joint Appointments with UK Research Institutions

Am I a competitive candidate for this programme?

Applicants for the SFI Research Professorship Programme are expected to be outstanding researchers in academia or industry, recognised as world leaders in their discipline, with a demonstrated capacity for strategic and dynamic leadership on the international stage. They will have already been successful in obtaining funding through extremely competitive national or international funding calls or will be able to demonstrate clear potential to do so in the near future.

Can applicants claim their salary through this programme?

No, the salary of the applicant is not an eligible cost of an SFI Research Professorship Programme award. The host Research Body is required to find an appropriate mechanism to fund the salary of the Research Professor.

What is a joint appointment?

A joint appointment is an arrangement whereby a researcher is formally employed in two different institutions in two different countries. Funding offered through the SFI Research Professorship Programme may only be utilised for work being carried out at the Irish host institution; alternative funding must be used to support the work being carried out within the other country. Applicants holding mobile funding awards (such as those offered by the European Research Council) may choose to move their awards to Ireland or base them at the partner institution overseas; in any case, relevant funding must be held at both institutions for an application for a joint appointment to be deemed fundable.

Can female applicants applying under Theme 1 seek to support a joint appointment?

Yes, applications under Theme 1 can either be joint appointments or be based fully in Ireland.

Can applicants request a joint appointment if they do not hold an ERC award?

Yes, previous calls to this programme only permitted ERC awardees to seek a joint appointment. For this call, it is necessary to demonstrate that appropriate and relevant funding is held in the other country, but this need not be an ERC award.

What level of funding can I apply for?

SFI is not setting a maximum budget for applications to the SFI Research Professorship Programme 2020 call. Applicants are required to provide clear and convincing justification for whatever support they are seeking to carry out an initial five-year research programme. Those seeking to create a joint appointment should consider whether the reduced time at the Irish Host Institution should be reflected in the funding being sought. Applications considered to not offer good value for money are unlikely to be funded through this call.

Must I commit a minimum of 40% of my time at the Irish host institution in each year of my SFI Research Professorship award?

No, there is flexibility allowed within the planning of a joint appointment. A minimum 40% commitment is obligatory for this programme over the first five-year cycle of the award. The time commitments need not be identical in each year; what is essential is that the plans are reasonable and rational, and in keeping with the proposed research programme.

Under a joint appointment, should I make contingencies for the periods of time where I am working outside of Ireland?

Yes, it is expected that appropriate plans are in place to ensure that team members are being supported while a Research Professor holding a joint appointment is working abroad. Applications may include salary requests for a Senior Research Fellow, who might be tasked with leading the research group in the absence of the lead investigator.

I am interested in a joint appointment with an institution outside of the United Kingdom – can I apply through this call?

Under Theme 2, it is only possible to create a joint appointment where the partner institution is located in the UK. For female applicants applying under Theme 1, applications may seek to create a joint appointment with institutions anywhere in the world, including the UK. Applications under this theme may also be based full-time in Ireland. Applications not aligning to either of the preferential themes may propose joint appointments.

Is it possible to include a Co-Applicant?

No, there can be only one applicant included in a proposal submitted to the SFI Research Professorship Programme.

How many Collaborators are permitted?

There is no limit on the number of Collaborators, however, applicants should ensure that the role of any listed Collaborator fits the description available in the call document.

Can Collaborators receive funding through this programme?

Only Academic Collaborators based in an [SFI Eligible Research Body](#) are eligible to receive funding through an SFI Research Professorship Programme grant. 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 Investigators Programme. Industry Collaborators may not receive funding through this programme, regardless of their location.

Can I apply to other SFI programmes while applying to the SFI Research Professorship Programme?

For certain SFI programmes, individuals may only be under active review for one programme at any one time - these programmes include, but are not limited to: SFI Investigators Programme (including the Investigator Career Advancement criteria); SFI Career Development Award; SFI Starting Investigator Research Grant; SFI Future Research Leaders Programme; SFI Research Professorship Programme. If an applicant submits more than one proposal to an open SFI programme, the second submission will be withdrawn without review.

If not employed under a joint appointment, what employment contract should a successful SFI Research Professor receive?

Such SFI Research Professors are expected to be permanent, full-time employees of the host Research Body. While any contract should be consistent with [SFI General Terms and Conditions](#), employment contracts must be negotiated directly between the applicant and the host Research Body.

And for those under joint appointments?

The host Research Body is expected to offer those awardees holding a joint appointment an appropriate contract to allow them to fulfil the time commitments indicated in their full proposal. The proposed time commitment, expected to be between 40% and 60% of the full working time of the awardee over the duration of the award, may or may not be profiled equally across the duration of the award. Annual reports and progress reviews will be used to ensure that the proposed time commitment is being honoured by the award holder.

B. EXPRESSION OF INTEREST & CANDIDATE LETTER

I am in discussions with an SFI Research Centre and I plan to work with the Centre directly through an application to the SFI Research Professorship Programme – should the Research Centre submit an Expression of Interest? No, Expressions of Interest may only be received from SFI Eligible Research Bodies. However, the EoI section should detail how the position being envisaged by the Research Body will impact and influence the SFI Research Centre(s) concerned. In addition, the Candidate Letter may outline the plans already made with the Research Centre(s), if applicable. A full proposal, if invited by SFI, will provide Research Centre Directors with an opportunity to give direct support to the applicant.

What information should be included in my Candidate Letter?

The Candidate Letter is expected to contain some high-level comments on the reasons behind the candidate's intention to take up an opportunity in Ireland through the SFI Research Professorship Programme. The letter must also indicate how much progress has been made by the candidate and the Research Body in completing the process of recruitment at the time of writing (i.e., whether an employment contract already been signed, or whether negotiations are taking place, or whether negotiations have not yet commenced). The Candidate Letter should ideally demonstrate that there is already a strong, cohesive link between the candidate and the proposed Research Body. For those candidates seeking to take up a joint appointment, the Candidate Letter **must** provide the rationale for choosing such an approach.

What criteria are used in assessing Expressions of Interest?

The following criteria will be used to assess Expression of Interest:

- *Justification of the need to create a new professorial position, at both the national level (e.g., alignment with areas of current national priority) and at the institutional level (e.g., to help with local strategic objectives)*
- *Quality and significance of the candidate's track record, and suitability to hold a senior position funded through the SFI Research Professorship Programme*
- *Appropriateness of the selected candidate for the position that the Research Body wishes to fill*
- *Level of planning and demonstrated commitment of the candidate and the host Research Body, including the recruitment package offered, the infrastructure being made available, and the progress already made in completing the recruitment of the candidate*

C. FULL PROPOSAL

I have previously applied to the SFI Research Professorship Programme – may I apply again?

No, only one Full Proposal to the Research Professorship Programme may be submitted by an individual.

How do I submit the Full Proposal?

Proposals are submitted to SFI through our grants and awards management system, called SESAME. Access to SESAME is controlled by the staff of the Research Office of the institution that you are intended to move to. The Research Office will have its own organisational process in place for obtaining access to SESAME, and you are requested to liaise with them accordingly. Once you have been registered, you will be able to obtain a username and password that will allow you access to the SESAME system. Guidance on how to use SESAME can be found [here](#). Access to SESAME will only be provided following the approval of an Expression of Interest.

How long is an SFI Research Professorship Programme award funded through this call?

In this call, applicants may be supported for up to 10 years. The initial application will be for a five-year programme of research which, if funded, will be reviewed after approximately four years to assess its progress. Should the review indicate that progress is strong, the awardee will be invited to submit a *Continuity Proposal*, which if approved will support a second five-year cycle of funding.

I am preparing my full proposal and intending to take up a joint appointment – what is the difference between the “Time Commitment to Irish Host Research Body” and the “Time Commitment to Project” in SESAME?

The “*Time Commitment to Irish Host Research Body*” figure only appears when “Yes” is selected in the Joint Appointment section. Applicants must indicate what percentage of their working time will be dedicated to the work being carried out at the Irish host institution. The minimum commitment allowable through this programme is **40%**; a commitment in the range of 40% to 60% is expected but may be higher with appropriate justification. The “*Time Commitment to Project*” figure will be the percentage of an applicant's total working time (regardless of location) that will be dedicated to the work being funded through the award. The figures in each section should be consistent with the plans indicated in the work programme and letters of support contained within the proposal.

How long do I have to complete the Full Proposal submission?

Full Proposals must be completed in SESAME **no later than four months** after notification from SFI that an Expression of Interest has been approved. SFI reserves the right to rescind an invitation for a Full Proposal once this period of time has elapsed.

What are “NRP Areas”? Must my proposal align to one of these areas?

In 2012, the *National Research Prioritisation (NRP) Steering Group* published its report on the future of research in Ireland, in which it was recommended that the majority of funding made available for research should be prioritised within 14 delineated areas. In 2018, [a refreshed list of priority areas was published](#). In preparing an application to the SFI Research Professorship Programme, applicants are required to align their research programme to at least one of the 14 Refreshed Priority Areas for 2018-2023; where this is not viewed as appropriate or possible, applicants must demonstrate that the proposed programme will be of **significant industrial relevance and strong economic impact**. In any case, the proposed research must be aligned to [SFI’s legal remit](#). Proposals that do not fulfil the above criteria will not be eligible for support under the SFI Research Professorship Programme and will not be sent out for review.

What criteria are used in assessing Full Proposals?

Expert peer reviewers will be asked to assess Full Proposals under the following criteria:

- *Quality, significance, and relevance of both the recent research record and the career achievements of the applicant, including their suitability to receive an SFI Research Professorship Programme award.*
- *Quality, significance, viability and relevance of the proposed research programme and its potential contribution to the economic, scientific and educational development of Ireland.*
- *Quality, credibility and relevance of the impact statement, including the likelihood, scale and value of societal and/or economic effects on Ireland*
- *Quality, significance, and relevance of the applicant's leadership plan and how it will complement existing management structures at the host Research Body*

With a joint appointment, can I dedicate some of my funding to work being carried out abroad?

No, funds obtained through the SFI Research Professorship Programme may only be used for work being carried out within the Republic of Ireland. Applicants must utilise alternative funding sources to carry out their activities at the other institution.

Is it permissible to carry out clinical trials under an SFI Research Professorship award?

Generally, it is not permissible to fund clinical trials through SFI Research Professorship Programme awards. The exception is for regulated, early-stage trials (i.e., Phase I or combined Phase I/II) where the awardee is a Lead Investigator or Co-Lead Investigator within an SFI Research Centre recognised for its activities involving clinical trials.

D. Other Questions

Why is SFI offering supplementary support to the host institution of female awardees?

The SFI Research Professorship Programme has been active since 2004; to date, there has not been an award made to a female Research Professor. Anecdotal information indicates that recruiting leading female researchers can be more challenging for various reasons, but some of these issues can be overcome through enhanced financial support at the early stage of employment at the new institution. As such, SFI is offering a supplementary award of up to €100,000 to the host institution of female Research Professorship awardees, which must be applied for within 12 months of the official start date of the award. The additional support may be used to cover the following costs:

- Contribution to an institutional start-up package
- Childcare costs
- Schooling fees
- Salary contributions for the award-holder's spouse when working at the same institution in Ireland

The list above is not exhaustive and other possible costs will be considered where it is clear that they relate specifically to the costs of recruiting a female researcher.

Will the supplement be available for applicants seeking to create a joint appointment?

Yes.

How can the supplement be applied for?

Details of how to apply for the additional support will be provided once SFI has been notified of the Host Institution's intention to seek the supplementary funding.

Will applications under one preferential theme be favoured in this call?

No, applications under Theme 1 and Theme 2 will be assessed on the basis of excellence under the review criteria outlined above and in the call documentation. SFI will support as many applications as possible that are deemed through peer review to be competitive.

Why do Expressions of Interest not aligned to the preferential themes require pre-approval?

SFI has identified two strategic themes, considered vital to Ireland's research and innovation landscape, which it wishes to target through this call. However, the Foundation does not wish to ignore outstanding candidates who do not align to these themes. As such, intentions to submit an Expression of Interest should be provided where there is no such alignment. SFI will determine whether it is in a position to accept an Expression of Interest in such cases and will respond as rapidly as possible in order to notify interested parties whether an Expression of Interest may be submitted or not.

Will applicants committing to moving full-time to Ireland be favoured (or disfavoured) over those seeking joint appointments?

No – this call is strategically seeking to create joint appointments through one theme and may support joint appointments through the other theme. There is also no priority for joint appointments per se, although it is clear than of the preferential themes seeks to create such appointments.

Is the progress review critical in deciding whether a second cycle of funding will be offered?

Yes, the review (which will likely take place in the fourth year of an award) will need to demonstrate that strong progress is being made in order for an invitation to submit a Continuity Proposal for a second five-year term to be provided. If progress is deemed to be unsatisfactory, SFI will decide what course of action should occur thereafter; options include allowing the award to complete its current five-year term or, in critical cases, the immediate wind-down of an award.

Will continuity proposals be peer-reviewed?

Yes, Continuity Proposals will be peer reviewed and are not simply awarded following a successful progress review of the first five-year cycle. The new proposal may be reviewed by those experts who took part in the progress review and by new reviewers selected at the discretion of SFI. A positive outcome on this review process will be required for additional funding to be awarded.

Can the plans for a joint appointment change for the second five-year cycle of the 10-year award?

The time commitment to the Irish Host Institution may differ for the second five-year cycle from the first, thus offering maximum flexibility to awardees. For example, an awardee committing the minimum time (40% of total working time) in their first five-year cycle may increase their commitment for the second cycle up to 100% should the award holder plan to move full-time to their Irish Host Institution. In principle, the commitment to the Irish Host Institution may be reduced in the second cycle of support; however, it should be noted that SFI would **not** generally favour such reductions in commitment and plans for such a reduction must be agreed with SFI in advance of submission of a Continuity Proposal; commitments may **never** be lower than 40% of the total working time.

Last Updated June 2020