

SFI RESEARCH PROFESSORSHIP PROGRAMME

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).

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 either have already been successful in obtaining funding through a call to any main ERC funding scheme (that is, either the **ERC Starting Grant**, **ERC Consolidator Grant**, **ERC Advanced Grant** or **ERC Synergy Grant** schemes), or they will be researchers with the clear potential to be future ERC award winners, most likely with a track record rendering them competitive for an **ERC Advanced Grant** or **ERC Synergy Grant**.

It is noted that there is a gender initiative being introduced with this programme – will this affect an applicant's chances of being eligible to apply?

The gender initiative is being introduced to encourage Ireland's research bodies to seek to recruit excellent female researchers through the SFI Research Professorship Programme. Very few female candidates have been nominated since the programme launched in 2004, and there have been no female Research Professors employed to date. The initiative states that for any eligible research body in Ireland, one of the first two successful Expressions of Interest (i.e., leading to an invitation to submit a full proposal) following publication of the new call documentation must be associated with a female candidate. Once such a successful Expression of Interest has been received, and a full proposal has followed, the restriction will be dropped for that research body.

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?

For the purposes of the SFI Research Professorship Programme, 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, such as an ERC award, must be used to support the work being carried out within the other country – **only ERC award holders** may to the SFI Research Professorship Programme seeking to work under a joint appointment.

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

No. Only applicants who hold **active ERC awards** will be offered the opportunity to take up a joint appointment. Such applicants must demonstrate an intention to be located within the Irish host

Research Body for **at least 40%** of their time and if awarded, funding may only be used to support team and activities based in the Irish host Research Body.

What level of funding can I apply for?

If you hold an **active ERC award** (at least 12 months remaining at time of EoI submission), you are entitled to apply for funding up to a maximum of **€5M direct costs for a five-year award**. Applicants that do not hold an active ERC award (including those with expired ERC funding or with less than 12 months remaining on an active award) are entitled to apply for funding up to a maximum of **€3M direct costs for a five-year award**.

I'm planning a joint appointment, and intend to spend 40% of my time at the Irish institution over the five-year duration of the award. Can I apply for an award of €5M?

You are obliged to indicate your proposed time commitment to the Irish host institution over the period of your SFI Research Professorship Programme award. The percentage time commitment may be taken into account by SFI where awards are made. You are *expected* to request a budget that **reasonably reflects the intended time commitment to the Irish host institution**; requested budgets that are clearly in excess of the expected level of proportionality must be **strongly justified**. Note that the time commitment to the Irish host institution **may not be lower than 40%**; a commitment in the range of 40% to 60% is expected, but may be higher with appropriate justification.

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 of 40% commitment is obligatory for this programme over the whole five-year duration 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 whole 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.

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.

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 I 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.

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 with 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.

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](#).

What is the maximum duration of an SFI Research Professorship award?

All SFI Research Professorship Programme awards have a duration of **five years**. No alternative durations are allowed for this programme.

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 full 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 preparing an application to the SFI Research Professorship Programme, applicants are required to align their research programme to at least one of the NRP areas; 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, 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.

How does SFI define disruptive technology?

Disruptive technology has the potential to radically alter the way we work and live and/or how businesses operate and compete. Disruptive technologies have the potential therefore to result in transformative societal and/or economic impact and opportunities for Ireland. Disruptive Technologies may arise from research that is highly innovative and ambitious. Such research often requires interdisciplinary and convergent approaches. Consequently, its outputs and impact may be unpredictable at the outset and as such are considered as high-risk and high-reward.