

Starting Investigator Research Grant (SIRG) Programme FAQs

Last updated 8th July 2015

APPLICANT & MENTOR DEFINITIONS

Q: Under the SFI SIRG Programme what is the definition of an applicant?

A: The Applicant will be a researcher with between three and eight years' experience beyond the award of their PhD or equivalent qualification, who will be responsible for the scientific and technical direction of the research programme, the supervision of the postgraduate student and the submission of reports to SFI. 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](#). The Applicant will serve as the primary point of contact for SFI on the award.

Q: Under the SFI SIRG Programme what is the definition of a mentor?

A: The Mentor will be an established senior researcher within the host institution who will give advice and provide laboratory space and related infrastructure to both the Starting Investigator (SI) and the postgraduate student. The mentor will also take the role of co-supervisor for the postgraduate student; however, it is the SI who will act as the primary supervisor. The mentor does not play a supervisory or presiding role to the SI, but acts as an advisor and host. The mentor will work with the SI to ensure that all fiduciary aspects of the award are managed successfully.

APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

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

The official date is defined as the day, month and year that the degree was conferred, i.e. the month and 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 (26th November 2015). However, for the 2015 SIRG call, applicants may have received their PhD at any time between September 2007 and December 2012.

Q: Will allowances be made for eligible leave?

A: SIRG applicants may extend their period of eligibility by 18 months for each separate period in which they have taken a minimum of 12 weeks of consecutive documented eligible leave since the conferring of their PhD. This can include, but is not limited to the examples below:

- Statutory adoptive leave
- Statutory parental leave

- Statutory maternity leave
- Statutory paternity leave
- Carer's leave
- Long-term medical illness leave
- Conscription

Any queries in relation to eligible leave can be forwarded to sirg@sfi.ie. No allowance will be made for part-time working (two years of half-time working counts as two full-time years). The maximum extension to the period of eligibility under this scheme is 4½ years (54 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. Applicants who have taken one period of eligible leave may extend their eligibility to March 2006. Applicants who have taken two periods of eligible leave may extend their eligibility to September 2004 and applicants who have taken three periods of eligible leave may extend their eligibility to March 2003. Scanned copies of the relevant supporting documents from the HR Department of the applicant's host institution (or the relevant HR Department at the time of the applicant's eligible leave) demonstrating the applicant's eligible leave for the period must be sent to sirg@sfi.ie following application submission.

Q: Will allowances be made for time spent in industry?

A: SIRG 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**. No allowance will be made for part-time working (two years of half-time working counts as two full-time years). The maximum extension to the period of eligibility under this scheme is two 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 sent to sirg@sfi.ie following application submission.

Q: Please outline those candidates that would not be eligible for SIRG 2015.

A: SIRG awards are not available to the following:

- Researchers whose proposal/area of work is not aligned to SFI's legal remit
- Current or former holders of any independent (permanent or fixed-term) research position
- Those who do not hold a doctorate level degree e.g. Ph.D. or equivalent
- Those whose doctorate level degree was awarded before September 2007 or after December 2012 subject to any periods of documented leave (see above);
- Those who do not meet the stated peer-reviewed publication requirements as detailed in Section 4 of the call document;
- Holders of significant independent research awards (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 4 of the Call document.***

Q: What types of previous research funding can SIRG applicants have held?

A: The following types of awards are allowable for SIRG applicants:

- Research awards with a total value of no greater than €100,000 direct costs and a duration of no greater than one year.
- Research awards funding more than one named investigator, where the total value of the award does not exceed €100,000 direct costs per investigator, and the duration of the award is not greater than one year.
- Personal awards, including student and postdoctoral fellowships, travel awards, and bursaries; awards of this type may be of greater than one-year duration. Note also that awards such as these would not be expected to be of a value greater than €100,000 direct costs per annum.
- Enterprise Ireland commercialisation awards, irrespective of the amount awarded.

Q: What types of personal awards do not affect eligibility to the SIRG Programme?

A: The following are examples of personal awards that would most likely not render the recipient ineligible for the SIRG Programme:

- Marie Curie Fellowships
- Irish Research Council Fellowships
- HRB Career Development Fellowships
- College/Institutional Awards
- EPA Fellowships

Q: As a postdoctoral fellow who is currently funded by a three-year fellowship that has costs of less than €100k/year, can I apply?

A: Yes, providing all other eligibility criteria are met.

Q: If I submit an application to the SIRG programme, can I apply to the RS-SFI University Research Fellowship scheme or to the Research Career Development Fellowship (SFI-HRB-Wellcome Trust Biomedical Research Partnership)?

A: Yes. Subject to eligibility requirements, individuals may submit an application to the RS-SFI University Research Fellowship or to the Research Career Development Fellowship (SFI-HRB-Wellcome Trust Biomedical Research Partnership) whilst under active review under the SIRG programme. Should an applicant be successful in both review processes, this will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Q: If I submit an application to the SIRG programme, can I apply to the European Research Council Starting Grant?

A: Yes. Subject to eligibility requirements, individuals may submit an application to the ERC Starting Grant whilst under active review under the SIRG programme. Should an applicant be successful in both review processes, this will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Q: Can I apply to SIRG and PIYRA in parallel?

A: It is not possible to apply to the SIRG programme while under active review for PIYRA and vice versa.

Q: Can a proposal be submitted by the same primary applicant to, for example, PIYRA during the same year?

A: Yes, so long as a proposal to SIRG is not under review at the time of submission of the PIYRA application (and vice versa) and the relevant eligibility criteria are met.

Q: Can unsuccessful applicants to the 2013 SIRG programme, submit an application to the 2015 SIRG programme?

A: Yes, unsuccessful applicants to the 2013 SIRG programme are eligible to apply to the 2015 SIRG programme providing all other eligibility criteria are met. Please note that applications to SFI that are based primarily on unsuccessful submissions to a completed call of any SFI programme must demonstrate that the review process from the initial application has been taken into account in the preparation of the new submission. SFI not review resubmissions that fail to pay due consideration to any previous peer-review process. In such cases, it is advisable that the applicant consult with an SFI Programme Manager in advance of a resubmission to raise any specific queries.

Q: If I apply for a SIRG award in 2015 and am not successful, can I apply to a future call?

A: Yes, unsuccessful SIRG 2015 applicants can apply to a future call providing all other eligibility criteria are met. Please note that applications to SFI that are based primarily on unsuccessful submissions to a completed call of any SFI programme must demonstrate that the review process from the initial application has been taken into account in the preparation of the new submission. SFI not review resubmissions that fail to pay due consideration to any previous peer-review process. In such cases, it is advisable that the applicant consult with an SFI Programme Manager in advance of a resubmission to raise any specific queries.

Q: Is a researcher within an organization eligible to apply from the same organization or is mobility required?

A: Mobility is not required but it is permitted.

Q: Does the Starting Investigator 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 SIRG award 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 a mentor in that institution is able to provide the necessary infrastructure and support.

Q: Would there be any exceptional circumstance where applications would be considered for people who have slightly less than the required 3 years' experience?

A: No

Q: Is there an age limit for SIRG?

A: No

Q: 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 SIRG?

A: 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, at any stage, moved into an independent lecturing or research position of any kind, and you have remained part of a research group led by a supervisor, you remain eligible to apply for SIRG. If your contract ended and you worked independently from any supervised research group for any period of time, you are deemed to have taken a step towards independence and are, therefore, not eligible to apply to SIRG. It is important that any teaching, supervision or lecturing duties undertaken during your post-PhD career are carefully described in your CV.

Q: Can you explain what being senior author on three 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 three senior-author publications.

Q: I am a first author on two published papers and I have one in preparation. Am I eligible to apply to the SIRG 2015 call?

A: No, applicants must be senior author on three publications at the time of application.

Q: Can first-author publications published during the period of an applicant's doctoral studies count towards their required three 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: Should the applicant mention the number of oral presentations given at international conferences? Should only a maximum of 20 publications be incorporated on the publications list section?

A: Oral presentations may be listed in addition to peer-reviewed publications in the Section 2 of the CV. However, the three-page and 20 publication limits will be strictly enforced. Exceeding either of these limits may render the application ineligible.

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 three 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: Does the mentor have to be employed in the same institution in which the SIRG award holder will take up his/her position?

A: Yes, the SI, mentor, and postgraduate student must all work within the same institution. The mentor will provide the infrastructure within which the SI and student will be accommodated.

Q: Is it possible to have a mentor located outside the host institution if the SIRG applicant also has a mentor located within the host institution?

A: No, only one mentor may be appointed, and the mentor must be located within the host institution.

Q: Is it possible to have two mentors if your research spans two different research fields?

A: No, only one mentor may be appointed. 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.

Q: Is it possible for a mentor to act as mentor to more than one SIRG awardee?

A: 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 SIRG awardee. The mentor must have sufficient time available to advise and host a second SI and the lab capacity and infrastructure to mentor more than one SIRG awardee. This would be assessed as part of the overall application and a decision reached regarding the appropriateness or otherwise of mentoring multiple SIRG awardees.

Q: May my current post-doc PI be my mentor for SIRG?

A: Yes, if you wish your current post-doc PI may be your mentor for SIRG.

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

A: Yes

ELIGIBLE RESEARCH BODY

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

A: Please see the list of SFI eligible research bodies at <http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-eligible-research-bodies.html>.

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 SIRG 2015 Programme Call is the responsibility of the Research Body. However, only one proposal may be submitted to the SFI SIRG Programme Call.

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

A: Applicants may only submit one proposal to the SFI SIRG 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 research bodies may nominate up to a maximum of 12 candidates, who may then submit a proposal to the SIRG 2015 call. A maximum of six candidates out of the 12

allowed from each eligible Research Body may be male candidates. Therefore possible outcomes of individual Research Bodies selection process for example are six male and six female, five male and up to seven female, four male and up to eight female, three male and up to nine female, two male and up to ten female, one male and up to 11 female or zero male and up to 12 female candidates.

Q: Is it correct that the research institutions have no requirement to offer a post at the end of the SIRG?

A: Yes, there is no requirement. It is hoped that completing a SIRG award will put awardees in a strong position to avail of such a position should the opportunity arise.

Q: Should the SI have an independent office?

A: Preferably. The letter of support from the institution should outline what infrastructure is available to the applicant.

Q: May a SIRG awardee, move host Institutions during the award?

A: Yes, provided SFI terms and conditions are met and a suitable mentor can be found at the new host Institution, a SIRG awardee may move Institutions during the award.

REMIT

Q: I'm not sure if my research topic falls under SFI's legal remit – how is the remit defined?

A: SFI's legal remit can be found at the following link: <http://www.sfi.ie/about/what-we-do/>. SFI will only accept proposals where the proposed research aligns to the SFI legal remit.

FUNDING

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

A.: The successful SIRG applicant must include a salary contribution from the SIRG award. The contribution must align to the Senior Postdoctoral Researcher level (Level 2B), as described more thoroughly in the SIRG 2015 call for proposals.

Q: Are the salary requests for each year inclusive of PRSI?

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

Q: Is it possible to carry out a SIRG award part-time?

A: It is possible to carry out a SIRG award part-time subject to SFI's and Research Body approval. Appropriate supervision must be in place for the PhD student and the Research Programme must lend itself to part-time working. Part time working requests should not be less than 0.6 FTE. This is primarily geared towards those with care-giving responsibilities. It is not possible to work part-time on a SIRG award and part-time on another research award. Please note that the duration of a SIRG award, whether carried

out part-time or full-time is four years (48 months). It is **not possible** to extend the award to take into account periods of part-time working.

Q: Can SIRG award holders apply for other funding or hold other awards when starting their awards?

A: Applicants to SIRG may hold other awards in line with the guidelines discussed above. However, it should be noted that once a SIRG award has been granted it is expected to be the primary source of funding going forward. 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 understands that SIRG 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 SIRG award in the first year. In cases where further funding has been obtained, the SIRG commitment should never drop below 50%. SFI must be notified of any other awards won by the SI and, where necessary, reserves the right to approve any expected changes to SI's time commitments. Note also that SFI will not entertain proposals from SIRG award holders to any of its programmes during the first 12 months of the SIRG award, unless otherwise stated in the relevant programme's call documentation.

Q: Is there a limit of one PhD student per SIRG grant?

A: Yes, only one PhD student may be funded through a SIRG award. Postdoctoral researchers will not be funded through a SIRG award.

Q: Can PhD students 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 SIRG staff budget unless they are named in the proposal in advance.

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

A: It is mandatory to include a PhD student in SIRG applications.

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

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

Q: Are publication costs allowed in SIRG 2015 applications?

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

APPLICATION PREPARATION

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

A: Collaborators should not be listed when preparing the application in SESAME; only details on the mentor should be provided in the relevant section of the application form.

However, SIRG award holders are certainly encouraged to start collaborations and use these to advance their own research programmes. Applicants may name collaborators in their research programme section for context if they wish to do so, but no supporting CVs are allowed.

Q: My collaborators are really important in gaining access to world class samples, and essential proteomic/metabolomics core facilities. Is it possible to submit letters of support from these collaborations, as opposed to just my mentor?

A: No, it is not possible to submit letters of support from collaborators. However, please include appropriate details in the body of the application. The mentor could also note collaborator support such as this in his/her letter of support.

Q: Concerning the “relevant research record”, does SFI stipulate that SIRG applicants restrict the scope of their proposal to the area of their previous research? If your published background is mainly in kidney research could the proposal centre on intestinal disease?

A: No. It is reasonable to assume that applicants may wish to diversify their research through their SIRG award. However, it will be beneficial to the applicant if they can demonstrate to reviewers through their previous accomplishments that they will be able and prepared to carry out the work that they are proposing to undertake.

REVIEW PROCESS

Q: Can you describe the SIRG 2015 review process?

A: Proposal evaluation is a two-step process. The first stage is a postal review by a virtual panel comprising international scientific experts. Proposals will be assessed on the basis of six key evaluation criteria.

- *Quality, significance, and relevance of the research record of the applicant (weight 25%)*
- *Quality, significance, novelty, and strategic relevance of the research plan (weight 25%)*
- *Quality of the proposed programme for the postgraduate student (weight 15%)*
- *Potential impact and value to Ireland (weight 15%)*
- *Suitability of the mentor and their commitment to the programme (weight 10%)*
- *Quality of institutional support and infrastructure provided (weight 10%)*

The second stage of the review process will be an evaluation of the comments of the virtual postal review panel by a sitting panel comprising of international scientific experts.

Q: Applications need not be aligned to the 14 National Research Prioritisation (NRP) areas, but would applications that are aligned be preferred or advantaged?

A: No, all applications, regardless of alignment to the NRP areas will be adjudged equally.

Q: When will the outcome of the SIRG 2015 programme be available?

SFI expect that the outcome of SIRG 2015 will be available by July 2016.

OTHER

Q: What was the success rate in the SIRG 2013 call?

A: The success rate in the 2013 call was ~35%.

Q: Does SFI intend to run a call under the SIRG programme every two years?

A: Currently this is likely but is dependent on future budget. The call to date has run every two years since 2009.