

SFI Policy on PhD Equivalence

In order to be eligible to apply to the majority of SFI programmes, applicants are required to hold a PhD degree or equivalent¹. Details are provided in the relevant call documentation. This policy is based on recognised best practice and is in keeping with the recommendations of other international² and national funding bodies and will be adhered to with effect from March 31st 2015. For equivalent qualifications, as outlined in this policy, applicants must contact SFI for approval *prior* to submitting a grant application. In addition, SFI award holders (current or past) who have previously been deemed equivalent and who did not hold a PhD at the time of application are required to contact SFI *prior* to submitting an application.

1. PhD degrees

The research doctorate is the highest earned academic degree. It is always awarded for **independent research** at a professional level in either academic disciplines or professional fields. To be awarded this degree, the candidate, regardless of the entry point, has to meet certain criteria in terms of the duration of study and written work requirements (thesis or equivalent, work of publishable quality, product of original research and significant contribution to knowledge in the respective field of study). Upon successful defence of a thesis, the award of a PhD degree is made.

For individuals, who hold more than one PhD degree or equivalent, the date of the earliest degree will define the applicant's eligibility for SFI calls.

2. Degrees equivalent to the PhD

Although, the route to a PhD may vary in certain fields, all **have similar content requirements and are therefore considered equivalent to PhD**. In countries with two-tier system of doctoral degrees (e.g. Germany, Austria, Russian Federation, Poland, Switzerland), a first doctoral degree should be recognised as equivalent.

Potential applicants are invited to consult the following for useful references on degrees that may be considered equivalent to the PhD:

- (i) EURYDICE: "Examinations, qualifications and titles - Second edition, Volume 1, European glossary on education"
(<http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/european-glossary-on-education-pbEC3212292/>)
- (ii) List of research doctorate titles awarded in the United States that are also recognised as PhD-equivalent by the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF)
(<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/edlite-structure-us.html>)

¹ International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) and European Higher Education Area (EHEA) use the term "**doctoral or equivalent**" for international comparability. This term refers to ISCED level 8 (*Irish NQF level 10*) degrees. An ISCED level 8-recognised degree must meet the criteria outlined in the paragraph 263 of the Classification (<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/isced-2011-en.pdf>).

² SFI would like to acknowledge the European Research Council (ERC) as aspects of this policy are based on current ERC policy (<http://erc.europa.eu/>)

- (iii) Recognition of Foreign Qualifications (QQI)
(<http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Recognition-of-Foreign-Qualifications-.aspx>)

3. Professional doctorate degrees

Professional doctorate degrees (with the exception of medical degrees) may be recognised as PhD-equivalent if they meet all the criteria outlined in the Dublin Descriptor of the Doctorate level of EHEA Framework for Qualifications.

Potential applicants are invited to consult the following for useful references on professional doctorate degrees that may be considered equivalent to the PhD:

- (i) The Review of Professional Doctorates (National Qualifications Authority, 2006)
(http://www.nqai.ie.webhosting.heanet.ie/publications_by_topic.html)
- (ii) Recognition of Foreign Qualifications (QQI)
(<http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/Recognition-of-Foreign-Qualifications-.aspx>)

4. Doctor of Medicine (MD)

For **medical doctors** an MD degree will not be accepted by itself as equivalent to a PhD award. To be considered eligible, these candidates, in addition to their Doctor of Medicine (MD) degree, must also either hold a PhD degree, or provide information on their research experience (including peer reviewed publications) in order to further substantiate the equivalence of their overall training to a PhD. In these cases, the certified date of the Doctor of Medicine (MD) degree completion plus two years is the time reference for calculation of the call eligibility time window. For medical doctors who have been awarded both an MD and a PhD, **the date of the earliest degree that makes the applicant eligible** takes precedence.

5. SFI Research Centres Appointments

In exceptional cases, SFI Research Centre Directors may seek approval from SFI for the discretionary appointment of Research Centre investigators (FIs/Co-PIs) who do not hold PhD equivalent qualifications. In such instances, all other eligibility criteria for FI and Co-PI appointments will still apply. The Research Centre Director must submit a written case to SFI which clearly outlines the strategic importance of the proposed appointment to the mission and objectives of the Research Centre. Such appointments do not qualify investigators to hold such roles in other SFI awards, nor do they make them eligible to apply for funding to other SFI programmes calls where specific eligibility criteria will still apply.

Any queries relating to this policy should be addressed to info@sfi.ie. Please put "SFI policy on PhD equivalence" in the subject line.

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