



ANNUAL PLAN 2019

1. Introduction:

The Science Foundation Ireland's (SFI) Annual Capital Grants Budget for 2019 is €188.25 million. This budget represents an increase of €16 million on the SFI Annual Capital Grants Budget 2018.

During 2018, as part of developing our new strategy SFI conducted consultations and workshops with the HEIs and other stakeholders nationwide. While the full results from this process are currently under review, the feedback is strongly converging on the need for regular programmes supporting individual-led research across career stages and support for shorter, smaller-scale 'high-risk, high-return' programmes. Responding to this, and the lack of an Investigator Programme call since 2016, yet recognising budget constraints in 2019, SFI has consolidated individual-led programmes by designing a more flexible, larger programme that facilitates eligibility to a range of different career stages and allows a focus on frontier research.

Decisions on the specific programmes to be included within the SFI Annual Plan 2019 have been taken in consideration of a number of key elements, in particular ensuring a balanced pipeline of research and innovation from individual-led to large scale commitments, including enterprise collaborations, in addition to the commitment to supporting excellent and impactful research and maintaining Ireland's standing as a research and innovation hub of global standing and repute.

2. SFI Annual Plan 2019 Programme Overview

SFI proposes to run a range of programmatic calls in 2019 that are linked to the delivery of the SFI Strategy *Agenda 2020*¹ and that aim to address balance across the portfolio.

Science for Society

In line with the new SFI organisational structure, programmes under the SFI Science for Society Directorate focus on supporting individual-led and challenge-based research, the STEM talent pipeline and citizen engagement. The range of programmes in 2019 include:

- The **SFI Frontiers for the Future** programme will launch in Q1 2019 with decisions to be made before the end of the year and awards to issue at the start of 2020, all subject to SFI Board

¹ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/research-impact/AGENDA-2020.pdf>

approval. The programme will support excellent individual researchers for both short and longer projects, novel review mechanism are designed both to foster high risk and high gain projects, as well as supporting women and other currently under represented in the research ecosystem. The SFI Frontiers for the Future programme will replace the traditional SFI Investigators Programme and the SFI Career Development Award through an overarching investigator-led programme. It is expected that the SFI Starting Investigator Research Grant programme will merge into the SFI Frontiers for the Future from 2020 onwards. The programme also integrates a shorter award track that focusses more on frontiers research. It is planned that this will be in partnership with, and co-funded by, a range of other Irish funding agencies.

- The **SFI Starting Investigator Programme** review was completed in 2018, however a reserve list of 10 proposals will remain in place until the end of 2019.
- The **SFI Research Professorship Programme** will run as a rolling call, with a focus on joint appointments with UK institutions and recruitment of ERC advanced grant winners. This programme is key to establishing national expertise in strategic priority research areas.
- The **SFI President of Ireland Future Research Leaders** call is under review with awards in 2019.
- SFI ran a **Strategic Research Infrastructure** call in 2018. A reserve list for this programme will remain in place until the end of 2019.
- SFI will support the Conferences and Workshops Programme in 2019. It will be paused in Q1 to allow for review of the programme.
- SFI will continue to support **Maternity Allowances** awards, in line with SFI's gender policy.

International Partnerships:

SFI has several 3rd party agreements with Irish, UK and International funding agencies. A focus of the 2019 plan is to continue to support and nurture international partnerships that stimulate collaboration between Irish and international researchers.

- A provision has been made to continue support for Irish based applicants to a wide range of Wellcome programmes in 2019, under the co-fund **SFI-HRB-Wellcome Trust** partnership.
- The **US-Ireland** tri-jurisdictional schemes, involving Ireland, the US and Northern Ireland include the US-Ireland Investigator calls with the NSF and NIH, and the US-Ireland Centre to Centre calls with NSF.
- **SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI scheme** will be supported in 2019.
- The **SFI-Royal Society partnership** will continue to support Ireland-based applicants to be able to apply to the **Royal Society University Research Fellowships** (URFs).

PhD Programmes:

SFI will deliver significant investment in PhD programmes with the aim of creating a pipeline of talented scientist who will go on to build careers in either academia or industry, supporting economic growth and the goals set out in *Innovation 2020* in terms of national output of PhD graduates.

- Following the review process in 2018, SFI will support **SFI Centres for Research Training** in 2019 (awards will be announced in early 2019). These Centres will provide training in the broad area of Data and ICT Skills.
- SFI will provide support under the **SFI-EPSRC-CDT** call to successful joint proposals from UK Universities and SFI Research Centres for collaborative **Centres for Doctoral Training** (awards will be announced in early 2019).

Challenge Based Funding:

SFI is currently undertaking multiple, complementary approaches to the development and implementation of challenge-based funding to enhance delivery of societal impact from government-funded research. SFI is developing funding calls that support Irish researchers to apply their expertise to address national societal challenges. By establishing this programme SFI also aims to develop capacity within the Irish research ecosystem to engage with challenge funding programmes that will support Irish researchers to collaborate, compete and win in European, global and national challenge funding programmes.

- During 2018, SFI launched a bottom-up challenge-based call, the **SFI Future Innovator Prize**. Teams were provided with funding to develop their ideas and compete for seed funding. At the end of 2019, shortlisted teams will compete for an overall prize award of €1 million.
- During 2019, SFI will develop further **challenge-based initiatives** to drive transformative research activity which has the potential to deliver significant societal impact. Interdisciplinary teams will be encouraged to apply unconventional approaches to the development of novel, potentially disruptive, solutions to societal challenges. It is envisaged that, in 2019, particular emphasis will be placed on funding disruptive research and innovation within the area of climate action and that these efforts will be developed in close collaboration with strategic partners, where co-funding partnerships will be sought.
- In addition, to enable innovative and **transformative research** ideas to be explored and tested, seed funding streams for **high-risk** research will be considered alongside the development of individual-led frontier awards and challenge-based funding.

Education and Public Engagement:

SFI will strive to ensure that the Irish public is highly engaged in, and informed about, STEM and its potential to deliver for the Irish economy and society. This will include collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills on a number of actions under the STEM Education Implementation Plan, the undertaking of the second SFI Science in Ireland Barometer Survey, and the delivery of a range of national programmes including Science Week.

- Objectives for the annual **SFI Discover Programme** will be broadened to attract applicants from less engaged communities.
- The annual **SFI Discover Science Week Festivals Programme** will have a focus on sustaining and growing regional STEM festival activity during Science Week 2019.

In addition to the two SFI Discover programme calls, it is expected that the **SFI RTÉ Joint Initiative Agreement** will be continued into 2019, subject to review by both parties. This agreement normally includes commissioning call opportunities through the RTÉ commissioning process.

Science for the Economy:

In line with the new SFI organisational structure, programmes under the SFI Science for the Economy Directorate focus on supporting research programmes that drive economic competitiveness, including:

SFI Research Centres

SFI will continue to develop and support world-class large-scale SFI Research Centres that are co-funded by industry and where world leading applied and basic research is conducted in key areas of national strength and significant strategic opportunity for Ireland. The focus in 2019 will be on:

- The **Phase 2 term for 6 SFI Research Centres** (these were reviewed in 2018 and awards will be announced early in 2019).
- The **five 2013 SFI Research Centres** will undergo review for a second term of funding in 2019.
- The **SFI Research Centres Spokes Programme** will continue in 2019.

Enterprise Partnerships

SFI will continue to deliver funding programmes that underpin enterprise competitiveness through enabling the development of strong mutually-beneficial co-funded partnerships between researchers and industry and other non-exchequer research players. In addition to the SFI Research Centres, SFI will support the following range of programmes to drive this activity:

- The **SFI Strategic Partnerships Programme** will continue to support co-investment partnerships with the private sector including industry, philanthropy and charitable organisations, in fields not covered by an existing SFI Research Centre.
- The **SFI Industry Fellowships** call will continue in 2019 providing a compelling training opportunity for researchers.

Appendix 1 – Overview of 2019 Planned Programme Timelines

The 2019 Science Foundation Ireland programmes fall into four categories as outlined in the tables below:

- Programmes launched in 2018, where a funding decision will be made in 2019
- Fixed deadline calls open in 2019
- Rolling calls open in 2019
- International Partnerships open in 2019

All launch dates provided in these tables are indicative and are subject to change, e.g. in response to alterations in Science Foundation Ireland's annual grants budget, staff resources, other new schemes Science Foundation Ireland may develop and Government policy/priorities.

Table 1. Programmes launched during 2018; funding decision to be made in 2019

Programme	Call Deadline	Decision Timeframe
SFI Research Centres - Phase 2 for 5 SFI Research Centres	November 2018	Q4 2019
SFI President of Ireland Future Research Leaders Award	November 2018	Q3 2019
SFI Industry Fellowship	November 2018	Q1 2019
SFI PhD Programme – Centres for Research Training	September 2018	Q1 2019

Table 2. Fixed Deadline Calls Open in 2019

Programme	Call Launch	Call Deadline	Award Decision Timeframe
SFI Frontiers for the Future	Jan 2019	Aug 2019	Dec 2019
SFI Industry Fellowship	Q3 2019	October 2019	Q1 2020
SFI Discover Programme	April 2019	May 2019	Q4 2019
SFI Discover Science Week Festivals Programme	February 2019	March 2019	Q2 2019

Table 3. Rolling Calls Open during 2019

Programme
SFI Research Professorship Programme
SFI Research Centres – Spokes
SFI Strategic Partnerships Programme
SFI Conferences and Workshops
SFI Discover Opportunistic
SFI Fellowship Programme
Maternity Allowance

Table 4. International Partnerships Open in 2019

Programme	Lead Agency	Call Deadline	Award Decision Timeframe
US-Ireland R&D Partnership Programme	NSF / NIH	NSF & NIH deadlines	NSF & NIH timeframes
SFI-HRB-Wellcome Biomedical Research Partnership	Wellcome	Wellcome deadlines	Wellcome timeframes
SFI Royal Society University Research fellowship	Royal Society	RS deadline	RS timeframes
EU Co-Fund Prgrammes	Various	Various	Various
EPSRC-SFI Standard Research Grants	EPSRC	Various	Various
SFI/NSF I-CORPS@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme	NSF	TBC	TBC