



**IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL**  
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn

# **The Irish Research Council Action Plan for Horizon 2020**

THE FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

**HORIZON 2020**

# The Irish Research Council - Action Plan for Horizon 2020

## Introduction

On December 11<sup>th</sup> 2013 Horizon 2020 (H2020), the European Union's new research and innovation funding programme designed to enhance and embed the European Research Area, was formally launched.<sup>1</sup> A national strategy on how Ireland would engage with H2020 so as to deliver on its objectives was published shortly thereafter<sup>2</sup>. As the Horizon 2020 programme will also contribute to the enhancement of national research and innovation capacity, the Irish national strategy sets an overarching target for Ireland's drawdown from H2020 (€1.25bn). The roles for government departments and agencies, and the expectations of the key stakeholders in the research and innovation community, are also set down.

Flowing from the national strategy for H2020, this statement summarises the actions being taken by the Irish Research Council so as to enable delivery of both national objectives and overarching European goals for Horizon 2020. In engaging with H2020, the Council seeks to enhance opportunities for Irish researchers, enhance the quality of research performed in Ireland and enhance the Irish research and innovation ecosystem.

## Enabling excellence and creative connections in Horizon 2020 – directly supporting the community

The specific role of the Irish Research Council in H2020 very much aligns with our mission 'to enable and create a vibrant research community in Ireland' and furthermore reflects the unique contribution that the Council makes to the Irish research and innovation ecosystem. The focus of the Council actions are in directly supporting the research community and the Council would plan to develop, as budgets allow, instruments which support the development of a track record for researchers and thus enable all Irish researchers - regardless of their discipline(s) - an opportunity to compete and win funding through the Horizon 2020. It is specifically hoped to provide through the Irish Research Council Research Project Grant Scheme, as budgets allow, small project funding to (1) support potential future applicants to the European Research Council, (2) support applicants to Societal Challenge 6 'Innovative, Inclusive and Reflective Societies' and (3) support and cultivate interdisciplinary projects in domains which will enable participation in Horizon 2020.

Furthermore, regardless of budget(s), the Council is providing support as follows:

- 1. Enabling and nurturing research excellence across all disciplines by directly supporting applicants to the European Research Council (ERC).*

The ERC awards are awarded based on excellence and awards may be made in any area of research or discipline. The Council is the designated National Contact Point (NCP) for the ERC in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS). SFI is the NCP for Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and at a policy advisory level, SFI is the National Delegate to the European

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<sup>1</sup> Horizon 2020 aims to break down barriers to create a genuine single market for knowledge, research and innovation. For more information: <http://ec.europa.eu>

<sup>2</sup> National Strategy for Horizon 2020, reference

Commission. The Council is the Alternate National Delegate and thus Ireland's interests in the ERC are represented by a partnership between SFI and the Irish Research Council. A bilateral MOU is in place to underpin the partnership.

The ERC NCP based at the Irish Research Council disseminates information, provides briefings, supports applicants and their applications and provide mock interviews for candidates who reach that stage of the ERC competitive process. A 'College of Mentors' drawn from those researchers who have been successful in applying to the ERC will be established to support ERC candidates..

*II. Enabling engagement of researchers to address the societal challenge of 'Europe in a Changing World – Inclusive, Innovative and Reflective Societies'.*

At a time of great change in Europe, and the world, the necessity to reflect on societal developments is recognised in the identification of this Societal Challenge.

The Irish Research Council is designated the National Delegate and National Contact Point for this Challenge. The Council is (a) directly providing support and guidance to applicants through the NCP function and (b) through the National Delegate function, shaping and influencing policy and strategic developments as new components and programmes within the Challenge evolve at European level. To reflect the view of the Irish research community, the Council will survey the community on flagship projects for the future and will at all times represent Irish interests in the development of future work programmes.

*III. Fostering the development of creative connections across all disciplines so as to better prepare the Irish research community for engagements which will contribute to addressing all the identified European Societal Challenges.*

As set down in the National Strategy for Horizon 2020, the research community are encouraged to engage in trans- and interdisciplinary research across all funding instruments. The Irish Research Council has been given a particular role to support and cultivate trans and interdisciplinary research. The Irish Research Council is working in partnership with other NDs and NCPs to achieve this goal. As a first step, the Council has launched the 'Creative Connections in H2020' initiative. This involves hosting workshops/conference events to demonstrate to Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences and researchers across all disciplines that opportunities exist in Horizon 2020 within all seven Societal Challenges. Insights from assessors about the distinguishing features of innovative and outstanding inter- and trans disciplinary projects are shared. Support for our national endeavours is being drawn from international networks (e.g. Science Europe) which are on a pan-european basis endeavouring to support and provide mutual learning opportunities for research funders in the area of trans and interdisciplinary research.

*IV. Enabling and cultivating research excellence through support for researcher education and career development*

The Irish Research Council and the Irish Universities Association (IUA) are continuing the strategic alliance which was established in Jan 2012, whereby the Council directly funds the Irish Marie Skłodowska Curie Office (IMCO) at the IUA.

The Council strongly believes that this area continues to be an important source of opportunities for Irish researcher education and career development in H2020. Support of the IMCO aligns with the Council's strategic mandate to support talented researchers at all stages of their career, but with a particular focus on (a) the early stage career formation at Masters, Doctoral and Postdoctoral levels in all disciplines and (b) support of PIs from the AHSS. A workplan and MOU is in place with the IUA. For example, given recent European Commission statistics that demonstrate that Marie Curie Fellows have demonstrated high success rates in the ERC, Ireland's Marie Curie Fellows (and external Fellows) will be specifically targeted for ERC participation. A further aspect of this partnership will be engagement by the Marie Curie office with employer and enterprise partners and utilisation of the Irish Research Council partner database.

In line with the partnership approach, the Irish Research Council is the National Expert/Alternate Delegate for the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions.

V. *Contributing to the delivery of research excellence by supporting the implementation of gendered innovations.*

Having had a Gender Strategy and Action Plan<sup>3</sup> launched in December 2013 by Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn, a strategy which aligns with Horizon 2020 policy, the Council is seen to be a leader in Europe in this area. The Council is therefore assisting the Irish research community to engage with this aspect of Horizon 2020 (a) through the embedding of relevant requirements in its own calls and (b) through the organisation of workshops to assist potential applicants to Horizon 2020. The Council is also a partner in a European initiative called GenderNet.

In addition to the above five key areas, the Council is strategically utilising its research networks and alliances, to develop linkages on behalf of the Irish research community. Such networks and alliances include HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area), NORFACE (A Social Sciences consortium), Science Europe and the ESF (European Science Foundation). To support the Irish community and strengthen the potential for Irish researchers, the Council will also continue its commitment to, on behalf of Ireland, pan-european infrastructures, specifically the European Social Survey (ESS) and DARIAH (the Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities).

## **Conclusion**

The actions set out in this document represent, in line with the role of the Irish Research Council, a multi-layered approach to supporting Irish engagement with Horizon 2020. This Action Plan will be kept under review on an annual basis so as to enable the evolution of supports in line with the evolution of Ireland's engagement with Horizon 2020.

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<sup>3</sup> Irish Research Council Gender Strategy and Action Plan - ref