

General Application Feedback GOI/2024 – Government of Ireland Programmes

Potential applicants are invited to consider the general application feedback provided by assessors in advance of submitting their applications. While taking on board this feedback will not guarantee an award, it may be useful in preventing the most common shortcomings which assessors have identified in applications to these programmes.

General comments

- Allow plenty of time to work up the application and realise it will need several drafts.
- Proposals should be written by the applicant with some input and assistance from the proposed supervisor/mentor.
- Proposals should be accessible to reviewers less familiar with the field while maintaining sufficient detail for expert reviewers.
- Attention to detail is paramount. Successful applications have more precise research questions, the anticipated contributions to knowledge, the scale of the research design, the expected problems and how they will be mitigated, and the ethical issues addressed.
- Be specific and avoid general or generic statements. Unsuccessful applications are more generic and vaguer.
- Acronyms should be defined on the first mention in the text.
- Make sure to address all the aspects that the guidelines stipulate.
- Give relevant information in the right place – do not include important information about the nature of the research project in the personal statement, without it also appearing in the detailed proposal. The good organisation and articulation of the complete proposal adds to the impression that the applicant can organise a research project coherently, and that they thoroughly understand the project that they are presenting.
- The applicant should be sure not to betray their name – and thus gender, - either on a document, e.g. a Gantt chart, which is uploaded separately from the main proposal. Also, the applicant be sure to use the word ‘applicant’ to replace their name in lists of authors of their publications.
- Do not forget to proofread the application very carefully.
- Applications to the Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship Programme need to be calibrated depending on what stage the applicant is at in their degree: a second-year application should look very different to someone who has not yet started.

Project

Clarity and coherence of the proposed research:

- Be concise and clear: A focused project description is favoured over a lengthy one – consider short paragraphs, rather than long, continuous text.
- Make very clear what the new idea or innovation is and write as if the reader does not have any knowledge about the proposed research.
- The 'lay abstract' should indicate what is being proposed and why, rather than just giving the background, as this shows how clearly the applicant understands the proposed research. It should be written for a non-specialist reader and should not be too technical: the applicant should test their explanation on people that they know are not experts in the area. If they cannot understand it, the applicant should edit it so they can.
- Remember that the abstract should give an overview of the whole application, not just a promise of what is planned.
- Clearly articulate the research in terms of aims, objectives, and research questions, and include hypotheses and predictions too.
- Ensure details of experimental approaches are included, with an indication of outcomes.
- Focus on strengthening the relationship between the literature review, research questions, and research design. Focus on rigorous methods rather than being ideologically driven.
- Consider the reasons behind an extensive literature review – reflect on what is already known and focus on specific questions when outlining the scope of the review.
- Fully explain and interrogate the intellectual foundations of the proposal and be aware of the importance of articulating a clear conceptual framework. It may be useful to explain not only why a particular approach is being taken, but also why other approaches are not being employed.

Quality of the proposed research design and methodologies:

- Ensure that the research design, methodology, methods, and tasks are described clearly and justified with sufficient detail and demonstrate that the applicant understand them. Applicants should be specific about what precisely they intend to do e.g. the number of interviews, size of the sample,
- The methodology should be clear and detailed – avoid bullet points as well as technical terms that those outside the field will not understand. The rationale for adopting the methodology needs to be specified as do the design and techniques to be used.
- Outline pre-existing ability to carry out the methodology or whether training will be required.
- Consider both the strengths and weaknesses/limitations of the design and offer critical reflection on the potential limitations of the chosen methodology.

- Avoid listing techniques without giving thought to how a specific experimental approach addresses a question (or its limitations). Be realistic about how many questions can be answered when designing the project.
- Be firm and clear about the research questions: (a) make sure that the background leads logically to those questions; (b) make sure that the aims and objectives are closely linked to the research questions, and (c) make sure the research design and techniques for data collection that follow from (a) and (b) and are clearly justified.
- If the proposed research is moving towards cross-disciplinarity and/or is borrowing from another discipline, make sure to have worked out to which discipline it belongs and plan for some training in it; talk to an expert in the relevant department for advice; invite someone from that discipline as a secondary supervisor or advisory partner if possible.
- If the project involves work with other cultures/languages, clearly state how an understanding of these differences will be handled. If language acquisition is significant, clearly state how, where, and when it is to be acquired.
- The best applications understand that the project description needs to be clear about what the applicant will be doing and how they will be doing it, having already established why it is worth doing.
- For applications that involve fieldwork abroad, away from host institutions, the following details should be included: How will supervision be maintained? Are there any health and safety considerations? What safeguards are in place if something goes wrong? An applicant should indicate if the institution has a protocol for students/fellows undertaking work abroad.

Feasibility of the proposed milestones, deliverables, and contingency plans:

- Spend time reflecting on the potential risks associated with the proposed research and what could be done to reduce these, and always include a clear contingency plan. Make sure to link the milestones, deliverables, and contingency plan to the methodological approaches of each aim rather than presenting them as a list.
- Deliverables (where appropriate) should be integrated into the dissemination plan.
- A new data set is a publishable item and should be considered (and created) as a deliverable.
- When the research involves interviews, contingency plans should focus on multiple strategies for recruitment.
- The ambition of the project should receive careful consideration. Be realistic when defining milestones and about how long both desk research (gathering material, reading, and critically understanding) and empirical research will take.
- If there are key partners in the research whose participation in the project is necessary for the project to be delivered, ensure as far as possible that they are all signed up, or at least that there is a clear indication as to how they are to be approached – along with contingency steps if one or other of the partners declines to be involved. Projects which are dependent on such involvement cannot expect to proceed when such crucial detail is lacking, irrespective of the overall quality of the informing idea behind the project.

- Be realistic about mastering specialist skills in a short period of time.
- Most applicants are reasonably ambitious wanting to produce, in addition to the PhD thesis, journal articles, conference presentations, and engagement events with diverse stakeholder communities. Strong applications successfully incorporate these outputs and their production timeline in the milestones and deliverables narrative. Less strong applications often forget to do that, so the timeline demonstrates the production of the thesis exclusively.
- For one-year projects proposing a book, there should be a greater awareness that this may be a drawn-out process and the possible implications for book completion.
- Applicants should understand the importance of presenting clear milestones and deliverables (GANTT charts are often useful).

Consideration as to how the proposed research will advance state of the art and make a contribution to existing knowledge:

- Positioning the work in relation to the state of the art is important and should not be neglected by applicants. The position of the work in relation to the state of the art may seem obvious to the applicant, but unless specifically addressed by them, it may come across as not having been considered.
- In less competitive applications, the actual point of the project is often unclear and the claims of how it will advance the state of the art are merely asserted rather than argued convincingly.
- Take time to consider and understand the state of the art and current literature at a global level rather than simply at a local level, and briefly outline it.
- Consider how the research will impact the field in which it is embedded, but also the implications of the work outside academia (e. g. informing debates, policy formulation); provide a preliminary indication of insights or outcomes expected from the research.
- It is worth considering societal problems as the area where research is more urgently needed. Culture and well-being are valuable areas of thought and debate not least at a time of global pandemic. Making a case for the relevance of the project within a wider social context also strengthens the best applications.
- The best projects are those which provide a developed case for the originality of the project and its contribution to the current state of the discipline.
- Identify a gap: focus on explaining why this project is timely but use caution when asserting a topic is undeservedly neglected or the approach is completely new and original.
- Spend time considering how the proposed work will advance the field and contribute to new knowledge: be specific and include a clear and succinct statement about it.
- Indicate explicitly the envisaged contribution to theory building, if applicable.

- Framing the innovativeness of the proposal: to state that the proposed project is filling a gap in existing research is not a persuasive way to demonstrate the innovative importance of the proposal. Avoid overstating the originality of the project in these terms. Consider demonstrating the originality of the project by detailing how the project develops/builds on existing research in ways that significantly modify and add to knowledge in the field.

Plans for dissemination and knowledge exchange of the proposed research:

- Dissemination plans should go beyond listing academic outputs, and, where applicable, reflect on engagement with the wider (non-academic) audience: the best dissemination plans are those that meld academic publication/presentations with (where relevant) industry engagement as well as public engagement and outreach activities. Remember that research is funded by the general public, who should be informed of its importance and progress.
- Publications, even at an early career stage, can look good in the dissemination plan, but be aware that premature publications while the research is still developing can misrepresent potentially good research and cause reputational damage, and may also take much-needed time away from the actual doctoral work – careful consideration is required here.
- The most impressive applications are those that explain why particular outlets would be most valuable i.e. those with a dissemination strategy.
- Plans for dissemination are often, also, rather generic (conferences, workshops, publications). The best applications name specific key conferences, specific journals, and plans for other events with concrete outlines.
- A number of applicants demonstrate a good deal of ingenuity in considering ways of disseminating their research, particularly outside traditional academic media (e.g. through the use of social media, and traditional mass media).

Consideration of the relevant ethical issues and sex/gender dimension:

- Details of ethics should be provided - the ethical issues have to be addressed, they are important and must be outlined.
- Sex/Gender dimension needs to be addressed properly. If gender issues are not addressed, this is rated negatively. Most applications have gender issues and there are negative consequences if these are not mentioned/addressed.
- Applicants should:
- spend time reflecting on the possible gender implications of the project and seek advice and guidance from their potential supervisor/mentor before asserting that none exists. It is seen as a real plus when applicants engage with the sex/gender dimension even when it is not obvious.

- reflect on the wider issues of inclusivity, and thus, for example, on the implications of the research for questions of ethnicity.
- provide the fullest ethical consideration possible for the project and reference any appropriate ethical guidance.
- give a full account of the ethical implications/consent issues etc. raised by conducting interviews, demonstrate awareness of the level of training needed to conduct ethically sensitive interviews in the course of the research, and full knowledge of the level of training offered by the host institution.

Main issues applicants should be aware of:

- Where risks are identified, contingency plans generally need to consider alternative research approaches.
- Where a sex/gender element is identified, this needs to be incorporated properly into the experimental design with a full description.
- Consider whether using superlatives to describe skills, quality of previous training, and supervisors' prowess well conveys what the applicant thinks.
- Engage meaningfully with the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the proposed research. Do not simply list the scholars' names whose works are relevant.
- Provide a full discussion of the research design i.e. not only the various data collection methods but why they are suitable for the proposed research and how they inter-relate.
- Clearly explain what motivated the selected research strategy and how this contributes to the state of the art.
- The proposal will be read by people who are not necessarily experts in the precise field of research, so it is necessary to explain the context of the project very carefully, and why and how the research will add to current knowledge.
- Give as much information about proposed outcomes as possible, even if only provisional. Identify specific conferences or journals and explain why they are relevant and important.
- Applicants should formulate their projects clearly, giving a sense of the research questions and why they are necessary questions (i.e. what about the state of the art that this research necessitates, what is the gap that this seeks to fill or the existing idea it seeks to extend or counter?).
- Having established why the research is worth doing, the research design and methodologies should make clear what the applicant will be doing, how they will do it, and why that method is appropriate. The milestones layout should provide a provisional timetable as to when these things are to be carried out within the funding period.
- Sometimes dissemination can focus only on academic routes, ensure that public engagement is planned and where clinically relevant research is taking place, that patients themselves are involved too.

- If a monograph is to be produced, be clear about the potential publisher and why they are preferred. Ideally, the applicant should already have preliminary correspondence with an editor.
- Provide a rationale for journals and publishers that are being targeted. Ideally, it should be a dissemination strategy.
- Ideally, knowledge exchange should involve genuine exchange and co-production rather than only dissemination to non-academic audiences.

Applicant

Track record and research potential of the applicant:

- The applicant should clearly outline why they are well-matched to the proposed research in addition to how their wider experience makes them the ideal candidate for undertaking the research.
- Low undergraduate grades should be addressed and explained by the applicant. It is perfectly acceptable to be on an 'upward trajectory' (i.e. academic performance increasing over time). If so, explain it and turn it into a strength.
- Include all relevant employment and research experience but be succinct and try not to repeat the same information. Lab internships should be identified as voluntary or compulsory as part of a course.
- It is important to lay out the track record clearly, with unambiguous details as to achievements (and not least publications).
- The applicant should give clear evidence of their potential for research, focusing on both the breadth of their academic experience as well as other work or life experience.
- Highlight any work submitted for publication and if none has been submitted, identify work that could lead to a publication.
- Be careful about tunnel vision and narrowing focus on a topic already explored in detail at undergraduate or master's level.
- The strongest applicants supplement good academic results with other experiences such as internships, relevant volunteering work or previous research experience, evidence of collaboration, networking, management and leadership experience and contribution to research and higher education.
- If applications relate to a PhD that is already in progress, include the data already generated. This should be expected to demonstrate satisfactory progress.

Personal statement:

- The personal statements should be enthusiastic, showing strong commitment and motivation to pursue the proposed research. There should be a very good match between the applicant's profile and the proposed research.
- The personal statement is not a CV, nor an autobiography; it should be understood as justifying the applicant's suitability for the research proposed (and thus the funding requested). The applicant should focus on qualities directly linked to the ability to conduct research, the suitability to undertake the proposed research, and how their career to date has prepared them for the project. The applicant should strive for certain objectivity, avoid overly emotional language, and focus on the relevant facts of their career and achievements, justifying how those facts support their eligibility to conduct the given research project.
- Avoid long narrative statements with a historic timeline that mean key achievements may get missed; additional achievements (besides degrees) should be made clearly visible to the reviewer.
- Contextualise the application. The applicant should explain how the proposed research fits with what has been achieved to date and will make a difference; clearly state if they have already started their research, how they had been funded to date, and why the Irish Research Council funding is required.
- The strongest statements contain a measure of self-reflection and personal insight and explain how the applicant came to be interested in their current project and their proposed research built upon previous studies or offered a new departure.
- Where possible, highlight any non-academic activities/experiences that demonstrate a genuine interest in the wider research area; don't be afraid to express curiosity and fascination with research and the subject selected.
- Personal experience through which skills and knowledge have been acquired can greatly strengthen an applicant's profile; The applicant should reflect on how previous experiences have given them the broad and deep skills base that is necessary to cope with the pressures of research and prepared them for the substantial progression from taught course success to independent research. This is a huge transition that requires them to have a strong set of research-related skills in place and a coherent plan for augmenting these.
- Always include third-party endorsements, for example, awards (no matter how small).
- Consider setting out longer-term ambitions, describing how the award is a first step towards something bigger, but be careful about appearing overly confident.
- The educational track record does not always speak for itself: in the best applications, certain aspects of the grades or content of unusual earlier educational paths or training were explained in the personal statement.
- For the academic record, research experience, work experience, personal statement and training and career plan, it is important that these add up to a coherent plan and do not omit anything significant. In general, statements in these sections need to be supported with evidence.

Match between applicant's profile and the proposed research project:

- The applicant should be careful about overstating the closeness between their profile and the proposed research, as questions and doubts may arise about the narrowness of perspective and the risk of tunnel vision: has the applicant ever known or cared about anything else or acquired or shown interest in acquiring any realistic sense of broader contexts and significances?
- If the work is related to previous research with the proposed supervisor/mentor or ongoing academic employment, the applicant should highlight how they have identified innovative questions independently, rather than as part of a team.
- The more the research project is clearly the development of a research trajectory and long-standing commitment the better. If there is no obvious link between previous experience and qualifications and the intended project – make the case.
- While applicants will acquire additional skills and competencies during the research, it may appear problematic if the research proposed requires the applicant to acquire radically new knowledge or competencies, without any previous experience, or lacks a sound familiarity with the theory that underpins the research. Lack of relevant experience may weaken the application, even if training is available in the host institution.

Main issues applicants should be aware of:

- There is a need for applicants to show more precisely how their prior experience prepares them for their proposed project. Just listing degree titles and module titles is not sufficient. Courses with similar titles can have very different contents and can thereby promote the acquisition of varying skills-sets. Similarly, it is important that applicants spell out the skills acquired, and knowledge built in their dissertations, and how they map on to those required in their proposed projects.
- Whilst final year undergraduate projects provide important training for research, it is preferable to develop a novel project or a novel aspect of the project as an independent line of research in a PhD, rather than simply base the application and PhD on the final year project itself.
- If the applicant's academic profile is not in line with the proposed research, offer a convincing narrative to support the shift. Justify the decision to locate the proposed research in a subject area that is different from previous academic training.
- It is particularly important to explain any research experience or research achievements, and how these are directly relevant to the project.
- The most impressive personal statements give context to the application – how the award of the scholarship will make a difference and lead on from what has been achieved to date.
- While an applicant cannot necessarily be expected to have completed their Master's degree prior to applying, it is important to give a clear and well-evidenced account of the likely result of that degree, and in particular to make clear the research experience, and thus readiness for doctoral research. The main issue applicants should be aware of is the ability to demonstrate continuity and development in terms of the relationship of the proposal to previous academic research. Applicants for a two-year postdoctoral award should be careful to distinguish their project from their PhD.
- For degrees obtained outside of the Irish/UK context, provide detail on how to 'translate' the results.

Training and Career Development

Clarity and quality of training and career development plan:

- Avoid simply listing graduate training courses and endeavour to state how these are needed for the chosen career.
- Consider integrating some of the information provided in the 'Specialist Knowledge' section of the application form into the Training and Career Plan; show evidence of how the plan will emerge from/map onto the project e.g. timing of training needed to perform specific parts of the research.
- Justify placements and collaborations in terms of how they will affect the project, what will be achieved from them, and how they will impact future plans.
- The best applications link academic interests to broader social issues and give thought to the relationship between academia and the wider cultural sphere: is the applicant connecting their project to forms of meaningful social engagement? What is the social and cultural urgency of the project? Why do we need it? Consider whether the training opportunities are being used to extend the applicant's abilities for social engagement and for developing influential research impacts.
- If possible, plan for at least one visit to another research group abroad.
- It is good if someone shows initiative in finding out the qualifications needed for a job they might be interested in beyond the academy. When describing work experience/internships think hard and find things that experience has taught which are useful both for the accomplishment of the research and on which to build at the postdoc stage.
- The applicant should make sure they have a clear career pathway – what is their main goal and what are the direct next steps along the way. What do they need to achieve to get them? Also, this is a "plan" – so the applicant should make it read like one – have planned activities with timelines: when are they going to do them, at what stage, and why? How does each proposed activity impact the development of the applicant?
- The applications should not be focused on an academic career and be too generalised about alternative paths. The best applications are those that deal with specifics, both in terms of the skills required and how and when (in what order) they would be acquired.

Capacity to acquire new knowledge and skills:

- The best plans are those that show an understanding of the applicant's skills gaps and how they will be filled.
- Applicants should be specific about how the training aligns with the project and track record.

- The training should depend on the project stage, and this needs to be emphasised. Training should also be specific to the project and the applicant. The applicant needs to identify the training and what needs to be done.
- Discuss both the skills already acquired and the new skills/ training that will be gained or are needed and link them; demonstrate how the award would transform the existing skills in those identified as being required to pursue the chosen career.
- Give clear details about any courses already taken, especially those taken independently of previous degree courses. Be specific about which training courses will be undertaken and be realistic about the number of courses that can be completed.
- Consider wider skill sets beyond the practical aspects of research work, including management, administrative, leadership, and teaching skills. The applicant should think imaginatively about skills they would like to acquire in order to differentiate their plan from those of all other applicants.
- Be realistic with regards to how many skills can be acquired during the time of the award, and about the capacity for skill-acquisition (e.g. language skills) in a relatively short time; it is important to reflect upon the total time available for research and the time that training will occupy within that total – it should not be done to the detriment of the actual research.
- Applicants should demonstrate their capacity to acquire new skills by providing evidence of a track record of acquiring skills. Demonstrating they have successfully undertaken a range of training opportunities (and the ability to search out such opportunities) inevitably shows that applicants have the capacity to acquire new knowledge and skills.
- Have a clear idea not just of training and development needs, but of how these could be met at the proposed institution: even down to the level of individual courses or modules on offer.

Main issues applicants should be aware of:

- The narrative about training and career development needs to link strongly with the proposed project. The more precisely the skills needs are identified, the more convincing the story IS told. Similarly, the more detailed the outline of the potential career avenues following from the project, the greater the impression that the applicant has thought through their career plans.
- For applications at any stage, it is useful to identify formal training (courses, workshops, placements etc.).
- Applicants should avoid reference to high-impact factor journals. The quality of the research is important. Applicants should also be realistic about the number of publications they expect to achieve, balancing quality and quantity.
- The applicant should bring out what is worthwhile and interesting about themselves and their proposed career plans. This is not just a routine exercise in listing what could be expected (though that needs to be included) but show some of their own thinking, thereby displaying that they are capable of original and critical thinking. Display that they do not take everything at face value but are learning to question and are able to uncover debates and discussions of limitations of all kinds.
- Ensure that both scientific/technical skills and transferable skills are covered in the plan.

- Applicants should always take the question about career paths outside of academia seriously. It may well be that the first preference is for a traditional academic career, and it is alright to say that, but applicants should also give some concrete examples of other roles they could take on.
- The best career development plans linked the skills the applicant already had to those they would gain because of the scholarship/fellowship. These plans showed how the award of the scholarship/fellowship would transform current skills into those the applicant had identified as being required to pursue their chosen career. It is important that the skills, career progression, etc., are linked specifically to the opportunities because of the scholarship/fellowship and not just because of a generic PhD or postdoc position.
- GOIPD applicants who intend to remain in the same institution or with the same mentor who supervised their PhD should provide a rationale of why they do not intend to move to another institution and/or research group. Assessors must be convinced that continuing in the same environment is the best for the applicant and the proposal.
- Applicants should make a more sustained reflection on the contribution of the scholarship/fellowship, not merely in terms of the importance of funding, but also in terms of the prestige of the scholarship/fellowship.
- One aspect that applicants need to get right is the ability to expand their networking abilities via the proposed scholarship/fellowship. It is important to show how their research will be put in context and how they will collaborate/compete with other groups working on similar research project. This will be useful for their future career in both academia and industry.

Environment

Suitability and ability of the proposed academic supervisor(s)/mentor to provide adequate supervision:

- Statements by proposed supervisors/mentors should be of a high standard, giving important detail about their own research and careers (including supervisory experience), their relationship to the applicant and the proposed research, and the merits of their institution.
- The applicant and supervisor/mentor should already be in close contact ahead of submitting the application, in order to comprehensively discuss the proposed research, so that it is clear to the assessor that the applicant has made the decision to study at the proposed institution on the basis of the close fit with the research project. The supervisor/mentor must be clearly on-board and should write their sections in a bespoke manner.
- Supervisors and mentors are advised to comment on how applicants will be supported in the lab/department (where relevant); this is particularly important in large groups where it is unlikely that the PI will provide day-to-day supervision to applicants.
- Supervisors and mentors should demonstrate appropriate research expertise in the proposed research, and that they can provide a supportive environment, whether through the department or the research group.

- Supervisors and mentors should not treat this section as a means to list their own CV. They need to demonstrate how they can best support the applicant.
- Supervisors and mentors should consider including detailed information about their track record (e.g. number of years after PhD, number of current and past research students).
- If the primary supervisor/mentor lacks experience or has not had any successful PhD students or postdoctoral researchers to date, consider the involvement of a more senior colleague as a co-supervisor/advisor in the proposal (their track record should also be referenced). It is also worth explicitly acknowledging this and making a positive case as to why they are still the best researcher for the job.
- Consider mentioning the position of the research team in the international context, if applicable.

Quality of infrastructure, facilities, and support to be provided by the higher education institution (HEI):

- Avoid using an institutional template. The applicant should include a personal justification explaining why the facilities and infrastructure are appropriate and will support them and the ability to carry out the proposed research. An attempt to link their project to the institution's environment makes an application stand out.
- Outline what is distinct about the chosen host environment, such as the possibility of industry placement, inter-lab exchange whether national or international; how it has the best resources for the specified work (e.g. equipment, access to datasets), stressing any specific resources and/or opportunities (e.g. internal grants and awards) that distinguish it from others; the possibility for public engagement, conferences, and other outreach activities should also be highlighted.
- Demonstrate strong knowledge of the host institution. The applicant should ask their prospective host department about the research culture for early career researchers.
- Consider highlighting the host institution's training programme, which is expected to be comprehensive.
- Ensure the host institution has a broad series of support structures for administrative, pastoral, and academic support as well as evidence of a strong research culture in the fields of the proposal.
- In the case of very specialised projects, the existence of specialised equipment or access to necessary computer power must be included.
- A research project is also about future networking links and organisations, which means it is almost impossible for a single host organisation to offer the perfect setting – when there is not a 100% fit between the host institution and applicant this can be improved with the inclusion of collaborations.
- Interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary projects can be difficult to manage within the confines of a perhaps a small, single-discipline department, in which case specific evidence of inter-departmental/cross-disciplinary support should be considered.

Match between the applicant, supervisor(s)/mentor, and higher education institution:

- Successful applications provide a clear match between the applicant, the supervisor(s)/mentor, and the higher education institution (HEI). The infrastructure, facilities, and support provided by the host institution should be excellent and well suited to support the proposed research.
- A clear recognition of the research profile and, above all the current research interests of the supervisor/mentor is important. Nearly all the proposals include detailed accounts of the infrastructure and support that would be provided by the institution, in terms of training and development courses, networking and outreach opportunities, as well as library and equipment resources. The best proposals tailor this information carefully to the research project.
- The strongest applications avoid generic HEI statements and demonstrate why the HEI is a particularly good match for the applicant and project.
- When choosing a supervisor/mentor and host institution, the applicant should look at what the prospective supervisor/mentor(s)' PhD and postdoctoral researchers have gone on to achieve, and at how well the prospective host institution's facilities and infrastructures fit with the proposed research.
- Make sure to discuss this aspect of the application with the proposed supervisor/mentor(s). The best applications are those that can justify that the research would not happen if it did not happen at the chosen institution, with the chosen supervisor/mentor, because of the uniquely distinctive research of the supervisor/mentor, a unique body of expertise (and resourcing) at that institution, or an existing project into which the research can be fitted; as well as those that go beyond the immediate supervisor and department to look at the benefits which the institution offers more widely.
- Endeavour to demonstrate the match between the applicant's background and the supervisor/mentor's expertise.
- Highlight the connections of the proposed research to the work of the supervisor/mentor and to the research specialisms of the department, as well as to any other staff members in the department or other departments in the host institution.
- Applicants should emphasise the capacity of the institution to understand the researcher's specific needs and to respond to them in appropriate ways.
- If already registered in the host institution, reflect on the experience of working there, even for a short period.

Main issues applicants should be aware of:

- Assure that information is provided by the supervisors on how the research costs will be covered (those not covered by the scholarship/fellowship, if granted).
- Where the applicant proposes to have one or more additional supervisors, whether from the same or another institution, the nature of the supervision arrangements need to be spelled out clearly (responsibilities of the team members, expertise of the team members, frequency/location/method of meetings).

- The strongest applications demonstrate that a relationship has been established with the proposed supervisor/mentor and point to the supervisor's/mentor's relevant qualifications and research interests for the applicant's project.