



**IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL RESEARCHER OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2024 –
GUIDELINES**

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Introduction

The Irish Research Council (IRC) has opened its call for nominations for the 2024 Researcher of the Year awards. Now in their eighth year, these awards will commend the very best of our awardees and alumni¹ who have made, or are making, highly significant and valuable contributions to knowledge, society, culture, or innovation.

The awards will additionally commend the role of mentors, supervisors, research officers and technical support staff in the Irish higher education and research system (whether funded by the IRC or not) for their support of the academic community across all career levels.

Award categories 1 – 3 will be judged by an expert independent panel, comprising four international expert judges and a non-voting chair from the Irish research system, whose decision will be final. The panel will be drawn from both AHSS and STEM disciplines and all panel members will review all nominations. **Award category 4** will be awarded to nominees upon successful completion of the nomination form and satisfaction of eligibility criteria.

Government has committed to the establishment of a new research funding agency, Taighde Éireann/Research Ireland, through the amalgamation of the Irish Research Council and Science Foundation Ireland. This scheme may be amended during the call process in light of this commitment.

Overview of award categories

Nominations are invited under four categories². For the first three categories, nominations should evidence the importance of IRC funding to the achievements of the nominee as a researcher within a given category.

Category 1 — Researcher of the Year

One award will be made to a **well-established and highly accomplished researcher** currently working in a Higher Education Institution (HEI) or a Research Performing Organisation (RPO), who is, or has previously been, a named awardee of the IRC, and who is, at the time of nomination, making an exceptional contribution to research in their field.

This category will be evaluated on the basis of substantiated examples of:

- excellence in research — on the basis of research outputs, including published work; national and international acknowledgements; research awards secured;
- demonstration of leadership in their field;

¹ This includes former awardees of the Irish Research Council's predecessors, namely the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) and the Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology (IRCSET).

² The IRC reserves the right to make additional awards outside the four categories described in this document.

- communication of their research;
- impact of their research on knowledge, teaching and learning, society, culture, or innovation.

Category 2 — Early-Career Researcher of the Year

One award will be made to an **early-career researcher** currently working in research in a HEI or an RPO, who is, or previously has been, a named awardee of the IRC, and who is, at the time of nomination, demonstrating an exceptional level of achievement in their field at this stage in their career.

This category will be evaluated on the basis of substantiated examples of:

- excellence in research — on the basis of track record appropriate to their career stage;
- demonstration of potential to become a leader in their field;
- communication of their research;
- impact of their research on knowledge, teaching and learning, society, culture, or innovation;
- potential to evolve into an inspiring role model for new researchers.

Category 3 — Impact Award

One award will be made to a current or former IRC-funded researcher, working within or outside a HEI/RPO, whose work is making a significant **impact beyond academia**. Eligible nominees need not be currently working specifically in a research-driven role.

This category will be evaluated on the basis of substantiated examples of:

- the impact of their work, nationally and/or internationally above and beyond the conventional scope of research outputs;
- demonstration of the impact of IRC funding on the development of their research/work.
- demonstration of leadership and a proven ambition to make a difference;
- contribution of their work to knowledge, society, culture, or innovation, including via teaching, community engagement and outreach, as relevant.

For more information on potential types of impact, see [Appendix 1](#).

Category 4 — Research Ally Prizes

These prizes will be awarded to mentors, supervisors, research officers and technical support staff in the Irish higher education system who play a **vital role in supporting the academic research community** across all career levels. Postgraduate students,

postdoctoral fellows, academic and research active staff are welcome to nominate the mentors, supervisors, research officers and technical support staff who support their work and careers.

Note: For this category, nominators and nominees are **not** required to be currently or formerly funded by the IRC.

Nominations will demonstrate:

- the supportive role of mentors, supervisors, research officers and technical support staff in academia;
- how they have contributed to the nominator's academic career development;
- how they have helped to foster a positive and respectful academic culture.

For more information on what makes a Research Ally, see [Appendix 2](#).

Eligibility criteria: categories 1 – 3

- Nominees under categories 1 – 3 must be persons who, in their own name, applied for and received funding from the IRC which has been pivotal to their research and/or research career, under one or more of the following categories:
 - Postgraduate scholarship schemes;
 - Postdoctoral fellowship schemes;
 - Research project awards, including all principal investigator-led awards: e.g. Laureate Awards, COALESCE, Research for Policy and Society, New Horizons, New Foundations;
 - A past awardee of a Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting Award, Creative Connections Award, Ulysses Award, or similar travel award is eligible to apply **only** if they have also held one or more of the Council's research awards in their own name.
- Nominees from all disciplinary areas are encouraged.
- Nominees can be based anywhere in the world.
- Category 1 and 2 nominees must currently be working in a HEI or RPO.
- A completed PhD is a requirement for Category 1.
- Category 1 nominees must have successfully completed their PhD at least 8 years prior to **1 January 2025**.
- Category 2 nominees must have successfully completed their highest postgraduate qualification no more than eight years prior to **1 January 2025**.³ This period of eligibility can be extended on the grounds of eligible career breaks⁴.
- Applicants to Category 2 at postdoctoral level or above must have an employment contract with the nominating institution (or another research performing institution abroad) at the time of application. Applicants to Category 2 at postgraduate level need to be hosted by the nominating institution (or another research performing institution abroad) at the time of application.
- Canvassing IRC or the adjudication panel is not permitted and will result in automatic disqualification.
- Current Council Board members may not be nominated.

³ For the purposes of this award, the date of conferring will be taken as the PhD or the highest postgraduate qualification completion date.

⁴ Eligible career breaks include maternity leave, paternity leave, adoptive leave, prolonged sick leave, and carer's leave (as set out in [Appendix 3](#)). Provision of documented evidence of an eligible career break will be required if an exception is to be requested.

Eligibility criteria: category 4

- To nominate a **mentor or supervisor**:
 - You must be a current or former postgraduate or postdoctoral researcher at an eligible HEI or RPO⁵;
 - You must be currently under the nominee's mentorship / supervision at a HEI/RPO **or** have been under the nominee's mentorship / supervision at a HEI/RPO within the last five years;
 - The nominee must have a current contract of employment with a HEI or RPO at the time of application.
- To nominate a **research officer or technical support staff**:
 - You must be a current or former (within the last five years) postgraduate student or postdoctoral fellow at a HEI/RPO **or** a current or former academic or research active staff member at a HEI/RPO;
 - The nominee must be employed as a staff-member at an eligible HEI or RPO at the time of application.
- Nominators and nominees are ***not*** required to be currently or formerly funded by the IRC.
- Nominators do ***not*** need to be based in academia at the time of application.
- Self-nominations will not be accepted.
- Nominators may only nominate ***one person per nomination category***.

Nomination process: categories 1 – 2

Step one — Nominees

- Nominees must complete the relevant forms, available [here](#).
- The completed form should be sent to the designated Research Officer within their HEI/RPO.
- Nominees not currently based in an Irish HEI/RPO should forward their forms to the designated Research Officer at the HEI/RPO where they held their IRC award.

Step two — HEIs and RPOs

- HEIs and RPOs may submit nominations (one man and one woman) under one or both categories. HEIs/RPOs are required (where possible⁶) to maintain gender balance within *any* category for which they wish to submit an application. Therefore, a HEI/RPO may decide to enter a total of either two applicants (one man and one woman within the same category) or four applicants (1 man and 1 woman in each category). Gender non binary nominees may be entered in place of either the woman or the man in each category, or in addition if an eligible man and woman nominee have been identified.

⁵ For a list of eligible HEIs and RPOs visit this [link](#).

⁶ "Where possible" relates to instances where institutions do not have eligible candidates from more than one gender from whom to select their nominees. In such cases, the IRC will exceptionally consider waiving the rule whereby a nomination from more than one gender must be made in each category. These circumstances will be subject to verification by the IRC.

- The list of HEIs/RPOs eligible for funding from the Irish Research Council can be found [on our website](#).
- Research Officers should forward the nominee forms, together with the HEI/RPO overview form (available [here](#)), to rotya@research.ie no later than **4pm (Irish time) on 30 September 2024**.

Nomination process: category 3

- This category is open for nominations by the organisation in which the individual currently works or by staff at the individual's current or former HEI/RPO (e.g. academic supervisor or mentor, research office, alumni, and career development office).
- Staff at HEIs/RPOs are encouraged to contact IRC alumni to make them aware of this category.
- Individuals may check the IRC's Awardee database [here](#) to ensure the nominee is an alumnus of the IRC.
- The nominator must complete the relevant form available [here](#).
- Gender balance is not a requirement of submissions made under category 3.
- There is no limit to the number of nominations that can be submitted under category 3 by a HEI/RPO; as stated above, nominations can also be made by the organisation in which the individual currently works.
- Applications should be emailed to rotya@research.ie no later than **4pm (Irish time) on 30 September 2024**.

Nomination process: category 4

- Nominators must complete the relevant form, available [here](#).
- Nominators may nominate no more than one person in each individual category (mentor / supervisor / research officer / technical support staff).
- Completed forms should be emailed to rotya@research.ie as a Word or editable PDF file no later than **4pm (Irish time) on 30 September 2024**.
- Detail contained in nominations will remain confidential and will not be shared with nominees⁷.
- Upon receiving nominations, the IRC will confirm with relevant VPRs/Deans/Heads of Research that all nominees are members of staff at their designated institutions.
- Nominees will be notified of their nomination by the IRC and, with their consent, will receive public recognition through the IRC's website and social media platforms.

⁷ Anonymised text excerpts from the nomination forms may be published by the IRC as part of future publicity material relating to the prizes.

Award presentation

Category 1 – 3 awardees will be presented with a commemorative plaque in late 2024. Category 4 awardees will receive an official certificate of commendation in late 2024. The winners will be profiled through an extensive media and online communications campaign.

Key dates

Call open	22 July 2024
FAQ deadline	23 September 2024
Nomination deadline	4pm (Irish time) 30 September 2024
Call announcement	December 2024

If you do not find the answer to your query in the call documentation, you should contact the Research Office in your HEI/RPO for additional information. Research officers may send any queries they are unable to clarify to rotya@research.ie.

Appendix 1: Types of impact

Potential types of impact include:

- Social and Economic
- Education and Access including through teaching, outreach and engagement
- Environment
- Gender Equality
- Health and Wellbeing
- Human Rights
- Cultural
- Policy Making and Influencing
- Legal Reform
- Scientific and Technological Advancement
- Product Production and Enterprise

The Campus Engage report, [Engaged Research Planning for Impact: Society and Higher Education Addressing Grand Societal Challenges Together 2022](#) illustrates the wide range of potential types of impact that may be considered here.

Some examples of socially impactful work are:

- Research outputs including publications, technologies and resources, organised workshops and events that have made a demonstrable public impact beyond an exclusively academic context.
- Research developed in collaboration with civil and civic society organisations such as community groups, non-governmental organisations, non-profit organisations, voluntary groups, and charitable organisations.
- Research that has contributed to and/or influenced governmental or institutional policy making.
- The production or refinement of technologies with a demonstrable societal impact.
- Research leading to innovation and enterprise with a demonstrable societal impact.
- Cultural and/or creative exhibitions, practices, events.

Appendix 2: What makes a research ally?

- **Commitment:** The commitment to supporting researchers across all career levels, from postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows to senior research staff.
- **Communication:** Mentorship, supervision and research support depends on communication. Excellent mentors, supervisors, and research officers are accessible and available to researchers and are ready to listen and to advise on any ideas or issues.
- **Enthusiasm and Encouragement:** Mentors, supervisors and research officers are enthusiastic about the research work and projects of their researchers. They are an encouraging and motivating presence in the higher education sector.
- **Guidance and Inspiration:** Mentors and supervisors are willing to offer their expertise and guidance on a research project and inspire their early career researchers to consider new ideas and concepts, methods, and materials. Research officers offer a wealth of administrative expertise and experience, connections and networks that are vital to the success of major research projects.
- **Accountability:** Mentors and supervisors ensure that their early career researchers set achievable goals and that they can meet their targets in good time and to the best of their ability.
- **Respect:** Mentors, supervisors, and research officers value their postgraduate students and research staff as fellow members of the academic community. They help to maintain a positive research environment, free from discrimination, bullying and harassment.
- **Empathy and Understanding:** Excellent mentors, supervisors, and research officers are sensitive to the many personal or academic challenges that a researcher can face during their period of research. They are an empathic and understanding presence during difficult times.

Appendix 3: Eligible career breaks

The IRC's allowance periods for eligible career breaks are:

- For **maternity leave**, the effective elapsed time since the award of first PhD (or the highest postgraduate qualification achieved) will be considered reduced by 18 months or, if longer, by the documented amount of leave taken for each child after the first PhD award, or the highest postgraduate qualification achieved.⁸
- The effective elapsed time since the award of the first PhD (or the highest postgraduate qualification achieved) will be considered reduced by the documented amount of **paternity leave** taken for each child born after the first PhD award, or the highest postgraduate qualification achieved.
- For **adoptive leave**, the effective elapsed time since the award of first PhD (or the highest postgraduate qualification achieved) will be considered reduced by 18 months or, if longer, by the documented amount of leave taken for each child after the first PhD award, or the highest postgraduate qualification achieved.
- For **parental leave/carer's leave**, the effective elapsed time since the award of the first PhD (or the highest postgraduate qualification achieved) will be considered reduced by the total documented time of leave taken by the applicant after the first PhD award, or the highest postgraduate qualification achieved.
- Verification for **long-term illness** must be provided in the form of a medical certificate. For long-term illness (over ninety days for the applicant or a close family member, i.e. child, spouse, parent, sibling), the effective elapsed time since the award of the PhD degree (or the highest postgraduate qualification achieved) will be considered reduced by the total documented amount of leave taken by the applicant after the first PhD award, or the highest postgraduate qualification achieved.
- Verification for **leave taken for clinical qualifications, military service or for other unavoidable statutory reasons** must be provided in an appropriate form. The effective elapsed time since the award of the PhD degree (or the highest postgraduate qualification achieved) will be considered reduced by the documented amount of leave taken by the applicant for each instance which occurred after the first PhD award, or the highest postgraduate qualification achieved.

⁸ A document confirming the maternity leave period from the relevant HR department(s) or a birth certificate is sufficient documentation.