

## SFI Centres for Research Training Guidance Document: Leveraged Funding

### 1. Overview

Innovation 2020 outlined a commitment towards the development of a talented and skilled workforce and researcher base that would be responsive to the emerging industrial and societal needs<sup>1</sup>. In line with this commitment, SFI launched the SFI Centres for Research Training (CRTs) for the training of postgraduate students in areas of identified skills needs with reference to the white paper: *Data and ICT Skills for the Future*. SFI's new strategy: *Shaping our Future*<sup>2</sup> also has a key objective to support the development of a highly skilled and agile workforce through evolving higher education training.

This thematic area of “Data and ICT Skills for the Future” encompasses the development of innovative software- and hardware-based information and communications technologies (ICT) as well as the diffusion of ICT as a key enabling technology in other relevant areas of science and technology. Building on research excellence, the CRTs aim to<sup>3</sup> establish a world-class cohort-based interdisciplinary research and training programme for postgraduate students equipped for an ever-evolving workplace.

In line with the core aim of increasing the number of postgraduate research students in Ireland as per Innovation 2020 “*increase annual research masters and PhD enrolments by 500 to 2,250*” CRTs are expected to “*leverage non-SFI funding for postgraduates to grow the scale and breadth of the CRT*” and increase the number of postgraduate research students in Ireland. This guidance is provided to support the CRTs in building partnerships with enterprise, public bodies and other external bodies to meet this commitment towards developing a pipeline of highly trained, highly agile and well-networked research talent.

### 2. Requirement for a minimum level of leveraged students

The CRTs are required to leverage funding to support a minimum of one additional student for every four funded by SFI. This non-SFI contribution must cover all costs associated with the leveraged student, and the leveraged students must be supported at equivalent levels as those funded through the CRT Grant. The number of students approved for funding under the grant, and number of minimum additional leveraged students are detailed in the Letter of Offer (LoO) and may differ between CRTs. Failure to maintain the required number of minimum additional leveraged students may result in the reduction in, or termination, of SFI's contribution to the budget of the CRT.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Innovation-2020.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sfi.ie/strategy/SFI-Strategy-2025-Shaping-Our-Future.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/centres-for-res-training/2018\\_CRT\\_Call\\_Doc\\_final-revised-13-June-NEW.pdf](https://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/centres-for-res-training/2018_CRT_Call_Doc_final-revised-13-June-NEW.pdf)

Table 1. Example of SFI funded and minimum additional leveraged students

	SFI Funded	Minimum additional leverage	Total
<b>Cohort 1</b>	24	6	<b>30</b>
<b>Cohort 2</b>	24	6	<b>30</b>
<b>Cohort 3</b>	24	6	<b>30</b>
<b>Cohort 4</b>	24	6	<b>30</b>
<b>Total Students</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>120</b>

It is understood and acceptable that the number of students recruited by the CRT may vary from the agreed numbers for a cohort in a given year. As such, variation in the number of annual leveraged students is acceptable, but the total number of leveraged students over the four cohorts must not be less than the agreed total for the duration of the grant.

### 3. Importance of participating partners in the CRT model

The CRTs are required to build partnerships in the design and delivery of training programmes over the duration of the award. CRTs are expected to engage closely with their partners in the development of appropriate training programmes to address skills needs in the labour market and to attract investment to Ireland through the availability of a high-value talent pipeline. It is expected that these engagements will guide the CRTs in adapting training programmes in response to changing needs over the course of the award. As such, representatives from participating partners may be invited to join the CRTs' governance and management committees.

Placements for CRT students are a mandatory element of training programme and may be hosted by the participating partner(s). The primary purpose of a placement is to expose students to other sectors and career paths, as well as to develop their professional networks. Placements may be directly related to the specific research project undertaken by the student or may be in a different area. Placements must be for a minimum duration of 12 weeks and appropriate support must be provided for the student in selecting and securing a placement.

### 4. Sources of leveraged funding

SFI expects that CRTs will leverage funding from as wide a range of sources as possible to increase the number of postgraduate students. CRTs will be asked to report the number of leveraged students, and source of leveraged funding on a biannual basis, or as requested by SFI (Appendix A). The source of leveraged funding can be from various partner organisations, including but not limited to industry/enterprise, philanthropy, international funding agencies and institutional funding.

For leveraged funding the following conditions must always be met: (i) Leveraged CRT students must be in receipt of a minimum of €18,500 per year after all deductions (tax, PRSI, pension etc), (ii) There are no additional costs incurred by the CRT, (iii) The integrity of the cohort structure is protected,

ensuring both SFI-funded and leveraged students benefit from the cohort experience, (iv) Training costs for leveraged students must be provided to the level of the SFI funded students.

*Industry/Enterprise contribution:* Where industry/enterprise is supporting a PhD studentship within the CRT or supporting the placement of a CRT student, the CRT must ensure that the partnership with industry is State Aid compliant (refer to Section 5).

*International funding agencies:* CRTs can leverage students through the support of co-funding programmes, such as the European Union, National Science Foundation and other international competitive awards.

*National funding agencies:* As the CRTs were established to increase the number of postgraduate research students in Ireland, funding already committed by national funding agencies, Government Departments or other Agencies of the State for other activities cannot be counted towards the additional leveraged student commitment of the CRTs.

*Philanthropic contributions:* CRTs can leverage students from charities or philanthropy.

*Institutional funding:* Institutional funding that has been committed at the proposal stage to support additional CRT students can be reported as a contribution towards the number of leveraged students. However, the number of students leveraged through institutional funding cannot exceed the initial commitment which was made at the proposal stage. This limitation is in place to encourage leveraging of students through external partnerships which will enhance the training and provide vital placements.

## 5. State aid Regulations

As per SFI's Grant Conditions (inclusive of SFI's General Terms & Conditions<sup>4</sup>, Letters of Offer and SFI Policy documents<sup>5</sup>), all SFI funding granted is subject to, and must be compliant with, State Aid legislation based on Article 107(1) of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).<sup>6</sup> Namely, research activities undertaken as part of a Grant awarded under the SFI CRT Programme, and agreed to subject to SFI's Grant Conditions, must be "non-economic" in nature. SFI has set out guidance to support how the programme of research or project is developed and undertaken in accordance with these conditions. See 'Guidance on State aid for applicants to, and recipients of, SFI Grant funding' for further information.<sup>7</sup> Applicants to, and recipients of, Grant funding from SFI should actively engage with their Technology Transfer Offices to support their understanding of the definitions where required.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/sfi-general-terms-and-conditions/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/>

<sup>6</sup> [Commission Notice on the notion of State aid as referred to in Article 107\(1\) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union TABLE OF CONTENTS \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/state-aid/>

*Placements* of a minimum of 12 weeks are a mandatory element of training programmes in the CRTs, with the purpose of enhancing students' employability prospects and mobility in academic and non-academic sectors. Placements may be in a non-academic sector, or in an academic research group outside the Republic of Ireland. Where placements are undertaken in an industry or other non-academic setting, the following two options are recommended to ensure compliance with the non-economic nature of these awards:

- Option 1: The placement must be undertaken as part of a collaborative research project between the Research Performing Organisation (RPO) and the partner (industry / "undertaking") and should be structured as an "effective collaboration" in accordance with the Framework for State aid for research, development and innovation (2014/C 198/01) (the "Framework"). A Collaborative Research Agreement (CRA) must be signed by both the RPO and partner in this scenario and made available to SFI on request. Furthermore, SFI now requires that an Industry Collaboration Form (ICF) is completed and returned to SFI on or before the date that the Collaborative Research Agreement has been 'agreed' with, or signed by, the relevant partner(s). The ICF contains a checklist of requirements which should be completed to ensure that the project undertaken with the relevant industry partner is and will be compliant with the definition of "effective collaboration" as per the Framework (and as outlined above).
- Option 2: Where there is no "effective collaboration" agreed as part of the placement, the partner (industry / "undertaking") must employ the student as a temporary employee for the duration of the placement, pay them an appropriate wage (i.e. the net salary must not be less than the stipend the student would normally receive) for the duration of the placement and cover all subsistence and associated travel costs for the student during the placement. Furthermore, it must be agreed in advance that the student will not be able to utilise any of the resources of the CRT/RPO during the term of the placement, or to support the activity undertaken.

## 6. Requirement for reporting outputs

CRTs are obliged to report annually to SFI using the annual report template on SFI's Grants and Awards Management System "SESAME". CRTs are required to keep their SESAME Research Profile updated, as their annual Research Outputs is drawn directly from the CRT's Research Profile. The dates by which these reporting responsibilities must be completed and submitted to SFI on SESAME are clearly defined and communicated to the CRT. This is part of the terms and conditions that each CRT signs up to on receipt of their Grant, which represents significant state funding. CRTs will be asked to report on all outputs from their partnership engagements attributed to the Grant, as part of their annual reporting and Research Outputs responsibilities. This includes:

- i) Recruited student numbers; SFI funded and leveraged students
- ii) Joint student research projects undertaken with partner organisations,
- iii) Training modules undertaken with the support/participation of partner organisations,
- iv) Student placements undertaken in partner organisations.

## Appendix A: Cost-Share Report\*

\*Cost-share report will be reviewed periodically by Sfs Directorate and SFI Finance team and may be updated.

Committed Funding	Source of Funding	Type of Funding	July To Dec 2020			Cumulative Total		
			Leveraged students	Target	Variance	Leveraged students	Target	Variance
XXX	Partner X	Industry / HEI / Co-fund	0	0	0	0	0	0
YYY	Partner Y	Industry / HEI / Co-fund						
ZZZ	Partner Z	Industry / HEI / Co-fund						
<b>Total</b>			<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>