



SFI Industry RD&I Fellowship Call 2021 FAQs

** Updated 13 May 2021*

General Questions

Q1. If I am successful in the Industry RD&I Fellowship Call 2021, when can I expect to start my Fellowship?

SFI expects that applications submitted for the 21 July 2021 deadline will commence in January 2022 at the very earliest. SFI will update applicants on precise details of the earliest start date as the review process concludes. Please note that Fellowships are expected to commence within 6 months of the notification of the award.

Q2. Is the programme open to Irish Research Bodies only?

Yes. A list of eligible Research Bodies can be found [here](#).

Q3. Can the industry host location be anywhere in the world? Where the applicant is currently based in Ireland, the industry host location may be anywhere in the world (including Ireland). Where the applicant is currently based outside of Ireland, the host location must be in Ireland.

Q4. What is the maximum award duration?

The award duration must be between 1 month and 12 months if full-time, or 2 months and 24 months if part-time. The duration referred to here is the total 'award duration' as distinct from the 'placement duration'. The maximum cumulative *in-situ* 'placement duration' that a Fellow may spend at a host location is 12 months. For part-time awards, this *in-situ* duration may be spread over a period of up to 24 months.

Q5. Do candidates have to spend the entire *placement* duration of the Fellowship at the industry host location?

Yes, candidates should spend the entire placement duration of the Fellowship at the industry host location. SFI acknowledges however that for some projects travel between industry locations will be required – such travel should be referred to in proposals submitted to the programme.

Q6. Does the award have to be continuous, or can it be split into several periods of time?

Part-time awards can be split into several periods of time. Applicants are required to demonstrate that the duration, frequency and number of visits associated with a part-time award is appropriate in

the context of developing or enhancing linkages between academia and industry, and for meeting the objectives of the Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme. Multiple visits are not permitted for full-time awards as the Fellow is expected to be located at the premises of the host on a full-time basis for the duration of the award.

Q7. Is an academic mentor needed in addition to an industry mentor? *

There is no academic mentor role as part of an Industry RD&I Fellowship award. All applicants must include an industry mentor. In the case of Category B applicants only, a maximum of one academic collaborator may be included on the application. An academic collaborator is an individual based in the applicant's *Research Body* who is committed to providing a valuable intellectual and/or technical contribution to the proposed research. Academic collaborators may not receive funding through the grant.

Q8. Approximately when will successful applicants be notified? *

It is anticipated that successful applicants will be notified by early November 2021.

Industry Partner Questions

Q9. Who are eligible industry partners?

An eligible industry partner must be a research-active, private for-profit company and can be located in Ireland or abroad. Industry partners must also possess the appropriate independent infrastructure, revenue and staffing to provide appropriate working conditions and training to prospective fellows. They also need to have the financial capacity to provide a *minimum* cash contribution of 20% of total project costs.

Although collaborations with Government exchequer funded entities such as publicly funded research institutes, funding agencies, Government departments or other agencies of the State are encouraged, these are not eligible as industry partners for the Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme. Likewise, charities and not-for-profit organisations are not eligible industry partners. Commercial semi-state companies such as the group of companies under CIE, EirGrid, ESB, and their similar counterparts worldwide are eligible industry partners. If you require clarification as to the eligibility of a potential industry partner, please refer to the Industry RD&I Fellowship Call document or email irdif@sfi.ie in advance of proposal submission.

Q10. Are start-up companies eligible?

Yes, start-up companies are eligible to apply as industry partners provided, they fulfil the eligibility criteria of the industry partner outlined in Section 6 of the Industry RD&I Fellowship Call document. Additionally, they must be able to provide evidence to SFI through their financial accounts that they are not an undertaking in difficulty (see Q38 below). However, please note that proposals are not

accepted from applicants who wish to be hosted in an organisation in which they have a financial interest or hold a decision-making role. All parties to the application must disclose any potential conflict of interest in their proposal. Conflicts of interest must be managed by the applicant's Research Body.

Q11. Is the programme suitable for building relationships with industry partners for future submissions to other SFI Programmes?

Yes, the programme is suitable for building collaborative relationships with industry partners who may subsequently be involved in applications to other SFI programmes including, but not limited to, the SFI Strategic Partnership and Spokes Programmes.

Q12. How should IP be handled in an SFI Industry RD&I Fellowship award?

IP agreements entered into between the Research Body named on the Letter of Offer and the industry partner are the responsibility of the Research Body and should comply with the national IP protocol document *Ireland's National IP Protocol 2019*¹. Please consult with the Technology Transfer Office of the Research Body for further information.

Q13. Can a company be involved in more than one Fellowship application?

Yes, there is no limit to the number of Fellowships that a company can be involved in as long as they have the financial resources available to support the awards. However, please note that only one 'Fellow' per proposal to the Programme is permitted, and therefore a separate application and hence research project must be submitted for each application.

Q14. How do I find an academic partner?

Several resources are available to help industry partners find potential academic partners. Please see the Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme [webpage](#) for further details on the available resources. Academic/industry partners should contact each other directly to discuss potential applications to the Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme.

Q15. As a postdoctoral researcher can I go to a company that has collaborated with our research group before? Is this considered a conflict of interest?

A postdoctoral researcher can apply to be hosted at a company that their research group has collaborated with before. Please note, however, that the following would be considered conflicts of interest:

- A prospective Fellow (Category B) wishing to work in a company founded by his/her current or past postdoctoral supervisor.

¹ <https://www.knowledgetransferireland.com/ManagingIP/National-IP-Protocol/>

- A prospective Fellow (Category B) wishing to work in a company where his/her current or past postdoctoral supervisor is a main shareholder.

Please refer to the Call Document for more information on disclosure of conflicts of interest. All potential conflicts of interest must be addressed in the application document and in the letter of support for the Research Body, where relevant.

Q16. Are there any general rules on background/qualifications required for an industry mentor to be eligible? *

The industry partner must nominate an industry mentor who will host the Fellow and act as a point of contact. Industry mentors must be a formal employee of an eligible industry partner and have:

- Relevant experience working in an industry environment.
- Experience and knowledge of industry processes including operational and business procedures.
- A proven record of leadership and accomplishment appropriate to international standards in their field, industry sector and career stage.

Applicant Eligibility Questions

Q17. How does SFI define a senior author?

A senior author is one that is listed as first or joint first author, reflecting the fact that she/he has provided the greatest intellectual contribution, has held the primary responsibility for collecting and analysing data, and for the writing of the manuscript and associated drafts. The last author will also be considered as a senior author, since this position generally reflects her/his overall responsibility for the study and suggests that a level of mentorship has been provided. It will be noted that different publishers have differing rules on how the senior authorship is indicated (e.g., by using asterisks, underlining, placing the name first or last in the list of authors, etc.); of overriding importance however is that the applicant should be able to convince and reassure reviewers that they are the key author on these publications. Joint first authorship may only be claimed where the article clearly states that two (or more) authors have provided equal and significant contributions to the work described. Please note that senior authorship does not necessarily mean that they were responsible for the finance associated with the research that was reported.

Q18. Referring to the minimum number of publication criteria, can conference papers be counted as publications to meet the criteria, or only journal papers?

Yes, conference papers can be counted as publications if they are internationally peer reviewed. This recognises the fact that in some fields, conference papers are the primary source of dissemination. Conference abstracts, patent applications, or invention disclosures may not be counted against the publication requirements.

Q19. I am a postdoctoral researcher with a Contract of Indefinite Duration. I wish to apply to the Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme but am unsure how this may affect my contractual status – could you please advise?

Queries relating to employment contracts are handled by individual Research Bodies. Please contact the Research Office/HR Section of your Research Body to seek clarification.

Q20. I am currently a postdoctoral researcher and hold an SFI Starting Investigator Research Grant (SIRG). Which category should I apply under?

Postdoctoral holders of individual Fellowships (e.g., SIRG, IRC postgraduate scholarships, MSCA Fellowships) must apply under Category B and cannot apply earlier than one year before the end of their Fellowship/contract/award.

Q21. Does an unemployed postdoctoral researcher need to identify both a host Research Body and an industry partner before applying to the Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme?

Yes, unemployed postdoctoral researchers are eligible to apply but they must identify both a host Research Body and an industry partner.

Q22. I am a postdoctoral researcher currently working abroad in Europe. Can I apply via any higher education body in Ireland, or must it be the institution where I received my PhD and briefly worked as a postdoctoral researcher?

You can apply at *any* eligible Irish Research Body. Please see the Call Document for further details. A list of eligible Irish Research Bodies can be found [here](#).

Q23. If the PhD thesis has been submitted but the viva has not taken place by application deadline, am I eligible to apply? *

All applicants must hold a PhD or equivalent. Please consult the **SFI Policy of PhD Equivalence**² for further information. Note that the PhD must have either been:

- i) conferred at the time of application. The official date is defined as the day, month and year that the degree was conferred i.e., the month and year printed on the official PhD certificate or
- ii) the applicant has been certified by the awarding university as having fulfilled all the requirements for the award of a doctoral degree, including the submission of the hardbound corrected thesis at the date of submission.

An individual who has not yet completed their viva would not meet the above criteria and is therefore ineligible.

² <http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/eligibility-related-information/index.xml>

Q24. Can anyone apply for a part-time Fellowship or only Category A and Category B applicants with caring responsibilities? *

The part-time option is open to all potential applicants. It is not limited to Category A applicants or to those with caring responsibilities. Applicants are required to demonstrate that the duration, frequency and number of visits associated with a part-time award is appropriate in the context of developing or enhancing linkages between academia and industry, and for meeting the objectives of the Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme.

Q25. My current postdoctoral contract with my Research Body will end before the potential start date of an Industry RD&I Fellowship award. Am I eligible to apply or should my existing contract cover the Fellowship? *

Category B applicants on temporary contracts are eligible to apply, assuming that all other eligibility criteria are met. If awarded an Industry RD&I Fellowship, the Research Body will recognise you as an employee of the institution for at least the duration of the grant.

Q26. If I was previously granted an SFI Industry Fellowship award, can I apply under the new Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme? *

SFI views the Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme as distinct from the previous Industry Fellowship calls; therefore, previous holders of Industry Fellowship awards may apply to the 2021 Industry RD&I Fellowship call. The applicant and the company must meet all eligibility criteria detailed in the Programme Call document.

Budget Questions

Q27. How much funding will SFI provide?

Under State aid rules, the SFI funding rate (aid intensity) can vary **from 25% to a maximum of 80%** of total eligible project costs depending on the size of the industry partner company and the type of research involved. The industry partner supports the remaining project costs. SFI will fund up to a maximum of **€100,000** in direct costs to support the Fellow's salary (or teaching buy-out) and mobility costs only. The requested SFI budget must not exceed the prescribed aid intensity allowed under State aid rules.

Q28. Are materials and consumables an eligible cost?

SFI funding cannot be used to support materials and consumables costs in the Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme. Where a Fellowship project requires materials and consumables, those costs should be met by the industry partner and a breakdown of those costs incurred by the industry partner must be detailed as part of the total project costs using the Microsoft Excel budget template provided.

Q29. I am a Senior Lecturer and intend to apply to the Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme. How do I calculate teaching buy-out and will a replacement staff member at the same level be covered by the Industry RD&I Fellowship Award?

Teaching buy-out costs should be calculated in line with the Research Body policy. Full justification should be included in the budget justification section of the application, including details of how many teaching hours per week the temporary lecturer is required for.

Q30. Can funding be used to pay for professional development, such as project management courses or other similar activities?

No, this is not an eligible cost. Please refer to the Call Document for eligible costs.

Q31. I intend to apply to the Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme to travel to an international industry host – are travel insurance and visa costs eligible?

Reasonable health insurance and visa costs related to the relocation of the Fellow are eligible, where appropriate and fully justified.

Q32. I am currently employed outside of Ireland. What is required for salary justification? Should I include a request analogous to my current salary (in a different country/system) or to my number of years of experience post-PhD?

An applicant who is currently employed outside of Ireland should calculate their requested salary for the duration of the Fellowship according to the number of years post-PhD.

Q33. Is it possible to work on the industry partner's premises for 12 months spread part-time over a two-year period and to spend the remaining time working with my PI in academia?

Yes, this is possible. Please note, however, that SFI will only fund the time spent at the industry partner's premises.

Q34. Is the funding rate consideration new? *

Yes. Under the previous Industry Fellowship Programme there was always a requirement for co-funding of the Fellowship from the industry partner however it was not mandatory to have it detailed as part of the application. Under the new Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme applicants now need to complete the total project costs up front; including those that will be incurred by the industry partner. Further, the SFI Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme is subject to the EU Commission General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) EU Commission Regulation (EC) No. 651/2014 which sets rules for the level of funding support that can be provided by national agencies. Please refer to section 5 of the programme call document for details.

Q35. Can the mobility costs be used to cover the travel costs associated with a part-time award in the case that the industry partner's premises are in a city other than the Fellow's home city i.e., the Fellow relocates for several days per week to another city as part of the award? *

Temporary accommodation costs may be requested (in the case of part-time awards). These costs must be relevant and justified.

Q36. When determining the SFI salary contribution, should 'Gross Salary Contribution' or 'Cost to Grant Budget' be used? *

The **SFI Team Member Salary Scales**³ should be used when costing the Fellow's salary; the 'Cost to Grant Budget' figure should be used. Applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with their Research Office in preparing their budget.

Q37. What does industry costs must be verifiable using standard accountancy practise mean? *

The costs incurred by the industry partner in hosting the Fellow must be provided as part of the application using the Excel budget template provided. These costs must be easily audited and vouched for and prepared using standard accounting methodology.

State Aid Questions

Q38. What is an 'Undertaking in Difficulty'?

Under State aid rules (**General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)**) SFI cannot provide funding for secondments to Industry Partners that are 'undertakings in difficulty'⁴. Industry partners will be required to confidentially provide additional financial information/declarations to SFI (see Section 3 Proposal Handbook). These documents will be used by SFI to determine eligibility of the company to receive State aid.

'Undertaking in difficulty' means an undertaking in respect of which at least one of the following circumstances occurs:

(a) In the case of a limited liability company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years or, for the purposes of eligibility for risk finance aid, an SME within 7 years from its first commercial sale that qualifies for risk finance investments following due diligence by the selected financial intermediary), where more than half of its subscribed share capital has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. This is the case when deduction of accumulated losses from reserves (and all other elements generally considered as part of the own funds of the company) leads to a negative cumulative amount that exceeds half of the subscribed share capital. For the purposes of this provision, 'limited liability company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex I of Directive 2013/34/EU⁵ and 'share capital' includes, where relevant, any share premium.

(b) In the case of a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years or, for the purposes of eligibility for risk finance aid, an SME within 7 years from its first commercial sale that qualifies for risk finance investments following due diligence by the selected financial intermediary), where more than half of its capital as shown in the company accounts has disappeared as a result of accumulated

³ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/budget-finance-related-policies/>

⁴ article 2, no. 18 of COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014

⁵ Directive 2013/34/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on the annual financial statements, consolidated financial statements and related reports of certain types of undertakings, amending Directive 2006/43/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Directives 78/660/EEC and 83/349/EEC.

losses. For the purposes of this provision, 'a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex II of Directive 2013/34/EU.

(c) Where the undertaking is subject to collective insolvency proceedings or fulfils the criteria under its domestic law for being placed in collective insolvency proceedings at the request of its creditors.

(d) Where the undertaking has received rescue aid and has not yet reimbursed the loan or terminated the guarantee, or has received restructuring aid and is still subject to a restructuring plan

e) In the case of an undertaking that is not an SME, where, for the past two years:

- 1) the undertaking's book debt to equity ratio has been greater than 7,5 and
- 2) the undertaking's EBITDA interest coverage ratio has been below 1,0.'

Q39. Should an Industry Collaboration Form be completed for projects funded under the Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme?

No, an [Industry Collaboration Form](#) is not required as the Industry RD&I Fellowship is run under a State aid exemption and does not require projects to satisfy the requirements for an 'effective collaboration'.

Q40. Who determines whether results are widely disseminated? Are there some indicators that can be referenced to ensure that the definition of wide dissemination is met or is it up to the applicant to determine whether results are widely disseminated? *

The funding rate may be increased up to a **maximum aid intensity of 80%** by a further 15% if the results of the project are widely disseminated through conferences, publication, open access repositories, or free or open-source software. SFI will monitor awards to ensure that outputs are widely disseminated, and awardees will be required to report on this through their annual and final reports. It is up to the applicant in conjunction with their industry partner and Research Body to agree whether results will be widely disseminated in advance of submission of an application to SFI.

Please note that as members of cOAlition S, SFI has aligned its Open Access Policy with the principles of Plan S, meaning that all publications arising either in whole or in part from SFI funding must be made openly available as soon as it is published and available under a CC-BY licence. Other outputs such as data and software must be made as open as possible and closed as necessary.

SFI expects that outputs of the project should be disseminated to the widest extent possible, on a national as well as EU level. If results can be published on an international level in addition to the national level e.g., by means of international recognised journals/magazines or during international conferences, such dissemination routes are preferable. Wide dissemination should take place during or as soon as possible after completion of the project and should be undertaken by the most appropriate means (e.g., through websites, open-access databases and publications) to ensure that its outputs remain continuously accessible for an unlimited time.

Application and Evaluation Process Questions

Q41. Does the gender element in research need to be addressed in my application to the Industry RD&I Fellowship 2021 call?

All applications must include a statement articulating the **consideration of biological sex and/or social gender variables** in their research programme. As part of your application on SESAME, you will be asked if there is a potential biological sex or social gender element to be considered in your research proposal. If you answer 'Yes' to this question, you will then be required to submit a statement to explain how the gender element will be considered in your research. If you answer 'No' to this question, you will be asked to explain why no gender dimension needs to be considered in your research proposal. In both cases, the maximum word limit for this statement is 1000 words. However, depending on the complexity of the project, applicants should note that the maximum word count may not be required. This statement will be assessed and scored by reviewers under the Quality of Research & Training review criterion.

Q42. When I preview my proposal in PDF format in SESAME, I do not see the Excel budget spreadsheet. *

As the budget spreadsheet is not in a PDF format it is not incorporated into the final PDF preview. However, there are inbuilt validations within SESAME to ensure that the Excel spreadsheet file has been uploaded.

Application to multiple SFI Programmes

Q43. Can I apply to both the SFI Industry RD&I Fellowship Programme and the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme? *

Yes, subject to eligibility requirements, individuals may submit an application to both the SFI-IRC Pathway and the SFI Industry RD&I Fellowship Programmes. We would ask that any applicant who is considering applying for both programmes be fully transparent about this when engaging with a potential industry partner. The industry partner contributes considerably to the development of the Industry RD&I Fellowship proposal and budget, and due consideration needs to be given to the industry partner in these circumstances. If successful, applicants will not be permitted to accept both awards. Should an applicant be successful under the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme call, they would be required to withdraw their application from the Industry RD&I Fellowship call. Please contact irdif@sfi.ie if you are under review under these calls at the point of application or if you are planning a future application to this call.