

HRB Gender Policy

The Health Research Board (HRB) is the lead funding agency in Ireland for health and social care research and is a statutory body under the aegis of the Department of Health. The HRB is committed to leading and supporting excellent research, and promoting its application in policy and practice.

In line with international best practice^{1,2,3,4} the HRB has a responsibility to support both women and men to realise their full potential in order to ensure equality of opportunity and to maximise the quantity and the quality of research. To ensure fairness and equality to all applicants, each funding application received will be assessed as outlined in the call guidance documentation for that particular funding round.

A key objective of the HRB is to strive for gender balance in Irish health research. Achieving this objective requires a persistent and long-term effort with continual review of our processes.

The HRB will work to achieve a greater gender balance throughout its research funding programmes and practices by:

- Promoting gender equality within its own administration of research funding and within the research teams that it funds;
- Fostering the integration of sex and/ or gender in research and innovation (R&I) content;
- Assuming a greater national responsibility for promoting gender equality in health research.

Specific actions will be focused across a number of key areas.

Gender balance in decision-making

- To ensure gender balance in decision-making, the HRB aims to reach the international best practice target of 40% of the under-represented sex in all HRB panels⁵ where possible. Gender will also be considered when appointing the position of Panel Chair

¹ EU Council Conclusions on advancing gender equality in the European Research Area, adopted by the Council at its 3431st meeting held on 1 December 2015. <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14846-2015-INIT/en/pdf>

² European Commission 2012. *A reinforced European Research Area partnership for excellence and growth*. COM (2012) 392. http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/pdf/era-communication/era-communication_en.pdf

³ European Commission. 2013a. *Gendered innovations: How gender analysis contributes to research*. Report of the expert group 'Innovation through Gender', <https://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/>

⁴ Strategy and recommendations from key organisations and initiatives such as the Swedish Research Council <http://www.vr.se/inenglish/researchfunding/assessment/genderequalitystrategy.4.5636787314bdfb2e125be7a1.html>, GENOVATE (<http://www.genovate.eu/>), EGERA (<http://www.egera.eu/>), genSET (<http://www.genderinscience.org/>) and GENDER-NET (<http://www.gender-net.eu/>) consortia.

⁵ HRB panels include HRB peer-review funding panels and HRB interim review panels

- Require gender balance be a consideration within the HRB peer-review process including in the drafting and the implementation of HRB funding calls, recognising, for example, the impact of career breaks and unconventional research career paths on productivity, and taking steps to reduce unconscious bias in peer-review processes.

Gender balance in research teams

- Include gender balance in the leadership of the research team among the ranking factors to prioritise proposals with the same scores at panel stage, in order to reinforce applicants' engagement at proposal level;
- Require commitment of successful applicants within grant contracts to aim, as far as possible, for gender balance at all levels of personnel assigned to the research, including at supervisory and managerial level;
- Investigate targeted initiatives to support successful applicants in research areas with a gender imbalance, paying particular attention to senior-level academic positions;
- Implement provisions for maternity and parental leave in accordance with the HRB Policy on the Payment of Social Benefits.

Gender dimension in research content

- Require all applicants to indicate whether a potential sex and/ or gender dimension may be present or could arise in the course of their proposed research:
 - and, if so, outline how sex and/or gender analysis will be integrated in the design, implementation, evaluation, interpretation and dissemination of the results of the research proposal;
 - if not, outline why it is not relevant to the research proposal.

Strengthening expertise

Strengthen expertise and set cleaner and clearer goals for the HRB by:

- Monitoring and reporting on gender balance, to include:
 - gender balance of HRB panels, and reporting on any goals not achieved with an analysis of how the situation can be improved;
 - patterns of awards to better assess trends, to challenge potential sources of gender bias in the peer-review process and to inform the development of targeted gender initiatives;
 - consideration of sex and/or gender dimension in HRB funded research proposals where these have been identified as relevant variables;
 - publishing annual HRB gender statistics
- Providing guidance and training on sex and/or gender considerations, to include:
 - training for those HRB staff involved in the drafting and the implementation of HRB funding calls, including on the integration of sex and/or gender dimension within research;
 - guidance for HRB peer-reviewers on panels;

- guidance for HRB peer-reviewers on evaluating a potential sex and/or gender dimension in research proposals;
- guidance for researchers on identifying and addressing the sex and/or gender dimension in the development of research proposals.

Assuming a greater national responsibility for promoting gender equality in health research

- Collaborating with Irish representatives of national and international groups that are working to advance gender equality and integration of sex and/or gender analysis in research content.
- In collaboration with other national funders, impose targets for Irish Higher Education institutions that are also HRB Host Institutions⁶ to achieve Athena Swan⁷ accreditation in order to be eligible to apply for funding. Targets for attaining Athena Swan accreditation were first endorsed by HRB in 2016.
- The HEA developed a statement in 2019⁸ in relation to the Athena Swan including updated targets for universities, Institutes of Technology (IoTs) or Technological Universities (TUs), or IoTs anticipating a merger. HRB has endorsed these updated requirements which are as follows:
 - HEIs shall **apply** for an Institutional Bronze award by the end of 2019.
 - HEIs shall **apply** for an Institutional Bronze award within 18 months of notification of a failed Bronze award application.
 - HEIs shall **attain** an Institutional Bronze award within 4 years of a first failed Bronze application.
 - HEIs should **retain** their Bronze award until such time as they obtain a Silver award.
 - HEIs shall **apply** for an Institutional Silver award after one successful renewal of an Institutional Bronze Award and on every subsequent application.
 - IoTs working towards TU status will be required to show evidence to the HEA, annually through their institutional gender action plans, that they are working together to build gender equality into their merger process.
 - Once a TU has been established it shall be required to **attain** a TU bronze award within three years.

The HRB's Gender Policy and its implementation will be kept under review. Last updated November 2019.

⁶ The need for accreditation will apply to HEA core grant funded HEIs, as well as the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

⁷ The Athena SWAN Charter is an internationally-recognised 'quality mark' for gender equality administered by Equality Challenge Unit in the UK. Information on Athena SWAN in Ireland is available at <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/athena-swan-ireland/>

⁸ https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2019/11/HEA-Statement-on-Athena-SWAN-Charter-in-Ireland-2019_July-2019.pdf