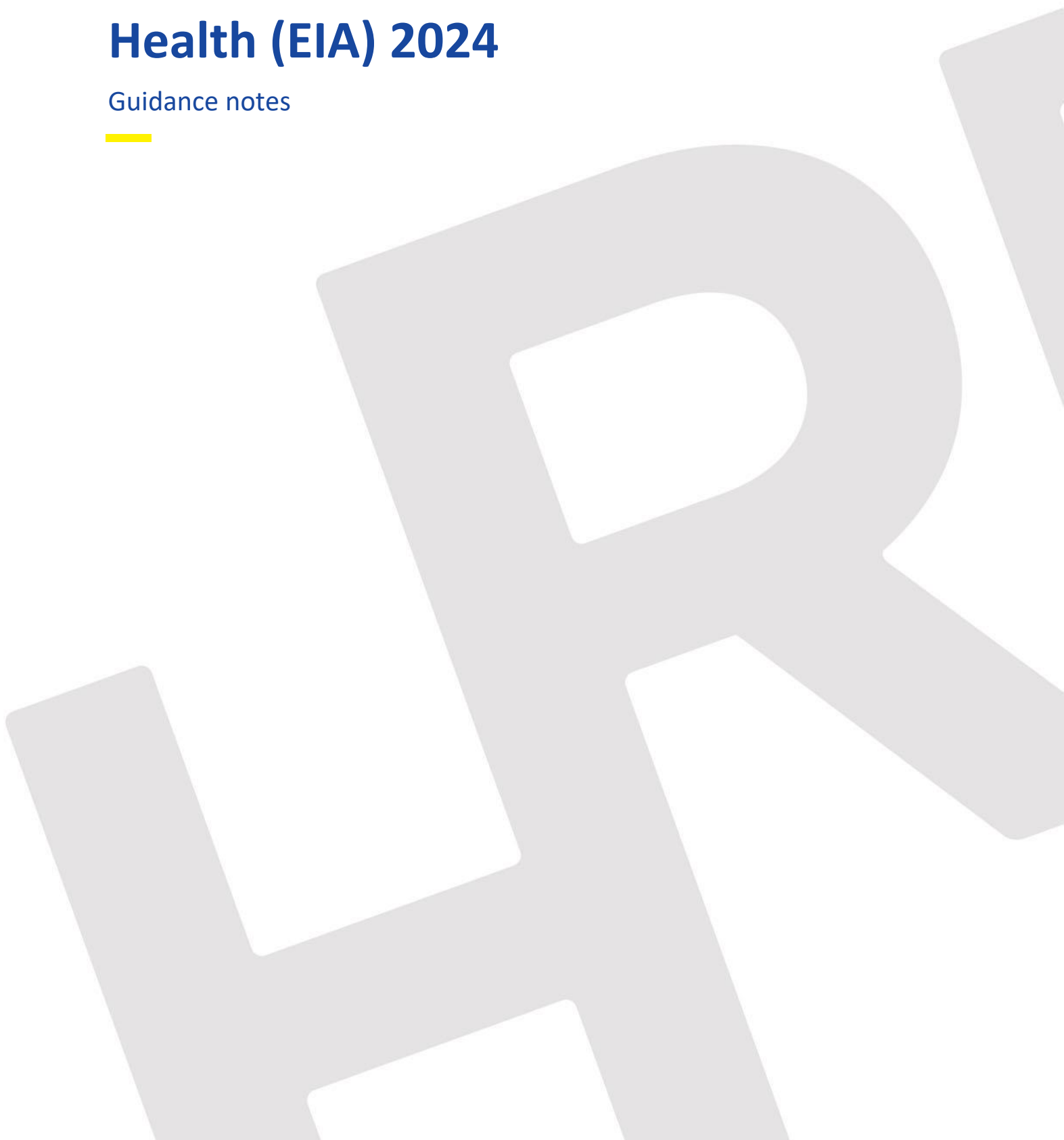


Emerging Investigator Awards for Health (EIA) 2024

Guidance notes



Guidance Notes

Deadline	Key Dates and Times
Applications Open	TBD
Pre-Application closes	TBD
Full Application open (by invitation only)	TBD
Full Application closes	TBD

Applications must be completed and submitted through the HRB online Grant E-Management System (GEMS) (<https://grants.hrb.ie>). This system will close automatically at the stated deadline according to the timeline listed above. Applicants are strongly recommended to read Appendix III 'Detailed guidance on the EIA pre-application form' prior to starting an application GEMS.

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1 Introduction

The Health Research Board (HRB) Strategy 2021 – 2025¹ highlights six strategic objectives for the HRB, including the building of a strong and supportive environment for health research in Ireland. In partnership with a wide range of stakeholders, the HRB will work to ensure that funding for researchers and infrastructure is delivered effectively, that the highest standards of governance, quality and ethics are met, and that innovative practices are developed and taken up here in Ireland.

Within this objective, the HRB is committed to invest strategically in research leadership and build the capacity of academic researchers and health and social care practitioners to respond to current and emerging health research needs. The HRB will work with national and international partners to facilitate training and exchange opportunities that address skills gaps aligned with the HRB research career framework and the HRB strategy.

The Emerging investigator Awards (EIA) scheme is part of a broader suite of HRB career supports and is targeted postdoctoral researchers from different disciplines who are engaged in health-related research activities, who have a PhD (or PhD equivalency) and who are ready to become independent investigators, bridging a critical career transition between postdoctoral and research independence stages.

This is the fourth round for this scheme with 32 awards made between 2017 and 2022. The HRB is investing in the region of €7M in this round.

2 Aims and Objectives

The overarching **aim** of the HRB Emerging Investigator Awards for Health is to develop a cohort of new and talented independent investigators in the Republic of Ireland by facilitating and supporting their transition towards research independence, in line with the research career path for academic researchers see Appendix I).

The main objectives of this scheme are to:

1. Support talented individuals at a critical career transition stage to establish themselves as independent health investigators in an academic or other research-based institution.
2. Develop collaborative researchers who can facilitate actionable knowledge by:
 - a) Translating knowledge generated through research into the health care system, policies, or practice.
 - or
 - b) Generating research findings informed by policy and practice.

This scheme targets individuals who have already consolidated their research knowledge, skills, methodologies, and capabilities, through a period of mentored postdoctoral research, and are currently progressing them by increasing or establishing strong national, international and/or cross-disciplinary and/or cross-sectoral collaborations and networks and are ready to transition towards becoming independent researchers. The career stage supported through this initiative is transition

¹ <https://www.hrb.ie/strategy-2025/>

from postdoctoral to investigator stages. Although there is no upper limit of the number of years researchers are expected to have spent in postdoctoral positions prior to application, this scheme is not targeted towards individuals who have already established research independence.

3 Summary of Revisions for the EIA 2024

The following revisions to the scheme have been applied based on the following:

1. HRB staff reflections from the previous rounds of the call.
2. Panel member feedback from previous rounds of the call.
3. EIA 2017 and 2019 Principal investigators and Research Offices' representatives from Host Institutions in receipt of EIA and ECSA awards.

3.1 Funding

The funding cap of €800K (including overheads) has been removed.

Full details on the funding available can be found [below](#).

3.2 Duration

The duration of the award has been increased from 48 months to 60 months; however, PI salary expenditure is limited to a 48-month period. The majority of research-related expenditure is expected to remain within the same timeframe. The longer time is to facilitate the startup of research activities and account for typical delays.

Full details of the award duration can be found [below](#).

3.3 Protected time for research

The minimum protected time for the award will be now set at 0.7 FTE for Lead Applicants who wish to combine their EIA research programme with other academic activities.

Full details of the award duration can be found [below](#).

3.4 Mentorship

Lead Applicants **must** nominate two mentors, a **Scientific** and a **Host Institution Mentor**.

Full details of Mentorship requirements can be found [below](#).

4 Scope of Call

The scheme will support individuals who can generate knowledge in the area of **patient oriented, population health, and/or health services research** with a view to translating their findings into practice and/or policy.

The case for the questions posed and the related methodology, partners and knowledge users must be clearly and convincingly set out in the application form.²

For the avoidance of doubt, the research areas in scope are defined below:

Patient oriented research (POR)

Patient-oriented research is defined as research conducted with human subjects, or on material of human origin, such as tissues, specimens, and cognitive phenomena. The research generally involves patients, samples and/or data from patient and other people who are not patients (e.g., healthy volunteers).

Population Health Research (PHR)

Research with the goal of improving the health of the population, or of defined sub-populations, through a better understanding of the ways in which social, cultural, environmental, occupational, and economic factors determine health status or through the identification of effective interventions for improving health status and reducing health inequalities.

Health Services Research (HSR)

Research with the goal of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of health professionals and the health care system through changes to practice and policy. Health services research is a multidisciplinary field of scientific investigation that studies how social factors, financing systems, organisational structures and processes, health technologies, and personal behaviours affect access to health care, the quality and cost of healthcare and ultimately health and well-being.

This scheme will not fund:

1. Applications involving basic biomedical research.
2. Applications using cell lines, animals or their tissue that do not constitute pre-clinical research (see Appendix I for a definition of pre-clinical research in the context of this scheme).
3. Stand-alone systematic reviews.
4. Applications seeking to evaluate an intervention.
5. Applications that aim to conduct a stand-alone feasibility study for an intervention.
6. Applications which are solely or predominately health service developments or implementation of an intervention without a predominant research element. The HRB will not fund the cost of providing the service or intervention itself, only the research element.
7. Applications which are solely literature reviews, audits, surveys, needs assessments or technology development (although these elements may be part of an integrated research study).

² The case for the proposed applied project should summarise where the need is documented (e.g., Department of Health or HSE Strategy, WHO, other). In addition, it is expected that that evidence supporting the case for the project has been gathered systematically, i.e., a systematic review or other evidence synthesis formats. Anecdotal evidence or simple literature overviews are not considered sufficient.

8. Applications which are solely or predominately developing the infrastructure for biobanking, databases or patient registers without a predominant research element.
9. Applications from individuals applying for, holding, or employed under a research grant from the Tobacco industry.
10. Research intended to create human embryos solely for the purpose of research or for the purpose of stem cell procurement, including by means of somatic cell nuclear transfer.

Note: Please note that applicants can propose to develop an intervention and may also include initial testing of the intervention in order to provide proof of concept data aimed to develop a feasibility study as next step (beyond this project).

Where an application is outside the scope of the scheme, the application may be deemed ineligible by the review panel.

5 Funding Available, Duration and Start Date

5.1 Funding Available

The HRB plans to commit up to **€7M** to this round of the scheme.

The budget requested **must** reflect the scale and nature of the proposed research and should include appropriate research personnel and appropriate research related costs to carry out the project. Reviewers will thoroughly assess this when reviewing the proposal. The maximum funding envelope available is not an invitation to apply for the maximum amount.

5.1.1 Salary-related costs for the Lead Applicant

Salary must be requested to ensure the applicant has protected time to conduct the research. The HRB will fund the Lead Applicant's salary and related costs for a maximum of 48 months to be incurred in a continuous period starting early in the award (excluding any period of statutory leave to which the Lead Applicant may be entitled).

Salary-related costs can be requested as follows:

1. On a **full-time basis** (1.0 FTE) for up to 48 months.

Or

2. On **part-time basis** with at least **0.7 FTE protected time for research, funded by the HRB** for up to 48 months. Part-time arrangements may be requested for example where an awardee wishes to combine their EIA research programme with other academic activities.

Or

3. On a part time basis with at least **0.5 FTE protected time for research, funded by the HRB** for up to 48 months, if their preference is to work in a part-time capacity due to personal circumstances.

Note: Lead Applicants who are seeking to work on a part-time basis will need to demonstrate that they can meet the aims and objectives of the award, both in terms of career development and the research project, within the duration of the award.

The salary must be in line with most recent **IUA scale of Level 3 point 1** in recognition of the Lead Applicant's career stage upon receiving an EIA award. Where an applicant's current salary is higher than Level 3 point 1, a higher point on the Level 3 scale can be requested and details of their current salary scale and point must be included in the HI letter of support. The maximum level that can be requested is Level 3 point 4 with no additional increments for the duration of the award (Level 4 on the IUA scale is **not** supported). Please note that the IUA scale is used solely for salary's reference purposes and that awardees are to be considered independent researchers.

5.1.2 Research-related costs

Research-related do not include the salary-related costs of the Lead Applicant. Research costs are capped at a **maximum of €300K** (excluding overheads). However, applicants should apply for a level of direct research costs appropriate to their research project. It is expected that, on average, research cost requests would be in the region €250K.

Research related costs include the following categories:

1. Costs for funded personnel necessary for the proposed research project.
 - a) Salary-related costs in line with the most recent IUA researchers' salary scale for academic researchers or the most relevant professional salary scale for buy-out of the health and social care practitioners salary.
 - b) Postgraduate candidates support:
 - i. A stipend for academic PhD or MSc degrees and postgraduate fees (EU rate only). Please note if requesting a PhD candidate, you should budget for four years of funding.
 - ii. A contribution to salary for health and social care practitioners conducting a PhD at the maximum level of the IUA researchers' salary scale Research Fellow Point 1 (no additional point increments are allowed) and postgraduate fees. The HRB does not support MD degrees.

Please note the HRB support four-year PhD degrees in line with other HRB funded doctoral training programmes, unless properly justified for individuals stepping out of clinical or social care services.
2. Running costs for the project; e.g. consumables, PPI costs, non-dissemination associated travel costs.
3. FAIR Data management costs (e.g. service/fees from data steward, access to secondary data, cost for metadata, cost of data sharing, etc.).
4. Equipment, to a maximum value of €50K for start-up costs, where justified.
5. Research and professional skill development for the Lead Applicant and for research staff, where justified.
6. Dissemination and knowledge exchange activities to a maximum of €15K unless clearly justified by outreach or similar activities.

5.1.3 Overhead contribution

In accordance with the HRB Policy on Overhead Usage³, the HRB will contribute to the indirect costs of the research through an overhead payment of 30% of Total Direct Modified Costs (TDMC excludes student fees, equipment, and capital building costs) for laboratory or clinically based research and 25% of Total Direct Modified Costs for desk-based research.

The overhead contribution **will not** be included in the budget at the time of application but will be calculated by the HRB at award stage and included in the overall budget prior to contracting.

5.2 Duration and start date

The duration of the ECSA awards is **60 months**; however, PI salary expenditure is limited to a continuous 48-month period. The majority of research-related expenditure is expected to remain within the same timeframe. The longer time is to facilitate the startup of research activities and account for typical delays.

Lead Applicants who intend to recruit PhD Candidates should be cognisant of any requirements and/or restriction relating to their registration with the Host Institution, and this should be accounted for when determining the start date of the award.

The earliest start date of the Grant is 01 September 2024

6 Suitability and Eligibility Criteria for the Research Team

This call is not open to Host Institutions from Northern Ireland.

6.1 Applicant team

6.1.1 The team-based and collaborative approach

The application **must** have a team-based and collaborative approach to maximise actionable knowledge and to support the emerging investigator in transitioning towards research independence and develop as a future leader.

The research team is defined as the Lead Applicant as the lead of the team, the mentors, co-applicants, official collaborators, and funded personnel. The Lead Applicant may collaborate, where appropriate, with partner organisations such as hospitals, health agencies, universities, local government, voluntary organisations and/or industry. The research team needs to be able to address the research question and to facilitate and/or maximise the translation of the research findings towards changes in policy and practice. It therefore should:

1. Contain the necessary **breadth and depth** of expertise in all methodologies, skills and competencies required.

³ <http://www.hrb.ie/funding/funding-schemes/before-you-apply/all-grant-policies/hrb-policy-on-usage-of-research-overheads/>

2. Have appropriate **cross-disciplinary and/or cross-border and/or inter-sectoral** members. Where relevant, experts in similar or different disciplines, such as but not limited to biomedical research, statistics, health economics, health service research, behavioural science, qualitative research methodologies, sociology etc., should be included as Co-Applicants or as official Collaborators. Experts by experience such as patients, potential patients, service users or carers are welcome to be included in the research team.
3. Have public and **patient involvement** or other **stakeholder engagement** as appropriate and relevant to addressing the research question and facilitating actionable knowledge. Experts by experience such as patients, potential patients, service users or carers are welcome to be included in the research team. Decision-makers, policy makers, knowledge users, health agencies and healthcare professionals must be involved throughout the entire research process to ensure integration into policy and practice as relevant to the research question and the national strategic area proposed.

6.2 Lead Applicant

The **Lead Applicant** will serve as the primary point of contact for the HRB during the review process and on the award, if successful. The Lead Applicant will be responsible for the scientific and technical direction of the research programme. They have primary fiduciary responsibility and accountability for carrying out the research within the funding limits awarded and in accordance with the terms and conditions of the HRB.

The scheme provides support to postdoctoral researchers who can make a valuable contribution to their research field and facilitate actionable knowledge in the area of patient-oriented research, health services research and/or population health research and who are capable of becoming independent and self-directed investigators.

Note: Although there is a strong expectation that the majority of the time will be spent on the research set out in the application, it is also expected that during the award the Lead Applicant will be involved in other grant funding applications as Lead applicant, Co-Lead or Co-Applicant, other collaborative/networking activities and that some of the time will be dedicated to other commitments related to the overall research and career development. A small amount of time during the award (i.e. up to 0.1 FTE if taking the award full time or pro-rata otherwise) may be dedicated to teaching or other academic activities.

6.2.1 Lead Applicant suitability

The Emerging Investigator Awards target **postdoctoral researchers** from various disciplines who are engaged in health-related research activities, typically in **academic or other research institutions** who have already consolidated their research knowledge, skills, methodologies, and capabilities through a period of mentored postdoctoral research and who are currently progressing towards becoming independent researchers.

Individuals who have already established an independent group by acting as primary supervisor of other researchers (e.g. PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, research assistants) and are leading a research programme are not considered 'Emerging Investigators'. These individuals fit into

the category of Investigators and are encouraged to apply to the suite of investigator-led research schemes.

Lead Applicants must be able demonstrate they have the skills, knowledge and supports necessary to direct the proposed research and to carry the research through to completion by showing:

1. Appropriate evidence of expertise matching the nature and context of the project.
2. A track record of contribution to scientific knowledge demonstrated by relevant research outputs that can prove the lead applicant is ready to transition to research independence. Please note that the HRB is a signatory of the DORA Declaration, and we ask reviewers to consider the value, quality and impact of the applicant's work.
3. Sufficient expertise, skills, and capabilities to demonstrate the potential of becoming independent investigators.
4. Some experience, capability and authority to supervise researchers (e.g. early-stage researchers, research assistants, other health and care practitioners), but not as primary supervisors leading research project(s) independently.
5. A track record in independently peer-reviewed grant funding. This may include being Lead Applicant on personal awards and/or fellowships and/or being listed as co-applicant and/or collaborator on any other type of research grant.
6. A clear research vision during and beyond the award.
7. A clear career trajectory to become an independent investigator during and beyond the award.

Please note that for individuals who have yet to gain postdoctoral research experience, the HRB also offer the [Applying Research into Policy and Practice](#) scheme. It supports this cohort in consolidating and progressing their research knowledge, expertise, and skills post PhD. The next round of the scheme is expected to launch in 2024. Please consult with HRB staff if you are not sure which scheme best fits your research career stage.

6.2.2 Lead Applicant eligibility criteria

The scheme is open to individuals who have the support of a HRB approved Host Institution in the Republic of Ireland.

Lead Applicants **must not** apply to the Emerging Clinician Scientist Awards 2024 scheme at the same time as applying to the EIA scheme.

Only one application per Lead Applicant to this round will be considered.

Where an applicant fails to meet the eligibility criteria, the application will be deemed ineligible and will not be accepted for review. The HRB will contact the Lead Applicant in the event that this situation arises.

As signatory of the DORA Declaration⁴, the HRB is committed to supporting a research environment where importance is placed on the intrinsic value and relevance of research and its potential impact in society ([HRB - Declaration on Research Assessment](#)).

6.2.2.1 Qualification:

Lead Applicants must possess a PhD degree or demonstrate equivalent research experience as defined in national⁵ and international⁶ frameworks or policy documents.

1. PhD equivalency is defined as at least four years ‘full time’ research experience post-primary degree, which does not need to be consecutive. Full-Time Equivalent Research Experience is measured from the date when a researcher obtained the degree entitling them to embark on a doctorate (either in the country in which the degree was obtained or in the country in which the researcher is recruited), even if a doctorate was never started or envisaged.
2. Applications for PhD equivalency **must be submitted at least two weeks before the deadline for applications**. The PhD equivalence request form can be found [here](#). PhD equivalence will not be considered at a later stage, and applicants without confirmed equivalence will be deemed ineligible. Please contact the HRB to discuss equivalency as soon as possible.
3. PhD equivalence can be granted only to individuals who are currently not undertaking a PhD at the time of submission of an application. Individuals currently studying for a PhD are ineligible to apply to this funding call. This includes individuals who have research experience prior to starting their PhD.
4. Professional and taught doctorate degrees **are not** accepted as equivalent to a PhD.
5. For individuals, who hold more than one PhD degree, the date of the earliest degree will define the Lead Applicant’s eligibility.

Note: Active research experience will be considered when assessing eligibility by the HRB and competitiveness of the track record of the Lead Applicants by reviewers. Career breaks, flexible working arrangements, changes in discipline and sector (e.g. industry, health organisation/agency) will be taken into account when assessing the research experience and scientific contribution to knowledge.

6.2.2.2 Career stage

Lead Applicants must have at least four years active post PhD (or equivalent) research experience.

1. For the purposes of this call the official date of a PhD is defined as the year that the dissertation was successfully defended. Lead Applicants who defended their thesis in 2019 or before are eligible to apply for EIA 2024 unless they have gaps (e.g. career breaks, flexible working arrangements) in their curriculum vitae.

⁴ [Home | DORA \(sfedora.org\)](#)

⁵ <https://www.iaa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Post-Doctoral-Researcher-Level-1-General-Job-Description.pdf>

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/guides_for_applicants/h2020-guide-appl-msca-if-2018-20_en.pdf

Although there is no upper limit of the number of years researchers are expected to have spent in postdoctoral positions prior to application, this scheme does not target individuals who have already established research independence.

The Lead Applicant must not be as yet recognised as an independent investigator by:

1. Having already received an award in Ireland or abroad targeting the career stage of **transitioning towards research independence**.
2. Having already built a research team by securing, as **Lead Applicant**, any peer-reviewed research grant which supports research personnel.
3. Acting as the past or present primary supervisor or sponsor of an early career scholarship or fellowship (e.g. PhD, postdoctoral) awarded to another individual.
4. Being already recognised as an **independent investigator** as confirmed by their Host Institution.
5. Leading an **existing** research team.
6. Being named as the **primary** supervisor previously for a PhD candidate or other early career researchers. However, Lead Applicants may have **some** previous supervisory experience other than as **primary** supervisor.

Lead Applicants for which any or all the above pertain are ineligible to apply to this round of the EIA scheme. Please contact the HRB if you are unsure.

6.2.2.3 Employment status

Lead Applicants **can** be individuals who are currently:

1. Working in Ireland.
2. Working overseas.
3. On a career break.

If employed in the Republic of Ireland, Lead Applicants **must not**

1. Hold a permanent position (academic).
2. Hold a fixed-term position (academic) with a contracted end date equal to or later than two years from the deadline of this call (See Timeframe [below](#)). Please note that fixed term postdoctoral or other research-based positions are eligible.

Health and social care practitioners engaged in delivering clinical practice should apply to the Emerging Clinician Scientist Award 2024 scheme. Please consult with HRB staff if you are not sure which scheme best fits your research career stage.

6.3 Mentors

The Lead Applicant **must nominate two mentors** as part of this application; a **Scientific Mentor and a Host Institution Mentor**.

The **Scientific Mentor** should provide support and guidance to the Lead Applicant during the award for the research project, career milestones and research vision. Scientific Mentor will also be supporting the lead Applicant in the acquisition of the set of skills necessary for having an effective and active role in actionable knowledge in health research. The selection of a mentor, who can demonstrate expertise in applied research, capacity building and coaching, will be crucial for the successful applicants.

The Scientific Mentor should be an individual who has strong evidence of:

1. Expertise and a skillset in knowledge application and/or translation and/or implementation.
2. Experience in networking, collaborating and ideally influencing clinicians, executives, health care personnel, policy makers and/or other relevant stakeholders.
3. Leadership experience.
4. Experience in conducting research projects and programmes.
5. Track record in scholarly publication and communication (peer-review articles, research data publications, national or international briefing/reports, etc.).
6. Coaching and mentoring.

The Scientific Mentor should not be the current sponsor of the Lead Applicant and should not be based in the same Institution as the Lead Applicant. This is to facilitate:

1. An appropriate balance between the supporting and guiding role of the mentor.

And

2. The Lead Applicant achieving independence during the award.

If the Scientific Mentor is selected from overseas, the Lead Applicant needs to describe how proper mentorship arrangements will be met.

The **Host Institution-based Mentor** must be nominated for the purpose of providing supplementary guidance to the Lead Applicant during the award, such as more career-specific or institutionally relevant guidance. This mentor should support the Lead Applicant in navigating the administrative processes of setting up as an independent researcher and has a particularly important role at the start of the award. This mentor may be in the same department as the Lead Applicant and typically is not the current sponsor of the Lead Applicant.

Both Mentors will need to approve their participation and complete the mentor section in the online application before it is submitted.

6.4 Co-Applicants

A **Co-Applicant** has a well-defined, critical, and substantial role in the conduct and steering of the proposed research. A Co-Applicant may receive funding for items such as running costs and

personnel but will not receive support towards their own salary if they are in salaried positions. However, researchers in contract positions/independent investigators, knowledge user and PPI contributor Co-Applicants can request their own salary, depending on their role and percentage of time dedicated to the research for the duration of the award (**up to a maximum of 5 Co-Applicants can be listed**).

Each Co-Applicant must confirm their participation and is invited to view the application form online. The terms of any co-application should be determined early, and relevant agreements should be in place by the onset of the project. The HRB advise that consideration should be given to issues such as relative responsibilities, governance arrangements, intellectual property rights, reporting and access to data and samples when working up co-application agreements.

6.5 Collaborators

An official Collaborator is an individual or an organisation who will have an integral and discrete role in the proposed research and is eligible to request funding from the award when properly justified. Named collaborators may include investigators or organisations from outside the Republic of Ireland, but an individual or organisation should **only** be named as Collaborator if they are providing specific contributions (either direct or indirect) to the activities. A collaborator may provide training, supply samples or kits, provide access to specific equipment, specialist staff time, staff placements, access to data and/or patients, instruments or protocols, industry know-how, or may act in an advisory capacity. Collaborators can come from a range of backgrounds such as academia, the private sector, a healthcare organisation, the charity sector, or a patient group (**up to a maximum of 10 Collaborators can be listed**).

At the full application stage, profile details **must** be provided for ALL official collaborators. In addition, each official collaborator **must** complete a **Collaboration Agreement Form**, which must be submitted as part of the full application form. A template collaboration agreement form can be downloaded from the collaborator section of the online application form at full application stage.

If access to samples, vulnerable population groups, healthy volunteers or patients, data, databases, or a link to an existing national or international study (e.g., an existing cohort or longitudinal study) are an integral part of the proposed project, evidence of commitment and access must be demonstrated by having the Data Controller or key Gatekeeper of a study included as a Collaborator.

Data controller definition

A 'controller' refers to a person, company, or other body that decides how and why a data subject's personal data are processed. If two or more persons or entities decide how and why personal data are processed, they may be 'joint controllers', and they would both share responsibility for the data processing obligations. Data Controllers from the provider organisation should be named as Co-applicants, where justified by their level of involvement. Otherwise, they should be named as Collaborators unless the dataset is publicly accessible, or the Central Statistics Office has given a letter of comfort.

At full application stage the Lead Applicant will be asked to describe any relevant agreements that they have entered into to facilitate their partnership working. The terms of any collaboration should

be determined early, and relevant agreements should be in place by the onset of the project. The HRB advise that consideration should be given to issues such as relative responsibilities, governance arrangements, ownership and copyright, access and sharing of data and samples etc. when working up Partnership proposals.

6.6 Funded personnel

Lead Applicants must demonstrate that the level, expertise, and experience of proposed research personnel matches the ambition and scale of the project and that they possess the necessary breadth and skills in all methodological areas required to deliver the proposed programme of work. Alignment between personnel requested and the proposed project should be demonstrated. Roles and responsibilities of funded personnel must be differentiated and clear. Reviewers will thoroughly assess the level of baseline experience matched with the supervisory and up-skilling arrangements proposed in scoring the proposal.

Lead Applicants must carefully consider how the complexity, scale, objectives, and dependencies of the project match the skills and expertise required for conducting the project.

When proposing **PhD candidates** Lead Applicants are also strongly encouraged to think about the suitability of such projects for PhD candidates, in terms of delivering a clearly identifiable original research project or potential difficulties in clustering various pieces of work packages of PhD thesis. Please note the following:

1. The Lead Applicant should clearly put in place appropriate supervisory arrangements with a supervisory team in place, which may also include the Lead Applicant's mentor and /or Co-Applicant(s), if appropriate.
2. Lead Applicants must budget for four years funding for PhD candidates unless properly justified, e.g., for health and social care practitioners who are stepping out of clinical or social care practices and cannot commit four years to a higher degree.
3. Additionally, PhD candidates should be enrolled in a structured PhD programme, at the Institution where they will be registered or through the SPHeRE PhD programme⁷, which is Ireland's national research training programme for Population Health, Policy, and Health Services Research. For further information please contact Katherine Walsh katherinewalsh@rcsi.ie.

7 Training and Professional Development

The Emerging Investigator Awards are career development research awards and are more than a means to fund a research project. A combination of the proposed research project and a good training and professional development plan in a strong research training and mentorship environment will provide the Lead Applicant with the most valuable experience during the award. It is also strongly recommended to discuss the training plan with the mentors.

⁷ <https://www.sphereprogramme.ie/>

The training and professional development activities should clearly support the Lead Applicant in

1. Conducting the proposed research project and furthering their research vision.
2. Developing a team.
3. Supporting their trajectory to becoming independent investigators and future health and social care leaders.
4. Facilitating the application and/or translation of knowledge generated through research and collaborations towards improving the health care systems, policies, or practice.

7.1 Training and Professional Development Plan

Applicants are required to provide a detailed personal research and professional development plan. This plan should include:

1. Formal and informal career development training.
2. Research skills/techniques training specific to the project.
3. Generic research skills training, such as data handling/protection, good oral and written communication/presentation, IT, and time-and resource-management.
4. Methodological/experimental design.
5. Statistics.
6. Dissemination and knowledge sharing and open resources.
7. Consideration of intellectual property issues.
8. GDPR and ethical issues.

Note: Applications which do not contain a convincing training and development plan are unlikely to be competitive.

8 Host Institution

A HRB Host Institution is a research-performing organisation that is approved by the HRB for the purpose of receiving and administering HRB grant funding and is responsible for compliance with all general and specific terms and conditions of awards. HRB Host Institution status is a requirement to submit an application under all HRB award schemes. In order to be eligible to apply for funding, an Institution must be an **approved** HRB Host Institution no later than two calendar months before the closing date of a call. A list of currently approved HRB Host Institutions and information on the application process for research performing organisations to be approved as HRB Host Institutions can be found on the HRB website⁸.

Please note that this call is **not** open to Host Institutions from Northern Ireland.

⁸ <http://www.hrb.ie/funding/funding-schemes/before-you-apply/all-grant-policies/hrb-policy-on-approval-of-host-institutions/>

Considering the objectives of this scheme, the substantial investment on talented individuals and future leaders in health research in Ireland, **the HRB has a strong expectation** that a **Host Institution**, in line with their policy and procedures for recruitment, will commit to sustainable plans to support a successful individual beyond the duration of this award with a **faculty appointment or, in the interim, with any other means of support until such a position becomes available.**

The Host Institution is required to provide Letters of Support at:

1. **Pre-application stage** which confirms that the applicant is not recognised as an independent researcher by the Host Institution
2. **Full application stage** which clearly describes how the host institution will support the Lead Applicant for the duration of the HRB award. This letter should state the following:
 - a) That the Host Institution will recognise the successful Lead Applicant upon receipt of the award as an independent investigator, who will have an independent office, research space at the institution for which they will be fully responsible for at least the duration of the award. This Letter of Support should confirm whether **both** the office **and/or** research space referred to above will be for the **exclusive** use of the Lead Applicant.
 - b) The status and role-title of the Lead Applicant upon receipt of the award, e.g. Lecturer, Assistant/Associate Professor etc.
 - c) That the Host Institution will sustain and support the successful Lead Applicant for the duration of the award by providing other supports, such as access to infrastructure, mentoring and in-house training (e.g. leadership) and networking activities etc.

Please note that all commitments made to the applicant in the Letters of Support are expected to be complied with in full should the proposal be successful, and the Host Institution will be required to report on how this is implemented or will be achieved in the annual reports and at Interim Review. The HRB may follow up with the Host Institution to ensure delivery of commitments made.

The letters of support should be on headed notepaper, dated and signed by the Dean of Research or equivalent.

Electronic signatures are acceptable for letters that are uploaded on the HRB GEMS system.

It is the responsibility of the Lead Applicant to ensure that applications are completed in full, and all necessary documentation is received by the HRB on, or before, the closing dates indicated.

9 Application, Review Process, and Assessment Criteria

9.1 Grant E-Management System (GEMS)

Applications must be completed and submitted through the HRB online Grant E-Management System (GEMS) (<https://grants.hrb.ie>).

The application must have been reviewed and approved by the signatory approver at the research office (or equivalent) in the Host Institution before it is submitted to the HRB. Therefore, applicants should ensure that they give the signatory approver sufficient time before the scheme closing date to

review the application and approve it on GEMS. Please note that many host institutions specify internal deadlines for this procedure.

The HRB is committed to an open and competitive process underpinned by international peer review. To ensure the integrity of the assessment process, conflict of interest and confidentiality are applied rigorously in each stage of the process.

9.2 Review process

The Emerging Investigator Awards for Health 2024 will use a two-stage application process consisting of:

1. Open call for Pre-applications (Stage 1).
2. Invitation of selected applicants to submit a Full Application (Stage 2).

9.2.1 Stage 1 - Pre-application

The pre-application form will focus on:

1. The track record of the **Lead Applicant** to date.
2. An outline of the **research project** focussing on the relevance of the proposed project and the potential for actionable knowledge,
3. The details of the **Core Research Team** (mentor and co-applicants).

Pre-applications will be checked for eligibility, other than scope and will be sent to a specially convened international review panel for assessment. The panel will assess if applications are in scope. Members of the review panel are selected based on the range of disciplines, methodologies, and expertise appropriate to the scheme. Panel members are assigned as lead, secondary and tertiary reviewers to specific applications.

The pre-application review panel will discuss the eligible pre-applications based on the assessment criteria below and a final score is collectively agreed for each application and then they will be ranked according to score.

The panel will recommend that a selected number of Lead Applicants are invited to full application stage. Written panel reviews and a brief feedback document from the panel discussion will be provided to all applicants.

9.2.1.1 Stage 1 Assessment criteria

The following are pre-application review panel assessment criteria:

1. **The Lead Applicant (40%):** Potential of the Lead Applicant to become an independent investigator.
2. **The Research Project (30%):** Relevance of the research question and the potential contribution made by the proposal.

- 3. The Support (30%):** Fit of the research team with the research question and with the objective to generate research findings informed by, or informing, policy and practice.

The final score is the calculated weighted average of the three sub-scores.

In the event that there are two or more proposals with the same final score around the shortlisting cut-off within the ranked list, the sub-score awarded to the Applicant will be the **first** determining ranking factor. Where the Applicant sub-score is also the same, the balance between the **research disciplines** of the Lead Applicants will be the **second ranking factor** to prioritise proposals for shortlisting. This means the under-represented discipline within the ranked list will be prioritised. In line with the [HRB Gender Policy](#), the **gender balance** of Lead Applicants within the ranked list recommended for shortlisting will be the **third ranking factor**.

9.2.2 Stage 2 - Full application - by invitation only

Information provided in the HRB online Grant E-Management System (GEMS) (<https://grants.hrb.ie>) at pre-application stage will feed automatically into the invited full application forms.

Please note that the panel will have made their selection based on the information provided at pre-application stage. The Lead Applicant will have the opportunity to make small revisions from pre-application to full application stage (e.g. addition of expertise/partner, revision of targeted profession/disciplines for training, strengthening the stakeholder participation, etc.), especially if addressing the feedback after the pre-application panel review. However, full applications should reflect a development of the relevant pre-applications rather than a radically different approach.

Full applications, once submitted, will undergo a **two-step** assessment process as follows:

9.2.2.1 Phase 1 - International peer review and public review

For each invited full application, the HRB aims to receive written feedback from at least three international peer reviewers and two public reviewers.

International peer reviewers play a vital role for the HRB in setting standards and in benchmarking our scientific community to enable them to operate in a global context. Peer reviewers will focus on the stated assessment criteria for the call and will provide comments as well as a score which is visible to the HRB and to panel members.

Public reviewers will only assess the quality of PPI in the proposal and will provide comments and an overall rating which will be shared with the panel. Public reviewers will not provide a score.

Public Reviewers are asked to comment on the following:

1. The Plain English Summary (Lay Summary).
2. Relevance of the Proposed Research Question.
3. Public and Patient Involvement in development of and throughout the project.
4. Research Design - inclusion of research participants (where applicable).
5. Dissemination and Potential Impact of the Proposed Work.

Both peer and public review comments will not include any reference to the reviewer's identity or their submitted scores or rating.

The HRB will share the public review feedback with the PPI Ignite Network team in the Host Institution where applicable.

Applicant response: The Lead applicant and research team will be provided with a time-limited opportunity to respond to peer and public review comments (Timeframe [below](#)).

The peer review and public review comments will be made available to the Lead Applicant on their GEMS personal page. The Lead Applicant will have 10 working days only to submit their response through GEMS, and the response has a **maximum word count of 2000 words only for the peer review response** (including references) and **500 words only for the public review response**. No figures can be uploaded. The response will be provided to members of the interview panel, in advance of the interview panel meeting, along with the application, the peer and public review comments and rating.

9.2.2.2 Phase 2 - Interviews with international panel

An international grant selection panel will be convened, and members are assigned as lead and secondary reviewers to specific applications. It is envisaged that some pre-application panel members will be invited to the full application panel. Panel members are selected based on the range of applications received and the expertise and skillset needed (e.g., research area and methodological and analytical approaches, coaching and mentoring, knowledge translation/applied health research, etc.).

All Lead Applicants invited to submit a Full Application will be invited to attend an interview.

Panel members have access to the application, peer and public reviews and the applicants' response prior to the interview panel meeting. HRB staff members are present at the interview meeting to clarify any procedural aspects for the Chair or panel members and to take notes for the feedback process.

The panel will review the strengths and weaknesses of the application relating to the review criteria detailed [below](#). Successful applicants are expected to score well in all review criteria. While PPI is not a stand-alone assessment criterion, it may influence scores under any criterion as relevant to the application.

At the end of the interview panel meeting, a final score is collectively agreed for each application, which will then be ranked according to score. To prioritise between applications with the same score around the funding cut-off in the panel ranking list, the sub-score awarded to the **Applicant assessment criterion** will be the **first ranking factor**. Where the Applicant sub-score is also the same, the balance between the **research disciplines of the Lead Applicant will be the second ranking factor** to prioritise applications. This means the under-represented discipline within the ranked list will be prioritised. In line with the HRB Gender Policy, **the gender balance** of Lead Applicants within the ranked list recommended for funding will be the **third ranking factor**.

The recommendations of the interview panel will be presented for approval at the next scheduled HRB Board meeting. When the Board of the HRB has approved the process and recommendations, HRB staff will contact the Lead Applicants and Host Institutions to notify them of the outcome. A summary of panel members' comments and the panel discussion comments will be issued to the

Lead Applicant following Board approval.

9.2.2.3 Stage 2 - Assessment criteria

The following assessment criteria will be used to assess applications **by peer-reviewers and the interview panel reviewers**. Successful applications will be expected to **rate highly in all criteria**.

1. The Lead Applicant (40%):

- a) Potential of the Lead Applicant to become an independent investigator as evidenced by their track record and research vision.
- b) Quality and appropriateness of the training and development activities supporting the Lead Applicant's progression stage.

2. The research Project (30%):

- a) Relevance of the research question and potential for actionable knowledge.
- b) Appropriate research design and methodology to address the research question.

3. The support (30%):

- a) Fit of the research team with the research question and the expertise required to facilitate actionable knowledge.
- b) The suitability of the Mentors.
- c) Host institution support during and beyond the award.

Panel members will be advised to take PPI approaches into consideration under any of the assessment criteria if considered relevant.

9.3 HRB Career track CV

As signatory of the DORA declaration, the HRB is committed to supporting a research environment where importance is placed on the intrinsic value and relevance of research and its potential impact in society. The HRB is using a narrative-like CV, the HRB Career Track CV, for research career schemes, where the person is at the core. In the Emerging Clinician Scientist Awards the HRB CV is mandatory for Lead Applicants, Co-leads, and Scientific Mentor, where applicable. It aims to allow researchers to craft a convincing rationale and present their career paths in a much more comprehensible way. Such a CV should be tailored to individuals completing it and to the funding opportunity they are applying for.

Please see additional information [here](#).

10 Timeframe

Date	
	Pre-application Stage
TBD	Call Opening for Pre-application stage
TBD	Deadline for Pre-application submissions
TBD	Pre-applications panel meeting
TBD	Applicants notified of shortlisting outcome and invitation to full application stage of shortlisted applicants
	Full application Stage
TBD	Full application stage opens
TBD	Submission of full applications closes
TBD	End of peer and public review
TBD	End of the Applicant Response Phase and start of panel review stage
TBD	Interview panel meeting
TBD	Board approval
TBD	Pre-contracting and contracting
TBD	Earliest start date for awards

11 Contact for pre-application stage

For further information on the **Emerging Investigator Awards for Health 2024** please contact:

Dr Brian Nolan

Project officer

Research Strategy and Funding

Health Research Board

E. bnolan@hrb.ie

The HRB reserves the right to reject any application that does not meet the terms of this call.

The HRB's procedure for appealing funding decisions is available at

<https://www.hrb.ie/funding/funding-schemes/before-you-apply/all-grant-policies/hrb-policy-on-appeals/>.

Appendix I: HRB Research Career Pathways for Academic Researchers and Health and Social Care Practitioners

