



# UCD Internal Guidance Document

## IRC Advanced Laureate 2022/23

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NOT FOR EXTERNAL DISTRIBUTION**

October 2022

This guidance document is designed to support UCD applicants preparing [IRC Advanced Laureate Awards 2022/23](#) proposals. **It should not be distributed to others outside of UCD.** It provides the institutional information and guidance required when completing a proposal and must be used in conjunction with the following:

1. [IRC Call Document \(includes Award Terms & Conditions\)](#)
2. [IRC SmartSimple Technical Guide for Applicants](#)
3. [IRC Laureate Proposal Template](#) IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL LAUREATE AWARDS PROGRAMME 2022/23
4. [IRC Laureate FAQs](#)

UCD's support documents and templates for this call are on the [Research Portal here](#) (UCD Connect login details required for access).

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## 1. UCD & IRC Deadlines

**Mandatory Budget Review Deadline: 5pm Thursday December 1st**

UCD Research & Innovation (UCD R&I) has prepared a specific budget template, justification text sample and recording of budget briefing for this call. The specific template must be used to prepare the budget. Budgets submitted without using this template will not be reviewed. Completed budget templates and budget justification text sections must be submitted by email to [budgetapprovals@ucd.ie](mailto:budgetapprovals@ucd.ie) no later than 5pm on Thursday December 1st. UCD R&I cannot release the fully signed Institutional Letter of Commitment to applicants without the budget first being approved. The template and other materials are available on

the [Research Portal here](#) (UCD Connect login details required for access). *Please note that UCD R&I will be liaising with Heads of School to sign off on budgets in cases where candidates require contract extensions or PI salary contributions (new contracts of employment) should the proposal be successful.*

**Mandatory PI Personal Declaration Form Deadline: 5pm Thursday December 1st**  
UCD Applicants submitting a full proposal to this call **must** complete the Applicant [Personal Declaration Form](#) no later than 5pm on Thursday December 1st to complete the necessary personal declarations required for sign-off of the Institutional Letter of Commitment by the Vice-President for Research, Innovation & Impact (VPRII).

**Mandatory Head of School Sign-off for Institutional LoC: 5pm Thursday December 8th**  
The Institutional Letter of Commitment requires signature from both the Head of School and VPRII. UCD R&I will liaise with the relevant Heads of School for their signatures and declarations. To allow sufficient time to provide the corresponding VPRII signature, we will be seeking to finalise all Heads of School signatures no later than Thursday December 8th.

**IRC FAQ Deadline: Queries accepted up to 4pm Thursday December 8th**  
All queries in relation to this scheme should in the first instance be directed to the Proposal Support Team, UCD R&I via the Connector. A specific dropdown has been created for IRC Advanced Laureate Applicants to email the team directly as below. Should further clarification be required, your query will be passed by email to the IRC who will publish your query and their response in their [IRC Laureate FAQ document](#) (document is updated every Friday).

dropdown if your query doesn't fall into any of the other provided dropdown topics.

A wealth of information can also be found on our portal page here: [Research Portal](#).

If you are thinking about or planning to apply for an upcoming call please take a minute to complete [this form](#) and we will note your interest and keep you informed.

Information on Current Open Calls and Help Pages for Specific Calls are available via [this page](#).

You can return to the start of the Connector at any point by clicking [here](#).

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**Which of the following best describes you? \***

**Which of these areas best describes your query? \***

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**IRC Final Full Proposal Submission Deadline: 4pm Thursday December 15th**

Due to heavy server traffic on the closing day of the competition, applicants are strongly advised to submit applications through the IRC SmartSimple system well in advance of the deadline.

## 2. IRC SmartSimple System

All proposals must be submitted via the [IRC's online award application system](#). Applicants who need to register for an account for the first time should click [here](#). Full instructions on registering for a SmartSimple account and creating an application can be found the [IRC SmartSimple Technical Guide for Applicants](#).

Applicants experiencing difficulties setting up an IRC SmartSimple account or registering for an application should email [laureate@research.ie](mailto:laureate@research.ie) and include "Query re: SmartSimple System" in the subject line of the email.

## 3. Proposal Peer Review & Compliance Check Tools

Applicants are strongly advised to arrange review and feedback of their proposal content with peers/colleagues and UCD R&I has prepared a proposal peer review form to assist with this. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to complete a full self-compliance check before submitting their final proposal and a checklist has been prepared for this purpose. Both documents are available on the [Research Portal here](#) (UCD Connect login details required for access).

## 4. Evaluation Criteria Explained

The Laureate Programme focuses specifically on excellent Frontier Basic Research:

"Research at and beyond the frontiers of current understanding. It is intrinsically risky, and is characterised by the absence of disciplinary boundaries" (Innovation 2020)

"The distinction between 'basic' & 'applied' research has become blurred, due to the fact that emerging areas of science and technology often cover substantial elements of both. As a result, the term 'frontier research' was coined for ERC activities since they will be directed towards fundamental advances at and beyond the 'frontier' of knowledge." (ERC)

This programme is not focused on career development, societal or economic impact, public engagement, dissemination plans etc. The key impacts for a frontier basic research project are:

**Significant advances for the scientific or scholarly field which open new research directions, new research perspectives or new research horizons.**

**Excellence** is the sole criterion of evaluation for both (a) the research project and (b) the applicant.

### **(a) Research Project:**

**Criterion 1:** To what extent does the proposed research address important challenges?

Here, the focus is on the big research challenge which is scientific or scholarly in nature. Applicants need to refine and clearly present it. They need to explain why it is important in their field, why it has not been addressed before, why they can do it now, and what the

potential breakthrough will be in their field. Addressing this challenge successfully is the high gain of the project. It can be broken down into: *What is the overall challenge – What is the scientific or scholarly research problem that needs to be solved to overcome this challenge – What is the big research question for this specific IRC Laureate project?*

**Criterion 2:** To what extent are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g., novel concepts and approaches or development between or across disciplines)?

Next, applicants should have a clear hypothesis and novel concept on which to base their project and approach. This needs to explain the idea and be clear on its rationale.

Having clarified the overarching research question, the need to have clear objectives that will form the structure of the project and define its focus and scope. These objectives are more specific and somewhat granular in nature in comparison to the overarching question and they must lead to ground-breaking results in themselves.

The objectives must be contextualised in view of the current state-of-the-art (SOTA) and applicants must demonstrate their understanding of the issues, problems and gaps that exist to justify the need for their proposed research.

Taken together, the objectives should synthesise to a) form a novel approach to implement the novel concept mentioned above and, b) deliver the overall aim which would be the breakthrough (high gain) expected.

**Criterion 3:** To what extent is the proposed research high risk/high gain?

Risk here does not refer to the typical operational risks and mitigation measures expected in a research proposal. For IRC Laureate and ERC projects, the high risk/high gain dimension is related to the significant chance that the project may not entirely fulfil its aims, however, if it does, the payoffs will be very significant.

It is important for applicants to identify and consider the key intermediate goals or critical points of the project on the path to achieving the overall aim/answering the overarching research question. They must analyse the key hurdles/issues to be overcome for each of these points. They must also analyse the potential significant impact of the work, if successful (i.e., high gain), in their field and beyond, the potential breakthrough and the opening of new research horizons as a result.

**Criterion 4:** To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind the extent to which the proposed research is high risk/high gain?

Applicants need a clear scientific, technical, or scholarly rationale for their methodological approach to address the overarching research question. As above, the approach needs to be novel and the key to this criterion is to illustrate the feasibility of this approach, without compromising the high risk/ high gain nature of the work. Applicants must demonstrate clearly why current and past approaches might have failed in addressing the challenge.

Evidence of feasibility can come in several different forms and is dependent on the discipline and nature of the research in hand. Applicants need to provide preliminary evidence through unpublished or very recently published work (data, pilot project, experiments etc.).

**Criterion 5:** To what extent are the proposed research methodology and working arrangements appropriate to achieve the goals of the project?

Here, applicants need to present a coherent and logical research strategy/technical research design, including working arrangements, for the project. The focus must be on the design which should be dynamic as opposed to linear in nature i.e., with a dynamic feedback system between the WPs or strands to allow for the synthesis to deliver on the overarching research question.

The level of detail required in relation to the methodology cannot be underestimated. Applicants must detail the tasks involved and the rationale for their choices (e.g., case study selection, data, material, measurements, sources etc.). Details of how and why the applicant will be able to draw conclusions from the outcomes are also important for this criterion.

**Criterion 6:** To what extent does the proposal involve the development of novel methodology?

Here, the applicant needs to illustrate the novelty of their research design. This can be taken as a new logic in how they design the research strategy in addition to developing a new method or technique - this will very much depend on the disciplinary area involved.

**Criterion 7:** To what extent are the proposed timescales, resources, and PI commitment adequate and properly justified?

In terms of the timescales, applicants should discuss the key intermediate goals on the path to the synthesis and present this in a broad timeframe (e.g., M1, M20, M30, etc.). The requirements for each goal need to be considered and a strategy for the incorporation of the project team members needs to be presented. The standard Gantt Chart and detailed time-based workplan are not always appropriate here and it depends on the domain and panel involved.

In terms of resources, applicants must ensure that the team they plan to recruit for the project combines the appropriate skill set and level of experience to effectively carry out the work. It is important that the project never comes across as a consortium effort and is clearly PI-led, revolving around their expertise.

#### (b) Principal Investigator – Intellectual capacity and creativity

**Criterion 1:** To what extent has the PI demonstrated the ability to conduct ground-breaking research?

Applicants must clearly illustrate that they have a track record of conducting ground-breaking work in their career to date. It is important that they show this through the publications that they select to highlight in the track record section as well as any previous grants that they have successfully executed. Other metrics for this will come from invited presentations and recognition through awards and prizes etc.

**Criterion 2:** To what extent does the PI have the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project?

This is a key criterion for success and contributes to the feasibility of the project. Applicants need to outline their very specific skill set and intellectual/scientific terrain which makes them the ideal candidate to carry out the project. The biosketch (scientific or scholarly autobiography) is the best vehicle to summarise this information, focusing on the applicant's career trajectory highlighting the specific knowledge, skills and experience acquired. Capacity refers to the applicant's ability to scientifically manage the research team, so they need to show evidence of supervision experience, particularly of postgraduate students.

**Criterion 3:** To what extent has the PI demonstrated sound leadership in the training and advancement of young scientists/scholars?

PIs need to provide the overall numbers of postgraduate students and other researchers that have completed their studies under their mentorship and supervision. They must also provide an overview to illustrate their "leadership in the ... advancement" of these researchers and this can be done by giving examples of honours or distinctions, career progression of the students involved, particularly focusing on success stories and on any interdisciplinary or intersectoral career pathways. They should also highlight significant publications with these researchers as first/corresponding authors.

## 5. CV

As per the IRC instructions, applicants must

- respect the document formats requested by the IRC.
- avoid using hyperlinks as experts are under no obligation to review external documents.
- include and explain any career breaks or unconventional career paths so that professional achievements are fairly assessed.
- highlight any impact Covid-19 had on scientific/scholarly productivity.

The track record of the applicant contributes significantly to the evaluation of this award. Competitive Advanced Laureate applicants must be able to demonstrate a track record of significant research achievements **in the last 10 years** which identifies them as an exceptional leader in terms of the originality and significance of their research contributions. In addition to the Track-record section (see below), the CV of the applicant will be hugely important in demonstrating to reviewers that the applicant has the capability to successfully lead not only this project but to potentially lead a future ERC project. The IRC have provided a basic **suggested** CV template for applicants to use, however, to maximize the impact of their CV, applicants should also consider the following when preparing their CV;

Update their research website once the application has been submitted. Reviewers often look up applicants' research websites when reviewing applications.

While demonstrating their experience supervising graduate students and postdoctoral researchers, applicants may provide examples of previous students/postdoctoral fellows who have gone on to secure prestigious positions both in academia and non-academia. This shows that they have a successful track record in mentoring early-stage researchers.

Highlight significant international collaborators and the fields in which the collaborations are active.

Applicants may also include a section or bio sketch outlining their specific research expertise/interests. This can further demonstrate to reviewers that the applicant is the most suitable person to lead the proposed project.

## 6. 10 Year Track Record

As per the IRC instructions, applicants must

- respect the document formats requested by the IRC.
- Clearly explain and documented career break in the last 10 years if the PI wishes to extend the track record beyond 10 years (see page 5 of the [IRC call document](#) for further information).

With the adoption of the San Francisco Declaration of Research Assessment (DORA) principles, the mention of Journal Impact Factors is no longer accepted and use of H-Index is discouraged among the field relevant bibliometric indicators that may be included as part of the publications track record.

The 10-year track record section is a critical piece of the application as it provides applicants with an opportunity to provide a narrative around certain aspects of their track record which may not be conveyed fully through the CV such as impact on the field of research or the significance of certain research findings/publications/awards. Applicants can showcase their leadership in this section, both in terms of research expertise and supervisory experience, and also address any perceived gaps in their track-record. This section will therefore be key to convincing the reviewer that the applicant has the necessary skills, expertise, and experience to successfully lead ground-breaking research as well as the potential to become an ERC award holder.

First, applicants should use the structure of the IRC 10-year track record template as much as possible, including the specific request for publication details (up to 10 publications as main author/ 3 major research monographs). Applicants should also consider the following for this section;

Comment on key publications, explaining the significance/ground-breaking elements of their work. This can be particularly helpful for cross-disciplinary researchers. This can be done by providing a sentence for each publication listed. For multi-authored publications, ensure that the role of the applicant in the work is clearly specified.

Outline very briefly how the IRC Laureate award will enhance their ERC competitiveness and how they plan to use the award to move towards an ERC proposal.

Include a narrative highlighting their scientific achievements, explaining the significance and their contribution to the field.

Choose the achievements that are highly valued in their domain. It depends a lot on the domain if it's first authorship, last authorship, conference proceedings etc.

Provide evidence of international visibility and recognition such as invited international talks and seminars, participation in international networks etc.

No repetition from the CV. Don't give the same information twice.

**COVID-19 impact:** Applicants may mention any specific situation caused by the pandemic that had a negative effect on their curriculum vitae or track record.

## 7. Detailed Research Proposal

For the most part, applicants have the freedom to organize this section in the way that best suits them and their discipline, however they must stick to three headings as follows

- State-of-the-Art & Objectives
- Methodology
- Resources (Discussed in section below)

The points outlined below are intended as guidance to supplement the writing instructions provided in the IRC call document and template for the detailed research project. These points should also be read in conjunction with the information on the evaluation criteria in section 4 above.

As per the IRC instructions, applicants must respect the document formats requested by the IRC.

### State of the Art & Objectives

Clearly articulate the overarching research question/goal and the novel insights/impact that investigating this question will provide in the research field.

Define the novel concept, approach or development that will be undertaken to address the stated research question and present it in a robust manner, putting forward a strong rationale to justify the approach. Highlight any inter-/multi-disciplinary aspects.

Describe why the research is relevant and timely in the field.

Present the research objectives/questions/strands before presenting the state-of-the art. This will help the reviewer understand why the state-of-the-art presented is important to the research objectives and will help them to analyse how ambitious the research objectives are in relation to the state-of-the-art. The specific objectives/questions/strands will help to structure the methodology.

Using self-references to the applicant's own work will help the reviewer understand how the applicant contributes to frontier research.

Balance self-references with those of competitors and references of others who have referenced the applicant's work. This will help the applicant show a full awareness of the state-of-the-art in the field as well as further demonstrate the applicant's contribution to the field.

### Methodology

To explain the feasibility of the proposed work, applicants should have a well-structured and organized project by presenting a clear research design with associated project tasks/activities and milestones, a description of the appropriateness of the methodology and a feasibility/risk analysis. Risky projects are welcome. It must be clear, however, that you are aware of the risks and know how to tackle them (e.g. a table outlining risk, level of risk, mitigation, impact if successful). Evidence of feasibility must clearly be shown. Find a balance between being original and realistic.

There should be as much detail as possible in the methodology (see sample structure below).

Justification for methods, techniques, case study selection, sources, specific experiments etc should be clearly articulated here.

Key project milestones or intermediate goals: These are goals that applicants need to achieve to demonstrate that the project is progressing toward the OVERALL goal.

Applicants should demonstrate to what extent their proposal involves the development of novel methodology (see evaluation criteria section above).

Consider including a section on the **synthesis of the outcomes** from the various project WPs/Strands/Phases outlining how the outcomes will merge to deliver the overall goal (high-gain) of the project. This section could also outline what the key points in getting to that goal are and the key challenges faced along that journey (high risks). The team strategy can also be discussed here.

Specify the proposed timescales and resources necessary for successfully completing the project and provide a justification for these timescales and resources. Note that they are asking for timescales and not a specific timeline. The standard Gannt Chart and detailed time-based workplan are not always appropriate here. If a Gannt Chart is included, keep it small and brief providing a high-level overview.

Outputs including publications can be mentioned briefly but there is **no requirement or request in the instructions** for any implementation plan, dissemination plan, public engagement plan, project management work package, training plan etc.

Sample Single Work Package/Strand/Phase Structure for Methodology  
- can be adapted as appropriate

WP/ Strand/ Phase Title

- Objective & tasks: for this section *WHAT WE WILL DO*
- Team & Time Frame: *WHO & WHEN – Just mention this. No need to discuss in detail.*
- Rationale: why this approach, objectives, tasks? *WHY WE WILL DO IT & WHY IN THIS WAY*
- Preliminary Data
- Methodology/Work Plan: detailed information on how this work will be done. Can be taken task by task and should include methods and techniques to be used. *HOW WE WILL DO IT*
- Risks/Contingencies: related to this part of the work
- Contributions/Impact: (a) what standalone ground-breaking contributions/outcomes will come from this part, (b) what contribution do the outcome(s) of this part make toward reaching the overall goal of the project?
- Outputs: if necessary/applicable for disciplinary area. Very brief mention only.

## 8. Resources Section & Budget

The resources section forms part of the Detailed Research Project and counts towards the page limit for that section. The budget costings are input separately into the budget table on the SmartSimple system. When sending budgets to UCD R&I for review, applicants need to send both a copy of the excel budget template and a copy of the resources section of the detailed research project so that the budget may be accurately reviewed. Details on eligible costs can be found on pages 20-24 of the [IRC Call Document](#) and the budget template is available on the [Research Portal here](#) (UCD Connect login details required for access).

Applicants should structure the justification text section in line with the IRC sub-headings for the budget categories as applicable to their project (i.e. Personnel, Travel Costs, Equipment etc). In the resources section, applicants need to

State the amount of funding considered necessary to fulfil the objectives for the duration of the project. The resources requested should be reasonable and fully justified in the proposal. The requested grant should be in proportion to the actual needs to fulfil the objectives of the project.

Describe the size, nature, expertise, and knowledge of the required team, indicating their roles in the proposed research project. Team members should be linked to the work-plan and their costs justified.

Outline the PI's own commitment to the project including detail on their role and time allocation and explaining it terms of scientific expertise as well as in relation to supervising the recruited team members. Include details of any PI Salary costs/replacement costs charged to the award.

Describe other necessary resources, such as infrastructure, materials, equipment etc. A detailed justification for such costs should also be provided.

When estimating the costs for travel, details on the number of trips, location, purpose and duration of the trips should be provided and the team members involved. Also consider participation of the PI and team members in conferences and dissemination events.

Include any foreseeable publication costs.

25% overheads (excluding equipment) must be factored into the budget.

Specify any existing resources that will contribute to the project.

## 9. Ethics & Sex/Gender Dimension

All applicants must complete an Ethics Self-Assessment Table on the online form as part of the application process. If you have entered YES for any ethics issues in the ethics self-assessment table you must address how you will handle these ethics issues in the Ethics Statement (2 pages max & IRC template has been provided) to demonstrate that the proposed research will comply with ethical principles and relevant national, EU and international legislation. For the questions to which you have answered yes, consult the relevant sections in the [EU Guide for how to complete your ethics self-assessment here](#).

Remember that the aim of the ethics self-assessment is to provide guidance for discussion of ethical issues that may arise in the proposal and to identify how the applicant will deal with the identified issues. Ethical approval is not required at proposal stage but will be required promptly should the proposal be successful.

Applicants are also asked to consider whether there is a sex/gender dimension in their proposed research. Applicants should refer to

- Appendix 3 (pages 25-27) of the [IRC Call Document](#)
- [UCD R&I Guide for how to write the sex/gender section of your proposal](#)

## 10. Other Online Form Fields

Panel choice, keywords and abstracts/summaries appear as part of the online submission form. These fields are used by funding agencies to select evaluators and will ultimately determine where your proposal will be sent for evaluation, so careful consideration of your selections is critical.

### Primary Area, Discipline & Prescribed Keywords:

These are usually in the form of a drop-down menu and tend to be linked to specific evaluators on a list or database. Keep this narrow and as closely aligned as possible to the core of your project. Avoid selecting additional keywords that are only loosely associated to the work, as this widens the net of experts to whom your proposal may be sent for review. Ensure your selections are the most closely aligned to the content of your proposal. Consider who is the best suited to evaluate the content, particularly the methodology and approach. Also consider where the science/scholarship will have the most impact.

### Free Keywords:

This is a free text field where you can insert your own keywords which best represent your proposal. Keep your free keywords as narrow and specific as possible. The word limit is not a target!

### Abstract:

This content is used to select evaluators and is also used in panel consensus meetings. It may be last thing you write, but it is the first thing that the evaluators read! It is your first opportunity to start selling the proposal idea, so use it as your marketing tool or "hook".

### Suggested Abstract Structure:

*Note that the content should closely reflect that submitted at EoI stage.*

- 1-2 sentences outlining the topic that your research addresses
- sentence describing the aim and hypothesis of your project. What is the key research question?
- Highlight the gap(s) in current knowledge and state how your proposed research aims to fill the knowledge gap(s)
- 2-3 sentences describing how you are going to go about carrying out this project – methodology
- 1-2 sentences describing the intended or expected outcome of your proposed research project

## 11. Letter of Commitment & Declarations

The institutional letter of commitment, signed by the relevant Head of School and the VPRII, is the only letter of support to be uploaded as part of the proposal submission. This text of this letter is prescribed by the IRC and will be provided to applicants by UCD R&I after the proposal budget has been reviewed and approved and the Head of School has completed their sign off.



## 12. PhD Cert

Applicants must upload a copy (scan) of their PhD Certificate or transcript.

## 13. Gender-blinding of Proposals

The IRC gives the option to applicants to gender-blind their application. For those who choose to do so, there will be a field in the online form to indicate this preference and the IRC will remove profile information containing the full name and gender of the applicant from all documentation provided to remote peer reviewers during stage 1 evaluations. Those who choose this option should:

- Use non-gendered pronouns when describing their research and track record and review their CV and supporting documentation for obvious indicators of gender. Only the applicant's initials and surname should be included.
- Inform the Proposal Support Team in UCD R&I of this option so that the support letter provided is gender neutral and only the applicant's initial and surname is provided.