

# Research Impact Questions by Funder

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*A Reference Guide for European and Irish Grant Applications*

Compiled by the [Research Engagement & Impact Office](#)

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## Introduction

This document collates the principal impact-related questions and criteria from major European and Irish research funders. It is intended as a practical reference for researchers preparing grant applications or developing impact narratives for case studies.

Each section presents the specific questions, prompts, or evaluation criteria that applicants must address when articulating the impact of their proposed or completed research. The funders covered are those most frequently encountered by researchers in Irish higher education institutions.

*Note: Application templates change between calls. Always verify against the current call documentation. This document reflects the position as of early 2026.*

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## 1. [Horizon Europe](#) — Collaborative Projects (RIA / IA)

The impact section in Horizon Europe collaborative proposals constitutes one of three award criteria. The 2026–2027 Work Programme templates (v10.0, December 2025) have simplified certain guidance elements, but the core evaluation questions persist.

### 1.1 Project's Pathways Towards Impact

Applicants must describe in narrative form how the project's results will contribute to the expected outcomes specified in the call topic and the expected impacts described in the relevant Destination. Evaluators consider:

- How will the project's results credibly lead to the expected outcomes listed in the work programme topic?
- What is the scale and significance of these contributions?
- What are the project's Key Impact Pathways — scientific, economic, and societal?
- How will the results be sustained and scaled beyond the project lifetime?
- What broader socio-economic or environmental benefits will arise?

*The explicit instruction to quantify scale and significance was removed in the 2026–2027 template, but evaluators still assess this dimension.*

### 1.2 Measures to Maximise Impact

This sub-section covers dissemination, exploitation, and communication:

- What is your plan for disseminating results to relevant target groups?
- How will the results be exploited — commercially, through policy uptake, or otherwise?
- What communication activities are planned to engage wider audiences?
- How will intellectual property and knowledge protection be managed?
- What measures ensure the longevity and sustainability of the outputs?

### 1.3 Summary (Now Optional in 2026–2027 Template)

A table-based summary linking project results to expected outcomes and impacts, including indicators and means of verification. Though now optional, it remains recommended as a concise overview for evaluators.

#### Overall Evaluation Question

*"Credibility of the pathways to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts specified in the work programme, and the likely scale and significance of the contributions due to the project."*

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## 2. ERC Grants (Starting, Consolidator, Advanced)

The ERC does not have a standalone impact section. Excellence is the sole evaluation criterion. However, impact-related questions are embedded within the assessment of ground-breaking nature.

### 2.1 Ground-breaking Nature and Potential Impact

Evaluators are asked:

- To what extent does the proposed research address important challenges?
- To what extent are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g. novel concepts, approaches, or development between or across disciplines)?
- To what extent does the project have the potential to generate new knowledge that advances the frontier — including significant development or renewal of theory, methods, experiments, or empirical knowledge?
- What contribution will the project make to the research field(s) — what may be changed, opened, challenged, or how will current understanding be altered?

#### Key Distinction

The ERC funds frontier research. Broader societal or economic impacts are welcome but not required. The emphasis is on transformative potential within the research field. No dissemination or exploitation plan is required, unlike other Horizon Europe instruments.

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## 3. MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships

The MSCA-PF application (Part B1) allocates approximately 2 pages to impact, which carries a 30% weighting in the overall evaluation.

### 3.1 Career Development and Employability

- How will this fellowship concretely advance your career trajectory?
- What new competencies, skills, and knowledge will be acquired?
- How does the fellowship position you for future research independence or leadership?
- What is the added value of the mobility (international, interdisciplinary, intersectoral)?

### 3.2 Dissemination, Exploitation, and Communication

- What are the specific, measurable plans for sharing results with scientific communities (dissemination)?
- How will results be translated into practical applications, including for industry, policymakers, or clinical practice (exploitation)?
- How will you reach broader, non-specialist audiences (communication)?
- What is your strategy for managing intellectual property?

### 3.3 Contribution to Expected Impacts

- What are the expected scientific impacts (e.g. advancing knowledge, creating new methods or tools)?
- What are the expected societal impacts?
- What are the expected economic or technological impacts?
- What is the magnitude and importance of these contributions?

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## 4. Science Foundation Ireland / Taighde Éireann

SFI (now part of Research Ireland as of August 2024) requires impact statements across most of its programmes. The overarching questions are consistent, though length and emphasis vary by scheme.

### 4.1 Core Impact Questions (All Programmes)

Impact statements should be written in lay, non-technical language and address:

- What is the activity's potential impact on the development of science, technology and industry in Ireland, and on Ireland's economy and competitiveness?
- Are there potential international beneficiaries, collaborations with international industry or partner organisations?
- How will industry collaborators enable increased impact? What supports are they offering?
- Have routes to commercialisation been considered?
- What is the activity's potential impact on the education and training of Ireland's students, the career development of research team members, and the infrastructure for further research and education?

### 4.2 Frontiers for the Future Programme

The Impact Statement should cover:

- Potential societal, economic, cultural, knowledge, political, health, technological, environmental, and educational impacts.
- Milestones and deliverables associated with impact delivery.
- Timeframe for impact realisation (short, medium, or long-term).
- Plans to utilise SFI and other funding sources to assist with achieving impact.

### 4.3 Strategic Partnership Programme

- Outline the potential economic and societal impact expected to arise from the partnership (max. 2 pages).
- Include appropriate milestones and deliverables.
- Reference the timeframe and scale (national, international) of the impact.
- For second-term awards: describe how the project builds on impact realised during the first term.

### 4.4 Research Ireland Investigators Programme (2025)

At full proposal stage, an Impact Statement is required. The Stage 2 handbook has not yet been published, but the general principles align with the established [SFI impact framework](#).

### 4.5 Global Talent Ireland

- How will the proposed research align with Ireland's national strategic interests and contribute to national development?
- Reference relevant institutional and national policies.
- Detail the likely timeframe required to deliver on the described potential impact(s).

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## 5. [Irish Research Council / Taighde Éireann — Postgraduate](#)

### 5.1 Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarships

Impact is addressed through several application components:

- **Abstract** (300 words): Should include a sentence on impact and outcomes.
- **Details of Proposed Research** (500 words): Must include aims, objectives, central research questions, and how the project will add value to the research area.
- **Dissemination**: Outline target audiences, dissemination media, and publicity activities.
- **Career Development**: How the scholarship contributes to the applicant's career trajectory.

### 5.2 SFI-IRC Pathway Programme

The Impact Statement should describe:

- The potential benefits of the proposed research including (but not limited to) societal, economic, cultural, knowledge, political, health, technological, environmental, and educational impacts.
- Impact at an international level is recognised as having potential value to Ireland.

### 5.3 Narrative CV (Used Across Multiple Schemes)

The Narrative CV assesses the applicant's wider contribution under four categories:

- Generation of Knowledge
- Development of Individuals and Collaborations
- Supporting Broader Society and the Economy

- Supporting the Research Community

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## 6. [HEA Impact Assessment Case Studies \(IACS\)](#)

The Higher Education Authority runs an annual process linked to Performance Funding (€5 million allocated annually). Each eligible HEI submits case studies demonstrating impact. These submissions are managed by the TU Dublin Strategy and Planning Office.

### 6.1 IACS Template Structure (2025–2028 Cycle)

The template requires:

- **Case study submission details:** Title, thematic area, research period, impact period.
- **Summary of impact** (indicative 100 words).
- **Underpinning research/activity:** Description of the research or activity that led to the impact.
- **Details of the impact:** The effect on, change, or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment, or quality of life, beyond academia.
- **Sources to corroborate the impact:** Evidence base (testimonials, policy citations, media, data, etc.).

### 6.2 Evaluation Criteria

Case studies are assessed on:

- **Significance:** The degree to which the impact has contributed to change or benefit.
- **Reach:** The extent and breadth of the impact — geographic, demographic, or sectoral.

*The definitions for significance and reach are drawn from the UK REF framework.*

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## 7. [Wellcome Trust](#)

Wellcome’s approach to impact differs notably from most European funders. They concentrate on discovery research and do not have a traditional “impact section” in the manner of Horizon Europe or SFI.

### 7.1 Discovery Awards

Average award: £3.5 million, up to 8 years. The sample application form (updated November 2025) asks:

#### Research Proposal

- Research proposal summary (what you want to achieve and why it matters)
- Your research vision
- Outputs management and sharing plan

#### Applicant-Focused Questions

- How have you contributed to the development of others? (300 words max)

- Describe how your research contributes to the strategic aims of your organisation. (300 words max)
- Describe your approach to developing and supporting a positive and inclusive research culture.

#### Assessment Criteria Include

- The importance of the questions addressed and potential for significant shifts in understanding.
- Whether the research may have clinical or societal impact or translational potential (welcomed but discovery remains the focus).
- Risk appetite — Wellcome explicitly supports ambitious, potentially transformative ideas.

### 7.2 Early-Career Awards

Similar emphasis on:

- Clear potential to improve human health or wellbeing.
- The researcher's ability to design and deliver their own research project.
- Contribution to discovery research.

### 7.3 Climate Impacts Awards

- Research must aim to make the impacts of climate change visible across health outcomes to drive policy change.
- Preference for proposals focused on policy outcomes informed by communities most affected by climate change.

#### Key Wellcome Distinction

Wellcome does not typically ask about economic impact or routes to commercialisation. Their lens is health improvement through knowledge generation, with translational potential as a bonus rather than a requirement.

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## 8. Enterprise Ireland

Included for completeness as relevant to the Irish TU sector. Enterprise Ireland Technology Gateway and Commercialisation Fund applications typically require:

- Description of the commercial opportunity.
- Market analysis and competitive landscape.
- Route to market / commercialisation strategy.
- Economic impact: job creation potential, export potential, industry sector relevance.
- Letters of industry support.

## Cross-Cutting Comparison

The following table summarises how each funder approaches impact, highlighting the primary focus and key distinctions.

Funder	Impact Focus	Key Distinction
<b>Horizon Europe (RIA/IA)</b>	Societal, economic, environmental, scientific	Must map to topic-level expected outcomes and destination-level impacts
<b>ERC</b>	Scientific advancement only	No standalone impact section; excellence is the sole criterion
<b>MSCA-PF</b>	Career + scientific + societal + economic	Unique emphasis on researcher career development alongside broader impact
<b>SFI / Research Ireland</b>	Economic and societal benefit to Ireland	Strong national focus; industry collaboration valued highly
<b>IRC (Postgrad/Postdoc)</b>	Knowledge generation + societal benefit	Broader disciplinary scope; recognises cultural, political, educational impact
<b>HEA IACS</b>	Evidenced, realised impact	Retrospective case studies, not prospective plans; draws on REF methodology
<b>Wellcome Trust</b>	Health improvement through discovery	No traditional impact section; focus on transformative research questions
<b>Enterprise Ireland</b>	Commercial and economic	Market-driven; strongest emphasis on job creation and export potential

## Notes and Caveats

- Application templates change between calls. Always verify against the current call documentation and templates available on the relevant funder portal.
- The Wellcome application forms sit behind their Funding Platform login; the questions presented here are reconstructed from the published sample application form (November 2025) and supporting guidance.
- The [Research Ireland Investigators Programme Stage 2 handbook](#) has not yet been published; that section is based on the call document and established SFI practice.
- The 2026–2027 Horizon Europe templates introduced reduced page limits and simplified the impact pathways section, removing explicit guidance on Key Impact Pathways and the scale/significance quantification requirement.
- This document does not cover all possible grant schemes from each funder, but focuses on those most frequently encountered in Irish higher education.

For support with impact planning, or to book a one-to-one session with the Research Impact Lead, contact the Research Engagement & Impact Office at [engagementandimpact@tudublin.ie](mailto:engagementandimpact@tudublin.ie)