



IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn



#LoveIrish
Research



The Irish Research Council (IRC)



Funds excellent individual research across all disciplines



Enriches Ireland's pool of knowledge and expertise



Provides support from early career to professor-led research



Provides policy advice



Our mission is to enable and sustain a vibrant and creative research community in Ireland

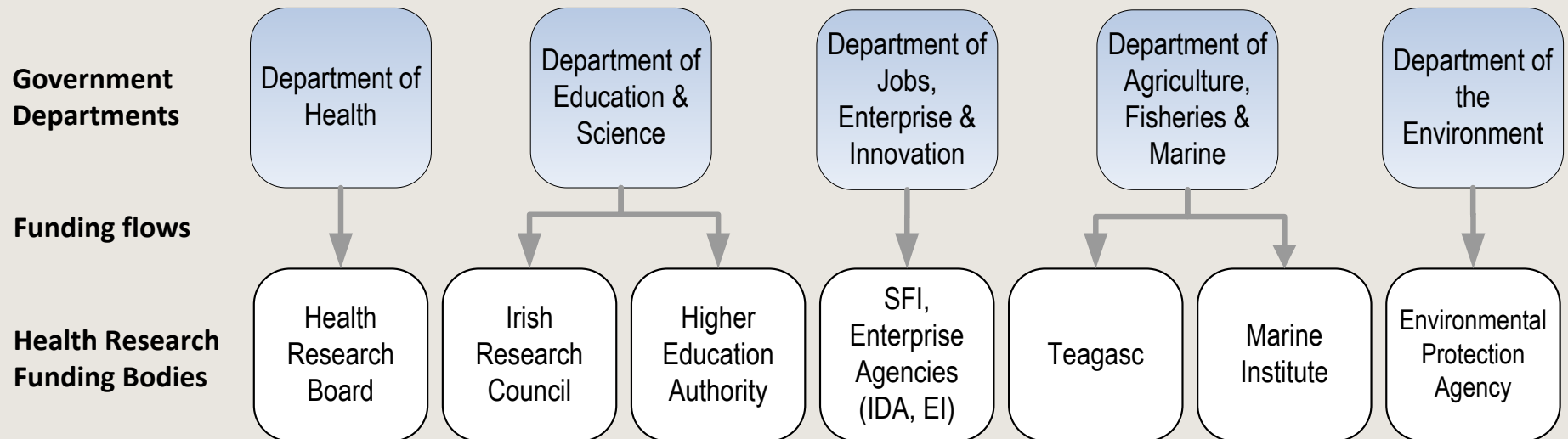
Funding excellence from early-career stage



The Council's role

- Addressing the **three key pillars** of Ireland's national research and innovation policy framework: research priorities, research for knowledge and research for policy
- Supporting the **broad development of excellent researchers** in Ireland's higher education institutions through individual awards in all disciplines and across all career stages
- Delivering on the **high-level skills agenda** of our parent Department (Education and Skills), to include innovation, creativity, and advanced analytical skills as well as expert knowledge
- Exposure of early-career researchers to **rigours of international experts** at the earliest stage, driving excellence and resilience

The Irish Research landscape



15 years of the Irish Research Council (end 2017)

7776

awards



4984

postgraduate scholars



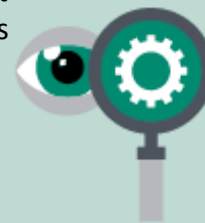
1287

postdoctoral fellows



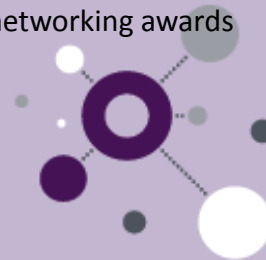
703

project
awards



802

networking awards



78,000*

individual peer reviews



200

funding calls



466

funding partners



€462,774,000

total investment



IRC Gender Strategy & Action Plan



Launch by then EU Commissioner for Research & Innovation, December 2013, Maire Geoghan Quinn

Two strands of IRC Gender Strategy & Action Plan:

1. Gender equality in research.
2. Integration of sex/gender dimension into research content (**IGAR**)

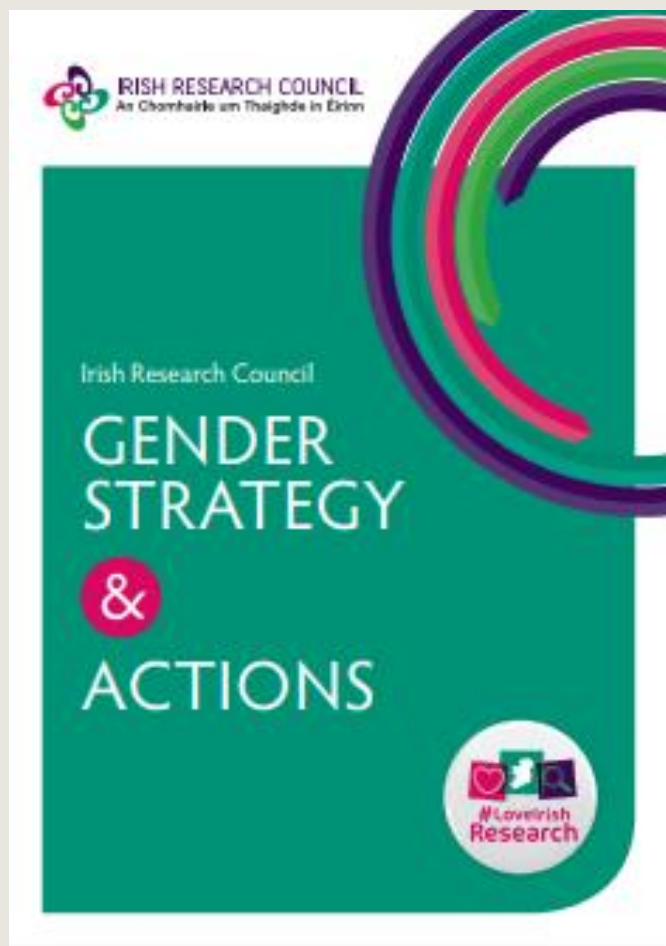
IRC Gender Strategy & Action Plan

KEY FEATURES OF THE STRATEGY INCLUDE:

- ➔ Encouraging more equal gender representation in the research population.
- ➔ Increasing awareness of the need to consider whether a potential sex and/or gender dimension is relevant in a research proposal. This integration of a sex and/or gender dimension stimulates scientific excellence, hence it is an important aspect of the evaluation of proposals.
- ➔ Operating a gender-blind assessment procedure to ensure a level playing field for all applicants.
- ➔ Supporting the development of national initiatives to remove gender related structural constraints and barriers in the recruitment, advancement, retention and mobility of all researchers in the Irish research system.
- ➔ Supporting the European agenda for the promotion of gender equality in research and innovation under Horizon2020.

Why did the Council include the requirement to address sex/gender in grant proposals?

IRC Gender Strategy & Action Plan



The Irish Research Council has a responsibility to ensure that it actively works to maximise collective research intelligence, creativity and innovation, and to only fund excellent research which has maximum impact and societal benefit.

To this end, the Council is committed to promoting gender equality and the integration of gender considerations into research content in order to guarantee the highest standards of rigour, transparency, and diversity of knowledge.

Irish Research Council

Gender Strategy & Action Plan 2013-2020

- In **humanities and social sciences**, researchers are well practised at considering whether there may be a potential sex/gender dimension to their research.
- IGAR is less consistent in **STEM**. However, many examples show the importance of integrating sex/gender analysis across a range of fields including health and medical research, engineering, environmental research, and in the development of new technologies.

EXAMPLES (source: <http://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/>)

- **SCIENCE:** Most basic research with animal models focuses on males to the exclusion of females (Zucker et al., 2010; Marts et al., 2004). Results of studies in males are often generalized to females without justification, and even some conditions that occur more often in women are studied in mostly male animals.
- **HEALTH AND MEDICINE:** Men account for nearly a third of osteoporosis-related hip fractures across Europe and the U.S. (Dhanwal et al., 2010). Nonetheless, osteoporosis is considered primarily a disease of postmenopausal women, and men are rarely evaluated or treated for it (Khosla et al., 2008).

Irish Research Council

Gender Strategy & Action Plan 2013-2020

- The Council was among the first research funding agencies globally to introduce a sex/gender dimension into applications to its funding programmes.
- **Since 2013**, applicants to our programmes have been required to indicate if **there is a sex and/or gender dimension to the research proposed** and **how such dimensions will be addressed in the conduct of research**.
- To coincide with the introduction of this requirement, the Council hosted workshops with international gender experts on:
 1. How to identify whether a sex and/or gender dimension was relevant and, if so,
 2. How to fully integrate sex/gender analysis into the design, implementation, evaluation, dissemination of the research.

Gender Dimension in H2020

Three key objectives underpin the strategy on gender equality in Horizon 2020:

- Fostering gender balance in research teams - close the gaps in the participation of women. Equal opportunities at all levels.
- Ensuring gender balance in decision-making, in order to reach the target of 40% of the under-represented sex in panels and groups and of 50% in advisory groups.
- Integrating the gender dimension in research and innovation content, helps improve the scientific quality and societal relevance of the produced knowledge, technology and/or innovation.

Horizon Europe (FP9)

CARLOS MOEDAS
Member of the European Commission

Brussels, 14 SEP. 2018
Ares (2018)4144518

Dear Professor Husu and Professor Drew,

I would like to thank you for your petition addressed to both the Director General for Research and Innovation, Jean-Eric Paquet and myself, and also for sharing your concern regarding the continuation and reinforcement of the European Research Area goals for gender equality and gender mainstreaming in our next Framework Programme, Horizon Europe.

As stated in the petition, gender equality is a fundamental principle of the European Union. As such, gender equality remains a high priority for the Commission, in line with the Treaties, and with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG5 on Gender Equality).

Horizon Europe will build on the achievements made under Horizon 2020 and continue to ensure the effective promotion of gender equality and the consideration of the gender dimension in research and innovation content, as laid out in the proposal for a Regulation establishing Horizon Europe published on 7 June 2018.

Particular attention will be paid to guarantee gender balance in decision-making, including evaluation panels, expert groups in the Mission boards, European Innovation Council board or else the ERC scientific council.

The gender dimension will also continue to be a focal point of attention. It will be adequately integrated in research and innovation content and followed through at all stages of the research cycle, with specific focus on the cross-disciplinary and cross-sectorial clusters addressing global challenges under Pillar II.

Ms Liisa Husu
Professor, Gender Studies
Co-Director, GEXcel Collegium for Advanced Transdisciplinary Gender Studies
School of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences
Örebro University
SE - Örebro

Professor Eileen Drew
Trinity College Dublin
Director, Trinity Centre for Gender Equality and Leadership
IE - Dublin

Furthermore, the 'Strengthening the European Research Area' foundation underpins the entire programme. Within it, the 'Reforming and Enhancing the EU Research and Innovation System' part will continue to fund policy-related actions supporting gender equality in scientific careers and in decision making, as well as the integration of the gender dimension in research and innovation, including building on incentivising gender equality plans.

I will be outlining my vision for strengthening the gender dimension in Horizon Europe next 25 September in the Women in Science European Parliament Conference.

I hope your group will be represented at this event.

Yours sincerely,



Carlos MOEDAS

How has the IRC implemented the requirement to address sex and/or gender in grant proposals?

IRC Core Funding Schemes

The Irish Research Council requires all applicants across core funding schemes to demonstrate that they have given full consideration to whether there is a potential sex and/or gender dimension in their proposed research.

- **Postgraduate scholarships**
- **Postdoctoral fellowships**
- **MSCA co-funded awards**
- **LAUREATE PI AWARDS**
- **COALESCE IDR awards**



**An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna**
Department of
Education and Skills



CAROLINE
Collaborative Research Fellowships
for a Responsive and Innovative Europe

COALESCE Research Fund

Collaborative Alliances for Societal Challenges

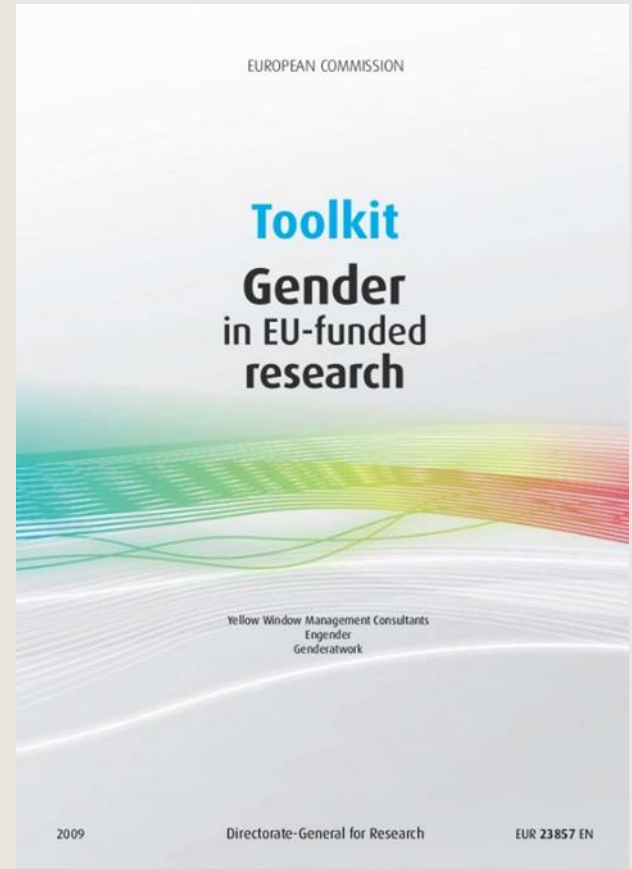
IGAR Training & Awareness

For Applicants:

Guidelines for Applicants: includes 'Biological Sex/gender dimension' section for help in answering this question.

IGAR Training Workshops: led by Consultants and facilitated by IRC.

- ✓ Targeted to PGs, PDs, and applicants to international funding programmes.
- ✓ Targeted Research Offices to disseminate learnings among their own communities.



Sex/Gender Checklist: Guidance to Applicants

Research idea(s) phase

- If the research involves humans as research objects, has the relevance of biological sex and/or gender to the research topic been analysed?
- If the research does not directly involve humans, are the possibly differentiated relations of men and women to the research subject sufficiently clear?
- Have you reviewed literature and other sources relating to differences in the research field?

Sex/Gender Checklist: Guidance to Applicants

Proposal phase

- Does the methodology ensure that (possible) sex/gender differences will be investigated: that sex/gender differentiated data will be collected and analysed throughout the research cycle and will be part of the final publication?
- Does the proposal explicitly and comprehensively explain how sex/gender issues will be handled (e.g. in a specific work package)?
- Have possibly differentiated outcomes and impacts of the research on women and men been considered?

IRC Checklist: Guidance to Applicants

Research Phase

- Are questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, etc. designed to unravel potentially relevant sex and/or gender differences in your data?
- Are the groups involved in the project (e.g. samples, testing groups) gender-balanced?
- Is data analysed according to the sex variable? Are other relevant variables analysed with respect to sex?

IRC Checklist: Guidance to Applicants

Dissemination Phase

- Do analyses present statistics, tables, figures and descriptions that focus on the relevant sex/gender differences that came up in the course of the project?
- Are institutions, departments and journals that focus on gender included among the target groups for dissemination, along with mainstream research magazines?
- Have you considered a specific publication or event on sex/gender-related findings?

What response has the Council had from the research community? From other funders?

Research Office Activities

Research Support Offices have engaged with IGAR, providing links to gender resources, guidance documents, and training sessions to applicants.

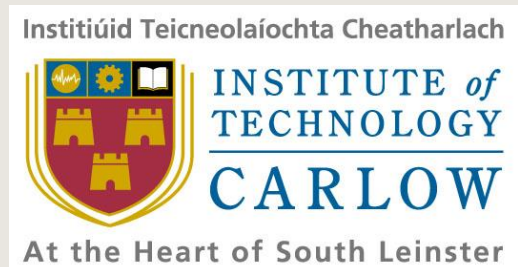
Research Offices activities include:

- Tailored training to proposal preparation for applicants, including guidance on the sex/gender dimension aspects/questions.
- A proposal review service, which includes feedback on all aspects of proposals.
- Access to the appropriate resources and tools on addressing the sex/gender dimension.
- Specialised support with faculties/schools.

Research Office Activities

Example of tailored IGAR related support:

Institute of Technology Carlow, in collaboration with **The Equality Business**, are planning a workshop aimed at training applicants on how to integrate the sex and/or gender dimension in research and research funding proposals.



Type	Duration	Course Code
Interactive workshop	2 – 2.5 hours	TEBW4
Workshop objectives <i>To enable researchers to integrate the sex and gender dimension in their research thus ensuring maximum impact, societal benefit and optimising innovation in research. To equip researchers to integrate the sex and gender dimension in research funding applications</i>		
Workshop content Why integrate sex and gender? <i>Excellent research fully considers whether a potential sex and/or gender dimension is relevant; Research funders require the integration of the sex/gender dimension</i> Definition of terms. Examples of excellent research and gendered research <i>Overview of recent research projects</i> Integrating sex/gender in research proposals <i>Integrating sex/gender in the research process and content to comply with funding guidelines.</i> Practical exercises <i>In groups, participants integrate sex/gender into a selection of sample research projects.</i> Guidelines for integrating sex/gender in research projects <i>Guidelines for integration of sex/gender in research process and research content; including design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination.</i> Resources		
Target group		

Engagement with European Initiatives

GENDER-NET was a pilot transnational research policy initiative funded by the European Commission under the [Science in Society](#) work programme of the seventh Framework Programme (FP7)

GENDER-NET was designed to address the common challenges still facing European research institutions in achieving gender equality in research and innovation, and improving the integration of sex/gender into research content.

Duration: 3 years (Oct. 2013 – October 2016)

Consortium: 12 Programme Partners (national programme owners), 6 Observers, IEAB



How does the Council evaluate the sex/gender experimental aspect of proposals?

IGAR Training & Awareness

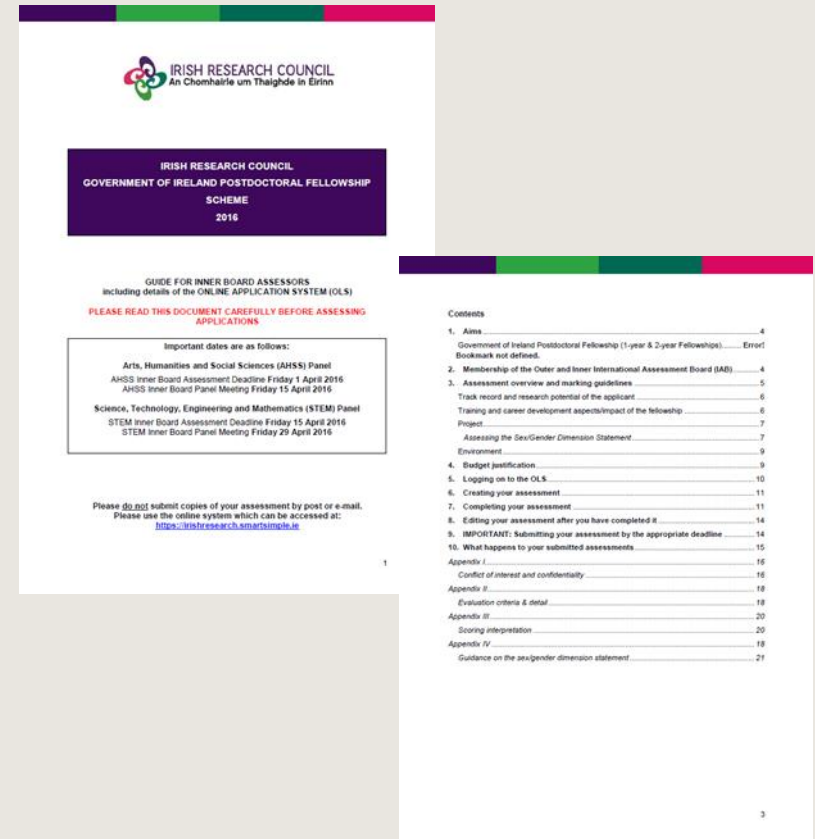
For Assessors:

IGAR Training & Guidelines:

- ✓ “Do you understand the concept of biological sex and social gender as they impact research content?”
- ✓ Refer Assessors to *Toolkit Gender in EU-funded Research* and Gendered Innovations case studies.
- ✓ Appendix “Guidance on the Sex/Gender Dimension Statement.” (2 pages)
- ✓ Gender-blinding in all assessment processes.

IGAR Criteria in Assessment:

- ✓ Evaluation criteria includes assessment of applicant’s consideration of gender dimension.



Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship

Evaluation criteria and Marks

PROJECT, including:

40%

- Clarity and coherence of the proposed research
- Quality of the proposed research design and methodologies
- Feasibility of the proposed milestones, deliverables and contingency plans
- Consideration as to how the proposed research will advance state of the art and make a contribution to existing knowledge
- Plans for dissemination and knowledge exchange of the proposed research
- Consideration of the relevant ethical issues and sex/gender dimension
- Where relevant, does the application directly align with the strategic funding partner themes as set out in the 2018 call documentation

Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellowship

Evaluation Criteria and Marks

POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP MAXIMUM 100 MARKS			
Track Record /Research Potential of the Applicant (30 marks)	Training and Career Development Aspects and Impact of the Fellowship (25 marks)	Quality of the Research Project (35 Marks)	Suitability of the Mentor/Implementa tion of the Fellowship (10 marks)
Research experience (based on their academic CV), including trans- national mobility, inter-sectoral mobility, scientific/practical/ma nagement experience.	Clarity and quality of objectives in the applicant's career development and training plan, including the extent to which specific training activities have been scheduled.	Research quality, including consideration of ethical and <u>sex/gender issues</u> and any interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary aspects of the proposal.	Suitability of the proposed Mentor: track record of the Mentor (including research output record); experience in developing researchers; capacity to provide mentoring; international linkages with appropriate partners.

CAROLINE Scheme (MSCA CO-FUND)

Sex/gender dimension

6.39 The Council's '[Gender Strategy & Action Plan 2013–2020](#)' is available on the Council's website²⁷.

6.40 Fellows are required to give careful consideration to whether there is a potential biological sex and/or gender dimension that may arise in the course of their research.

6.41 Where the fellow is involved in the organisation of conference, networking or dissemination panels connected with their research project, due regard should be given to gender balance within any such panel(s).

CAROLINE Scheme (MSCA CO-FUND)

Excellence	Impact	Implementation
<p>Quality and credibility of the research project and relevance to the CAROLINE research theme. This includes originality and innovative aspects of the proposed research, consideration of ethical and sex/gender issues, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary aspects of the proposed research project.</p>	<p>Potential of the proposed research to make a contribution towards realizing one or more United Nation's Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.</p> <p>Potential to advance fundamental understanding of the topic.</p>	<p>Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including the career training and development plan</p>

Principal Investigator awards

Starting and Consolidator Laureate Awards Programme for frontier research

8.4 Ethical statement and sex/gender dimension

- The self-assessment table must be completed even if there are no issues (simply confirm that none of the ethical issues apply to the proposal). Please note that, in case you answer YES to any of the questions, you are requested to provide a statement on ethical issues to be addressed.
- Applicants are advised to consult the [H2020 Guidance document How to complete your ethics self-assessment](#) before completing the ethics self-assessment.

Principal Investigator awards

COALESCE Research Fund

Evaluation Criterion	Detail	Mark/100
Quality of Proposal	<p>Suitability of the proposal's concept and objectives in relation to the intentions of the scheme, to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the potential of the proposed research to inform policy and/or practice within the chosen National Strategic Outcome (NSO) <u>or</u> partner strand theme; the potential of the project to contribute to the future development of research in the topic area. <p>Comprehensiveness and quality of the approach to be adopted including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ research methodology; ➤ data management; ➤ consideration of ethical and <u>sex-gender</u> issues; and ➤ the limitations of the approach to be adopted. <p>The experience and expertise of the applicant relevant to the proposed project including demonstration of a proven ability to carry out the work in an impartial and objective manner.</p>	<p>45</p> <hr/>

Responses to Gender Dimension Question

- Varying quality of answers, as regards depth of consideration: some thoughtful, others simplistic or superficial.
- Some common problems: focusing only on males; treating both genders equally, regardless of research focus.



Example (1)

Example of a research proposal in **immunology** submitted to IRC Postdoctoral Fellowship:

“Our immune system has evolved to clear infection through induction of a process called inflammation. An important component of this process is selective expansion of white blood cells, called T cells. We believe that a protein call Syntaxin 11 (STX11) plays an important role in this process. Individuals who are unable to make STX11 suffer from a rare disease called familial hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis (FHL-4) which results in a dysfunctional immune system and susceptibility to infection”.

Assessor’s feedback on the quality of the research proposal:

“This project will investigate the role of a snare protein Syntaxin in the release of IL molecules from CD4 cells. Clear set of objectives, with some identified risks. Seems like a lot of work for 2 years. It was not quite clear how the experiments will be performed, **esp. the investigation of gender**, and the human part”.

Example (2)

Example of a research proposal in **biological sciences** submitted to IRC Postdoctoral Fellowship:

“Krabbes disease is a brain disorder that affects children and is usually fatal within two years after birth. The disease is caused by a deficiency in an enzyme resulting in the accumulation of a highly toxic compound, psychosine, in the brain. The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of the endocannabinoid system on myelination, neurodegeneration and inflammation in an animal model of Krabbes disease”.

Assessor’s feedback on the quality of the research proposal:

“The idea is that cannabis based medicine will delay the progression of Krabbes disease. I would like to see some more information on the model to be used. Are there different forms or stadia of this progressive demyelination process and is there some resemblances with MS. More information should be provided on the behavioural parameters to be used and why. [...] **Are there no gender differences?**”

How has it changed the science that we fund?

What science has come about as a result of this? Or is it too early?

Some Metrics

- Over **11,000** applications to our calls since IGAR was introduced into our schemes in 2013
- The Council has made in excess of **2,700** awards during this period

2017 Starter Laureate Awardee

Dr Alvaro Llorente-Berzal

Pharmacology and Therapeutics
School of Medicine
National University of Galway

Project title: Sexual dimorphism in chronic neuropathic pain: A role for the endocannabinoid system?

Panel consensus: The proposal revolves around studying the role of the endocannabinoid system in neuropathic pain (NP) with a special focus on sex differences. **This is clearly an unmet medical need and sex differences are particularly urgent research priority in many fields.** Dr Llorent-Berzal's project will lead to understanding the role of sex differences in the development of neuropathic pain and its connection to the endocannabinoid system.

HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions (2016)

OBJECTIVE	RECOMMENDATION	LEAD STAKEHOLDER	TIMELINE/KPIS
1.13 To embed the gender dimension in research content.	Ensure that the gender dimension is integrated into all research content ¹⁸⁰ and provide training and support for research staff on how to do this.	HEIs	Ongoing

OBJECTIVE	RECOMMENDATION	LEAD STAKEHOLDER	TIMELINE/KPIS
3.1 To ensure scientific excellence, the stimulation of new knowledge leading to technological innovations, by integrating gender analysis into all phases of basic and applied research.	As a pre-requisite for funding, research funding agencies will require applicants to demonstrate that they have given full consideration to any potential gender dimension in their proposed research.	Research funding agencies	From 2017

National collaboration on sex/gender issues in research growing



Plenary Panel Session: Gender and Research Funders – Policy and Practice



GENDER-NET

GENDER-NET - pilot transnational research policy initiative funded by the European Commission under the Science in Society work programme of FP7 to explore challenges facing European research institutes in achieving gender equality and IGAR. This included research into:

- The barriers to recruitment and progress of women
- Lack of women in decision making positions
- **Limited adoption of IGAR**

GENDER-NET project started on October 2013, and ran for 3 years. GENDER-NET Plus is a continuation of this GENDER-NET ERA-NET.

Council-led deliverables under GENDER-NET



Deliverable 3.12

Exchange best practices on the integration of the gender dimension in research and innovation contents and programmes, building on national and European initiatives on the use of sex and gender analysis in disciplines beyond social science and humanities. This report develops a strategic framework for implementing transnational activities.

Council-led deliverables under GENDER-NET



Deliverable 4.16

To develop strategic transnational commitment, including joint programming, to the the integration of gender analysis in research contents and programmes.



ERA-Net co-funded by the European Commission under Horizon 2020



- Addressing structural inequality and the sex/gender dimension
- 16 partners across 13 countries
- Centre-piece is €11m transnational call supporting excellent collaborative research across borders and beyond the state-of-the-art
- knowledge exchange with non-academic audiences.
- applications that address and explore interactions and interdependencies explicitly between **SDG 5 Gender Equality** and one or more of the following SDGs:
SDG 3 Good Health and Well-Being, SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure and SDG 13 Climate Action.

GENDER-NET Plus Joint Call

Topics

- **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being**
 - Topic 1.1. Gender-Based Violence.
 - Topic 1.2. Sex, Gender and Ageing.
 - Topic 1.3. Sex, Gender and Health.
- **SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure**
 - Topic 2.1. Gender and New Technologies.
 - Topic 2.2. Gender in Entrepreneurship and in the Innovation System.
- **SDG 13: Climate Action**
 - Topic 3.1. Gender Dimension in Climate Behaviour and Decision Making.

Gender Equality and IGAR Principles

All GENDERNET Plus projects will be required to follow [the Gender Equality Principles on IGAR](#) for their research.

When applying for a grant under Horizon 2020, you are invited to explore whether and how the gender dimension is relevant to your research. The way sex and/or gender analysis is taken into account in the proposal will be assessed by the evaluators alongside the other relevant aspects of the proposal. This is even more important if researchers submit their proposals to a topic where gender-related issues are explicitly mentioned.



GENDER-NET Plus

Further Activities

The joint call for research proposals is part of collection of activities designed to further the aims of GENDER-NET Plus. Further actions include:

- Mappings and analyses on the promotion of gender in research and innovation
- Compiling comparative analytical reports on activities in this area
- Developing further tools and training for IGAR

Next steps for Council

- Review of current **Gender Strategy and Action Plan**
- More granular analysis of data and continued monitoring of our activities to promote IGAR in our calls.
- Continued support and input into the activities of the **HEA Gender Equality Taskforce**
- Continued input into **GENDER-NET Plus ERA-NET 2017-2022**

Review of Gender Strategy & Action Plan

Gender Strategy and Action Plan Review-Objectives:

- To identify and assess the impact of the IRC gender measures across our schemes.
- To ascertain the level of confidence of assessors in the evaluation of sex-gender questions.
- To identify, monitor, and verify if and how the IRC measures have supported our remit, particularly in relation to the inclusion of sex-gender questions in research proposals.
- To develop recommendations for the inclusion of measures/actions to further improve gender equality and the integration of gender considerations in research content.

Review of Gender Strategy & Action Plan

Gender Strategy and Action Plan Review-Actions

- A review of the responses to the gender-sex question/statement in the application forms across schemes to determine whether applicants are adequately addressing the sex and/or gender aspect in their research.
- A survey of peer reviewers and assessors on the evaluation of sex and/or gender aspect of proposals
- An analysis of sex-disaggregated data 2012-2017 – to analyse the impact of our gender actions. What metrics should we use in the future?
- An assessment of the impact of the gender proof criteria in terms of gender bias for the period.

Final thoughts

- Importance of disciplinary leaders to champion the integration of sex/gender dimension into research content
- Bi-lateral and multi-lateral cooperation to share knowledge and build an international community of best practice
- Continue to work to 'change the game' so that IGAR drives excellent research and uncovers new insights
- Foster and enhance knowledge exchange between academia and external settings, where the real impact will be felt

Thank you



**#LoveIrish
Research**

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