

Acting as an Assessor for the IRCSET EMBARK Initiative Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme – what’s involved?

Background

Since 2002, the Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology (IRCSET) has offered Postgraduate Scholarships to talented early-career researchers wishing to pursue a programme of postgraduate research. Presently, the Council offers two types of Fellowships:

Timescale

Scholarships are offered via an annual Call which opens in January each year.

	Months	Time period
Call accepts applications	Jan/ Feb	6 weeks
Assessment Stage 1 – online remote assessment	March	4 weeks
Assessment Stage 2 – assessment panel meeting	April	2 Days
Results announced	April	
Overall time from Call open to announcement of results	Approx. 14 weeks	

Acting as an Assessor

IRCSET EMBARK postgraduate applications (including the research proposal) are written for a general scientific audience and assessors are not required to have a specific expertise in the discipline of an applicant.

Assessors will be academically qualified and will have supervised PhD candidates to completion. They will have previous experience of assessment and appointment of candidates for doctoral studies.

They must be willing to review a significant number of applications, taking a view on the whole application in accordance with the assessment procedure rather than focussing on their own disciplinary expertise.

Assessors are asked to carry out assessments of applications that fall outside their field of expertise.

All applications are assessed under the following criteria:

- Academic background (30%)
- Personal statement (30%)
- Supervisor and referee endorsement of applicant (30%)
- Research Project outline (10%)

IRCSET supports applications from the following disciplines:

- Biological Sciences
- Chemistry
- Computer Science

- Earth and Environmental Sciences
- Engineering
- Mathematics
- Physics

Assessment Stage 1 – Online Remote Assessment

As an assessor you are provided with a login to the Online Application System (OLS). Assessors can browse all applications and associate with applications they wish to assess. (The average amount assigned per assessor is 100). Each application is read and assessed by at least two assessors.

Each application contains details of the applicant's educational background, a personal statement, supporting statements from two referees and the proposed research supervisor, and a 1 page project outline.

Assessors are asked to complete an Assessors Form for each application using the Online Application System, and are invited to provide a score and a short comment for each application. After completion of all sections of the Form, the Assessors Forms are collated through the Online Application System. Your completed assessment forms allow IRCSET to provide detailed and comprehensive feedback to all applicants; therefore the assessment must contain overall comments on the applications. All the contents – except your name – will be available to the applicant after the call results have been announced. You will have approximately 4 weeks to complete all of your assigned assessments.

To assist you, prior to the start of stage 1 of the assessment process, IRCSET will provide you with a 'Guideline for Assessors' document, containing information about IRCSET, about the funding scheme and about the specific grading scheme and assessment criteria.

Assessment Stage 2 – Assessment Panel Meeting

After the online remote assessments have taken place, a panel meeting is convened which lasts 2 days. If you agree to participate in stage 1, you will be invited to participate in the panel meeting. The panel meetings are held in Dublin, and generally last 2 days. A chairperson is appointed for the meeting from among the assessors, usually someone who has attended an IRCSET panel meeting before and has performed his/her duties exceptionally well. The IRCSET Programme Manager sits in on the meeting, but does not participate, other than to take notes of the assessor discussion and act as rapporteur.

During the panel meeting there is the opportunity to discuss all applications received. You will be asked to provide your opinion on those applications that you have assessed and also to contribute to the debate about all applications. The overall result required from the meeting is a ranking list for these applications.

Remuneration

For participation in Assessment Stage 1 (remote online assessment) and Stage 2 (assessment panel meeting) IRCSET will pay a Provisional Education Support Fee of €1000. IRCSET will pay all

reasonable expenses relating to attendance at the panel meeting in Dublin, including accommodation, travel and food.

Conflicts of Interest Policy

The Council's Rules on Conflicts of Interest are:

Actual conflicts of interest:

The Assessor must not be:

- involved in the preparation of an application that has been submitted
- stand to benefit directly should the application be funded (e.g. a potential scientist in charge of a application)
- have a close relationship with any person representing a host organisation
- have a close relationship with the applicant

If any of these statements hold true, the Assessor will be disqualified from reviewing this application.

Potential conflicts of interest:

The Assessor must not be:

- involved in a contract or research collaboration with a host organisation
- working at the same host institution as in the application but in a different research group

If any of these statements hold true, the Assessor will be disqualified from reviewing this application and must excuse his/her self from the room when the application in question is discussed at the assessment committee meeting.

Assessors will be informed of the Conflicts of Interest Policy in the following ways:

- In the 'Guidelines for Assessors' document
- Requirement to sign the 'Declaration by Assessor' at the end of the Assessment form on the OLS (checkbox): "I declare that to my knowledge I do not have any connection with the proposal, or any interest in its success or otherwise that could influence my impartiality. I will not disclose any information concerning this proposal or any matter relating to it".
- At the beginning of the assessment panel meetings