

# Irish Research Council

## 'Declined Funding' Appeals

### Policy and Procedures

#### 1. Introduction

This Policy establishes procedures and responsibilities for appeals in connection with a decision to decline funding of a proposal.

In reaching its decisions regarding funding, the Irish Research Council (the Council) takes into account the peer review assessments of the proposal, and the funding budget available to the Council. Proposals are evaluated in an open competition via international peer review. The evaluation criteria used to assess proposals and determine the outcome of the competition include: Project – quality of the research project, and training and career development aspects of the proposal; Applicant – capability of the applicant; and Environment – suitability of the host organisation(s), and availability of funding.

The primary function of the IRC appeals procedure is to ensure that IRC's review process has been fair and reasonable, and that IRC's review procedures were followed. Although the appeal procedure is not a peer review process itself and will not re-open such a process, it may address procedural errors that may have occurred during assessment and other aspects of proposal review including: unaccounted-for conflicts of interest, inappropriate consideration of extraneous information / rumour / hearsay or incomplete / inconsistent documentation being made available to the reviewers.

It is appreciated that applicants may, from time to time, disagree with the academic perspective of the expert reviewer, or their position on the overall quality or impact of the proposed research. However, IRC has full confidence in the high quality of experts that it engages in the assessment process and takes the position that this source of expert input allows IRC to make the best and most informed decisions. **The judgment, interpretation or level of understanding of these experts is, not therefore, an admissible ground for appeal.**

Appeals must be limited to clearly identifiable issues of procedure. The process required for invoking the formal appeal is detailed in part 2. An appeal will not be processed if the matter(s) in question are already the subject of legal proceedings.

IRC is satisfied that the procedures for submission of applications and associated forms (e.g. supervisor/mentor form, references, enterprise mentor form) are clearly set out in the call documentation. It is the responsibility of an applicant for funding to ensure that these are followed correctly. Consequently, appeals based on applications that have been deemed administratively ineligible, including, but not restricted to, missed deadlines, applications exceeding word limits or missing documentation, will not be considered unless it can be explicitly demonstrated that this resulted from an oversight or default on the part of IRC.

Appeals relating to funding levels or award conditions will not be considered.

Award of IRC funding is discretionary and the appeal process is not an adversarial one. A formal hearing is not therefore provided. Factors such as programme budgets and themed calls for proposals are also taken into account when considering an appeal.

## **2. Appeal Procedures**

Appeals are a 3 Stage process:

### **Appeal Stage (A)**

#### **Explanation by the IRC Programme Manager**

An applicant whose proposal has been declined is encouraged to request more information from the relevant IRC Programme Manager, over and above the explanatory materials received with the Declination Notice. The Programme Manager will afford the applicant an opportunity to present his/her point of view, will provide additional information if any exists, and will take any further action that is deemed appropriate in consultation with the IRC Assistant Director. Following this engagement, an applicant may be satisfied with any action taken and/or may accept that no further action is required. If however an applicant signifies dissatisfaction with the outcome of this engagement, a written Explanation will be furnished to the applicant by the IRC Programme Manager.

### **Appeal Stage (B)**

#### **Review by the IRC Director**

If dissatisfied with any action taken or the Explanation provided under Appeal Stage (A), the appellant may submit a written request to the IRC Director requesting that IRC reconsider its decision.

IRC will consider such a request:

- only if the appellant has first sought and obtained an Explanation under the procedures described in Appeal Stage (A)
- only if the request is received by IRC within 21 days of the date of issue of the Explanation, and provided the appellant's request for reconsideration has been sent through the research office of the appellant's host Research Body and is endorsed by the host Research Body (VP for research or equivalent).

In the letter requesting reconsideration, the appellant should state whether the appeal is based on

a) factual inaccuracy; or

b) procedural error.

The appellant should also provide a concise written statement (no more than 300 words) clearly outlining the grounds for the appeal. The Director will reconsider the record to determine whether IRC's review of the declined proposal was fair and reasonable. The Director may personally conduct the review or may designate a Programme Manager, who had no part in the initial review, to do so.

The Director will endeavour to provide the *appeal result*, in writing, to the research office of the host Research Body, with a copy to the appellant within 30 days of receipt of the request for reconsideration. If the *appeal result* cannot be furnished within that period, the Director will notify the host Research Body and the appellant, in writing, indicating a later date by which the *appeal result* can be expected to issue.

### Appeal stage (C)

#### **Further Review by an Independent Committee**

Within 30 days of notification of the *appeal result*, the host Research Body may request Further Review by an Independent Committee.

No particular format for such request is required, other than it must be in writing and signed by the President/Provost/Chief Executive Officer of the host Research Body and by the appellant. The written request should set out concisely why the host Research Body is still of the opinion that an error may have occurred in the initial evaluation and why it is not satisfied with the *appeal result* issued by the IRC Director under the procedures described in Appeal Stage (B) above.

An Independent Committee, made up of three non-IRC members, will review this request for Further Review and the record of earlier IRC actions (including the reviews conducted under Appeal Stages (A) and (B)). The Independent Committee will endeavour to furnish the result of the Further Review, in writing, to the host Research Body within 30 days. If the result cannot be furnished within that period, the Independent Committee will notify the host Research Body and the appellant, in writing, indicating a later date by which the result can be expected to issue.

### 3. Decisions to be Final and Binding

An Explanation, or decision following Review or Further Review (as the case may be) given by:

- (i) the IRC Assistant Director under Appeal Stage (A) (if not subject to appeal),
- (ii) the IRC Director under Appeal Stage (B) (if not subject to appeal),

(iii) the Independent Committee under Appeal Stage (C), shall be final and binding on the parties.

#### 4. Review of Appeal Policy and Procedures

The IRC intends to keep this policy under regular review and may update it from time to time. Policy updates will be effective on the date that the update is posted on the IRC website. Please check the IRC website regularly for updates.