

University College Cork - Strategic Research Fund – Guidelines 2015

Background

A major element of UCC's research strategy is focused on creating Centres of Excellence for research based on a critical mass of expertise that closely aligns with key Government and EU policies including; the *National Research Prioritisation Exercise: First Progress Report* (June 2014), the *Horizon 2020: Sustaining Excellence in University Research and Innovation* report (December 2013) and the *EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020) – Irelands Strategy and Target for Participation Report*, (December 2013).

Sustained support for research over the past 16 years has enabled significant development of University research infrastructure, with subsequent increases in research capacity and critical mass. More recently, economic conditions have created an increasingly competitive national funding environment with real and potential impacts on the sustainability of research activity in the University. To ensure the competitiveness of its research mission, UCC is presented with key challenges including:

- Ensuring the sustainability and development of existing research strengths.
- Stimulating new research areas and opportunities that are aligned with local, regional, national and European priorities.
- Effective positioning of UCC research to maximize opportunities for researchers and ensure that the University continues to build critical mass in areas that underpin economic growth.

To meet these challenges, strategic use of research overheads is essential to support the key elements required to maintain competitiveness.

Purpose

The purpose of the Strategic Research Fund (SRF) is:

- to stimulate new research areas and activities
- to maintain and support existing areas of research strength

Applications to the SRF are invited from all disciplines across the four Colleges, Research Centres and Research Institutes. The SRF will not be allocated to the support of staff contracts or the longer term support of research infrastructure.

Priorities

The specific priorities of the SRF are dynamic, reacting to evolving areas of strategic importance identified in the UCC Strategic Plan for Research and Innovation 2013-2017 and Ireland's Strategy and Target for Participation in Horizon 2020 (December 2013). Applications that have a wider University impact, including the potential to foster interdisciplinary research and collaboration or to leverage further research funding from national and EU sources are strongly encouraged. In a broad, non-prescriptive scope, the SRF will:

- Stimulate new initiatives with a focus on supporting the preparation and submission of large national and international research proposals
- Provide strategic resourcing of equipment and / or facilities
- Provide support for teaching and administration relief consistent with UCC's hourly paid policy.
- Provide support for short term travel grants
- Provide seed funding for discrete research projects of strategic relevance
- Provide matching funding for the support of scholarships such as the Fulbright Awards
- Provide a support fund for European Research Council (ERC) applicants to ensure UCC maintains competitiveness in leveraging H2020 ERC grants.

- To ensure UCC retains core services, a fund for urgent equipment repair will be retained. This fund will focus on the repair of core equipment used by multiple, distinct, research teams (ideally at least 3). Maintenance contracts for equipment will not be accommodated by this fund.

Operation

The SRF draws its funds from the overhead generated from research income. A top-slice of 10% of overhead income will be retained; the total value of the fund will therefore be dependent on the research income generated. Funds will not be allocated on a proportional basis; overheads will populate a central SRF, accessible on a competitive basis to all initiatives across the four Colleges.

Frequency

SRF funds are distributed *via* yearly calls in late spring/early summer of each year, with funding to be committed and used within a 12 month period from the date of notification of the award.

Application

Application to the SRF is by means of a dedicated form available from the OVRPI website (<http://www.ucc.ie/research/rio/fuf.html>). Any appropriate supporting documentation, such as equipment quotes, letters from collaborators or Heads of Department, must be attached to the form. Please note the following when submitting an application:

- All applications must be submitted electronically to the email address:
strategicresearchfund@ucc.ie
- All applications must include either a) original signature/(s) or b) *electronic signature/(s) *{An electronic signature in this context is defined as an image of a handwritten signature – other forms of e-signature will not be accepted}
- Applications must not exceed 3MB in size

- Competed applications (form, support letters etc.) must be submitted in a **single pdf file**.
- There is a limit of 2 support letters per application and a limit of one page for each support letter.
- Once submitted, applications may not be revised, modified or updated.

All successful applicants, and details of their funded proposals, may be published on the OVPRI website (www.ucc.ie/research) once notification of outcome has been received by all applicants.

Evaluation

Applications will be graded as Exceptional (5), Excellent (4), Very Strong (3), Strong (2), Moderate (1), Insufficient (0) based on the following criteria:

- Potential to develop new strategic research areas
- Complementarity to existing research strengths and /or alignment with the University Strategic Plan for Research and Innovation 2013-2017 and College Strategic Plans (2013-2017)
- Potential to develop new external strategic interactions and activities
- Provision of matching funding
- Potential impact and / or benefit to the research activity of the applicant and to the University
- Interdisciplinary aspects (where appropriate)

Administration

The SRF is administered by a Strategic Research Fund Committee (SRFC). Chaired by the Vice President for Research & Innovation, the SRFC membership will be drawn from the following stakeholders:

- Chairs of the College Research Committees
- Director of Research Support Services
- Director of Technology Transfer
- Chair, Academic Council for Research and Innovation Committee
- Representative from Research Centres/Institutes
- Dean of Graduate Studies

Urgent Equipment Repair Fund

A small fund will be retained to allow for flexibility and speed of response to urgent requests that may arise during the year once all other funding avenues have been exhausted. It will consist of 10% of the SRF and applications, under normal circumstances, will be in the range of €1,500 - €5,000.

The focus of this fund is the repair of core research equipment – centrally accessed equipment used, ideally, by at least three distinct research teams. A declaration of such use, signed by the appropriate PIs, will be required for inclusion with the completed application form.

Applications to the urgent equipment repair fund will be considered on an open call basis throughout the year through completion of an application form (available from www.ucc.ie/research). Initial consideration of applications to this fund will be made by a sub-committee consisting of the Director of Research Support Services and the SRF point of contact for the OVPRI, with final decision made by the evaluation committee.

European Research Council (ERC) Application Support Fund

The aim of this fund is to support the development and submission of competitive applications by UCC candidates to the European Research Council (ERC). The maximum allocation shall not exceed €5,000 per candidate. Support obtained from the applicant's College or other sources will be taken into account and must be disclosed in the application. Applications to the ERC Application Support Fund will be considered throughout the year. Initial consideration of applications to this fund will be made by a sub-committee consisting of the Vice President for Research and Innovation, the Director of Research Support Services and the SRF points of contact for the OVPRI. Final decision on eligible applications will be made by the evaluation committee.

Eligible costs include the following:

- Provide support for teaching/administration relief consistent with UCC hourly paid policies
- Provide support for the preparation and submission of an ERC proposal, including
 - professional services in the preparation of an application
 - access to specialist facilities
 - strategy development and planning
 - travel/ meeting costs
 - interview preparation

Application to the ERC Application Support Fund is by means of a dedicated form available from the OVRPI website <http://www.ucc.ie/en/research/>. All applications must be accompanied by a letter of support from the Head of School/Research Centre/Unit. Additional supporting documentation, such as letters from collaborators or Heads of Department, must be attached to the form. Please note the following when submitting an application:

- All applications must be submitted electronically to the email address:
strategicresearchfund@ucc.ie
- All applications must include either a) original signature/(s) or b) *electronic

signature/(s) *{An electronic signature is defined as an image of a handwritten signature – other types of signature will not be accepted}

- Details of funding obtained from other sources (e.g. College, Enterprise Ireland) must be provided
- Applications must not exceed 3MB in size
- Once submitted, applications cannot be revised, modified or updated.
- There is a limit of 2 support letters per application and a limit of one page for each support letter.

Terms and Conditions of the Strategic Research Fund Awards

- Receipt of UCC Strategic Research Fund (SRF) Awards must be acknowledged by return email within Receipt of UCC Strategic Research Fund (SRF) Awards must be acknowledged by return email within five working days issue of the Award.
- Contract assessment forms (Appendix C's) need to be completed by signatories (applicants and co-applicants) within ten working days post Award acceptance.
- Contract assessment forms are to be returned to the Research Office in hard copy with original signatures in order to process setting up of research accounts. Contract assessment forms are at: <http://www.ucc.ie/en/research/fuf/>
- SRF Awards must be used for the purpose for which they are requested. Should there be any proposed change to the purpose of the Award please contact strategicresearchfund@ucc.ie immediately.
- SRF funds must be used within 12 months of the date of the Award letter.
- It is essential that SRF Awardee's provide a brief but comprehensive account of the outcomes of SRF Awards via a project report. Project report templates are available on the Research Office website. Failure to complete an SRF report will result in ineligibility to compete for future SRF Awards. SRF Reports must be submitted within 14 months of the date of the Award letter.
- The SRF must be acknowledged on all items of equipment and at all events and

publicity including; presentations, conferences and publications where SRF funds have been used. A copy of the SRF logo is available from the Research Office website.

- Funding from the SRF cannot be used to support staff employment contracts. However, SRF funds may be used to cover hourly occasional staff to undertake specific tasks, provided these are set out clearly in the proposal. It is essential that use of SRF is compliant with the UCC policy on recruitment of hourly occasional staff accessible at this following link: [Occasional staff UCC](#)