# General Application Feedback

# GOI/2026 – Government of Ireland Programmes

Potential applicants are invited to consider the general application feedback provided by assessors in advance of submitting their applications. While taking on board this feedback will not guarantee an grant, it may be useful in preventing the most common shortcomings which assessors have identified in applications to these programmes.

**General Comments**

* Start early and expect to revise your application multiple times.
* Proposals should be written by the applicant with some input and assistance from the proposed supervisor/mentor.
* Make the proposal understandable to non-specialists, while detailed enough for experts.
* Focus on precision: clearly define research questions, contributions, design, challenges (and potential mitigations), and ethics.
* Avoid vague or generic statements; be specific.
* Define acronyms at first use.
* Follow all guidelines carefully.
* Place information in the correct sections—do not rely on the personal statement to carry key research details. This approach reinforces that the applicant can organise a research project coherently.
* Use “the applicant” instead of your name, especially in uploaded documents like Gantt charts or publication lists.
* Proofread thoroughly.

**PROJECT**

**Clarity and coherence of the proposed research:**

* Be concise: Use short paragraphs and focused descriptions.
* Clarify innovation: Clearly explain the new idea as if the reader is unfamiliar with the topic.
* Lay abstract: Explain what is being proposed and why—not just the background. Test the clarity with non-experts.
* Abstract overview: Summarise the full application, not just intentions.
* Structure clearly: Include aims, objectives, research questions, hypotheses, and predictions.
* Detail methods: Describe experimental approaches and expected outcomes in sufficient detail.
* Link sections: Ensure strong connections between the literature review, research questions, and design.
* Review purposefully: Focus the literature review on specific questions and existing knowledge.
* Explain intellectual foundations: Articulate clearly the conceptual framework and justify the chosen approaches.

**Quality of the proposed research design and methodologies**

* Describe clearly: Detail the research design, methodology, and tasks with justification.
* Be specific: Include numbers (e.g. sample size, interviews) and avoid vague descriptions.
* Avoid jargon: Use clear language and explain the rationale behind the chosen methodology.
* State capabilities: Indicate your existing skills or training needs for the methodology.
* Reflect critically: Acknowledge the limitations and strengths of the design and chosen methodology.
* Align components: Ensure the background leads logically to the research questions, and ensure they closely link to the aims, objectives, and methods.
* Clarify interdisciplinarity: Identify the relevant discipline, seek expert advice, and plan training if needed.
* Address cultural/language aspects: Explain how differences will be managed and how language skills will be acquired.
* Be practical: Clearly outline what will be done and how, after establishing why.
* Fieldwork abroad: Include supervision plans, safety considerations, and institutional protocols for those undertaking work study/abroad.

**Feasibility of the proposed milestones, deliverables and contingency plans**

* Plan for risks: Identify potential challenges and include a clear contingency plan linked to each aim and method.
* Integrate deliverables: Include them in the dissemination plan; consider new datasets as publishable outputs.
* Interview strategies: Provide multiple recruitment approaches in contingency planning.
* Be realistic: Carefully estimate time for desk and empirical research; define achievable milestones.
* Secure key partners: Confirm involvement or outline clear steps and alternatives if participation is uncertain.
* Specialist skills: Be honest about the time needed to master new techniques.
* Include outputs: Strong applications plan for thesis, publications, presentations, and stakeholder engagement.
* Book projects: One-year timelines require realistic expectations for completion.
* Use GANTT charts: Present clear milestones and deliverables visually.

**Consideration as to how the proposed research will advance state of the art and make a contribution to existing knowledge:**

* Position the research: Clearly explain how the project relates to the current state of the art – applicants may think this is evident, but they should be explicit so as to demonstrate their understanding and consideration of this aspect.
* Avoid assumptions: Don’t assume the relevance of the research is obvious—explicitly state it and make considered arguments of how it will advance the state of the art.
* Think globally: Reference international literature, not just local sources.
* Highlight impact: Describe expected outcomes and relevance both within and beyond academia e.g. policy formulation. Provide a preliminary indication of insights or outcomes expected from the research.
* Address societal relevance: Link the research to broader social issues (e.g. culture, well-being).
* Argue originality: Make a strong case for the project’s novelty and contribution.
* Identify gaps: Explain why the project is timely, but avoid overstating its uniqueness.
* Advance knowledge: Be specific about how the research will contribute to the field.
* Include theory: If applicable, state how the project contributes to theoretical development.
* Rather than claiming the project fills a gap in existing research, highlight how it builds upon and significantly advances current knowledge. Avoid overstating originality; instead, demonstrate innovation through the project's meaningful development of established work.

**Plans for dissemination and knowledge exchange of the proposed research:**

* Go beyond listing academic outputs—strong plans integrate scholarly dissemination with industry and public engagement and outreach activities, reflecting the public’s stake in funded research.
* While early-career publications can be valuable, premature publishing may misrepresent evolving work and detract from core research efforts—plan carefully.
* The most compelling applications explain *why* specific journals, conferences, or events are chosen, showing a clear dissemination strategy.
* Avoid generic plans; name key journals, conferences, and outline concrete outreach activities.
* Innovative approaches—like using social media or traditional media—can enhance visibility beyond academia.

**Consideration of the relevant ethical issues and sex/gender dimension:**

* Ethical Considerations: Clearly outline all ethical issues, referencing relevant guidelines. Provide a full account of consent procedures, especially for interviews, and demonstrate awareness of required training and institutional support.
* Sex/Gender Dimension: Address gender implications thoughtfully. Avoid stating none exist without consulting a supervisor/mentor. Demonstrating engagement with this dimension—even when its relevance is not immediately apparent—is regarded positively.
* Inclusivity: Reflect on broader inclusivity issues, including ethnicity and other social factors.
* Best Practice: Strong applications show deep ethical reflection and a proactive approach to inclusivity and gender sensitivity.

**Key Considerations:**

* Risk & Contingency: Where risks are identified, include alternative research approaches as contingency plans.
* Sex/Gender Dimension: If relevant, integrate this into the research design with full detail. Avoid dismissing it without consultation.
* Tone & Language: Avoid excessive superlatives when describing skills, training, or supervisors—clarity is more persuasive.
* Literature Engagement: Go beyond listing names—engage critically with relevant theoretical and empirical work.
* Research Design: Explain chosen methods, their suitability, interrelation, and how they support the research aims.
* Strategic Framing: Clearly articulate the motivation behind the research strategy and its contribution to the field.
* Accessibility: Write for a broad audience—explain context and significance clearly.
* Outcomes & Dissemination: Provide detailed, even provisional, plans for outputs. Name specific journals, conferences, and justify choices.
* Research Questions: Clearly state the questions and why they matter—what gap or challenge they address.
* Methodology & Timeline: Detail what will be done, how, why, and when—include a provisional timetable.
* Public Engagement: Include plans for outreach beyond academia, for example involving patients in clinical research.
* Monograph Plans: If applicable, name preferred publishers and provide evidence of engagement. Ideally, the applicant should already have preliminary correspondence with an editor.
* Dissemination Strategy: Justify chosen outlets and aim for genuine knowledge exchange, not just one-way dissemination. Knowledge exchange should involve genuine exchange and co-production rather than only dissemination to non-academic audiences.

**APPLICANT**

**Applicant Track Record & Research Potential**

* Fit for Project: Clearly explain why your background and wider experience make you well-suited to the proposed research.
* Academic Trajectory: If undergraduate grades were low/modest, address this openly. An upward academic trend can be a strength.
* Experience: Include relevant employment, internships (specify if voluntary or course-based), and research experience—avoid repetition.
* Achievements: Present your track record clearly, including publications or work submitted for publication. If none, identify work with publication potential.
* Research Breadth: Show evidence of research potential through academic, professional, and life experiences.
* Focus: Avoid narrowing your topic too much if it’s already been explored at undergraduate or master’s level.
* Added Value: Strong applicants combine academic success with internships, volunteering, collaboration, leadership, and contributions to research or higher education.
* Highlight any work submitted for publication and if none has been submitted, identify work that could lead to a publication.
* Ongoing PhD: If applicable, include data already generated to demonstrate progress.

**Writing a Strong Personal Statement**

* Tone & Purpose: Show enthusiasm and commitment. Focus on your suitability for the proposed research, your qualities and experience that link to the ability to conduct the research — not a CV or autobiography.
* Relevance: Highlight qualities and experiences directly linked to your ability to conduct the research. Avoid emotional language; stick to relevant facts.
* Structure: Avoid long chronological narratives. Make key achievements and experiences clearly visible.
* Contextualisation: Explain how the research fits with your past work, whether it’s already started, how it’s been funded, and why further funding is needed.
* Insight & Motivation: Include personal reflection—how your interest developed and how the project builds on or diverges from previous work.
* Broader Experience: Mention non-academic activities that show genuine interest in the field. Personal experiences that built research-relevant skills are valuable.
* Evidence & Endorsements: Support claims with evidence—awards, grants, achievements, publications, or work with publication potential.
* Future Plans: Outline long-term goals and how the grant supports them, without sounding overconfident.
* Clarify Education Path: Explain any unusual academic paths or grade patterns.
* Coherence: Ensure your academic record, experience, and career plan form a clear, well-supported narrative.

**Match between applicant's profile and the proposed research project**

* Avoid Overstatement: Don’t exaggerate the fit between your background and the project—this may raise concerns regarding an overly narrow focus or limited broader perspective.
* Independent Thinking: If the project builds on prior work with a supervisor or employer, highlight how you’ve developed innovative questions independently.
* Research Continuity: A clear trajectory and long-standing commitment to the topic strengthens the application. If the link to previous qualifications and experience isn’t obvious, make a compelling case.

Skills & Readiness: The proposed project should not be entirely dependent on the acquisition of new or unfamiliar skills. Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate existing knowledge of key theories and methodologies to convey preparedness. A lack of relevant experience/skills may weaken the application, even if training is available within the eligible research institution, as the necessary expertise may not be attainable within the proposed timeframe, for instance.

**Key Considerations:**

* Relevant Experience: Go beyond listing degrees and modules—explain the skills and knowledge gained, especially through dissertations, and how they align with the proposed project.
* Project Development: Undergraduate projects are valuable training, but PhD proposals should show novelty and independence, not simply extend prior work.
* Academic Shift: If your proposed research differs from your academic background, provide a clear, convincing rationale for the change.
* Research Experience: Detail any research achievements and explain their relevance to the proposed project.
* Contextualisation: Show how the scholarship builds on past achievements and will make a meaningful difference.
* Master’s Degree: If not yet completed, provide a well-supported projection of results and highlight research experience to show readiness for doctoral work.
* Continuity: Demonstrate a clear progression from past research to the proposed project. Applications the 2-year postdoctoral fellowship should distinguish the new project from the PhD.
* International Qualifications: For degrees outside Ireland/UK, explain grading and outcomes clearly.

**TRAINING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

**Clarity and quality of training and career development plan:**

* Purposeful Planning: Don’t just list training courses—explain how each supports your career goals and research needs.
* Integration: Link specialist knowledge and training to specific project phases. Show how timing and content of training align with research tasks.
* Justify Collaborations: Explain the value of placements and collaborations—what they’ll contribute to the project and your future career.
* Social Relevance: Connect academic interests to broader societal issues. Demonstrate how training enhances your ability to engage meaningfully beyond academia.
* International Exposure: Include plans for at least one visit to a research group abroad, if possible.
* Career Awareness: Show initiative in exploring qualifications for roles beyond academia. Reflect on transferable skills gained from internships or work experience which are useful for accomplishment of the research and on which to build at postdoctoral stage.
* Structured Plan: Present a clear career pathway with specific goals, activities, timelines, and rationale for each step.
* Specificity Over Generality: Avoid vague references to alternative careers—be specific about skills needed and how/when they’ll be acquired.

**Capacity to acquire new knowledge and skills:**

* Clearly identify the applicant’s skill gaps and how they’ll be addressed.
* Align training with the project’s goals and the applicant’s track record.
* Reflect the project’s stage and be tailored to both the project and the applicant.
* Link existing skills with those to be developed, showing how the grant will enhance career-relevant capabilities.
* Detail any prior training, especially independent courses, and specify realistic plans for future training.
* Include broader skills like leadership, management, teaching, and administration to stand out.
* Be realistic about the time available for training versus research and for skill acquisition, especially for intensive skills like languages.
* Show evidence of the applicant’s ability to acquire new skills through past training experiences.
* Identify how training and development needs will be met at the eligible research body, including specific courses or modules.

**Key Considerations:**

* Training & Career Development: Ensure a strong link between training plans and the proposed project. Clearly identify skill gaps and outline realistic career paths stemming from the project.
* Formal Training: Include specific courses, workshops, or placements relevant to the project and career goals.
* Research Quality: Focus on the quality of research over journal impact factors. Be realistic about publication expectations.
* Personal Insight: Go beyond listing achievements—show original thinking, critical reflection, and awareness of debates or limitations in your field.
* Skill Coverage: Address both technical/scientific/methodological and transferable skills (e.g. leadership, teaching, management).
* Career Pathways: Consider roles beyond academia, even if your primary goal is an academic career. Provide concrete examples of alternative paths.
* Skill Transformation: Show how the scholarship/fellowship will build on existing skills and enable career progression and link these to opportunities because of the scholarship/fellowship —not just generic development.
* Institutional Choice: If staying at the same institution or with the same mentor, justify why this is the best choice for your development.
* Prestige & Impact: Reflect on the value of the scholarship/fellowship beyond funding—consider its prestige and influence on your career.
* Networking: Demonstrate how the grant will expand your professional network and situate your research within the wider academic or industry context.

**ENVIRONMENT**

**Suitability and ability of the proposed academic supervisor(s)/mentor to provide adequate supervision:**

* Content Quality:Statements should be detailed and tailored, covering the mentor’s/supervisor’s research, career, supervisory experience, relationship to the applicant and institutional strengths.
* Engagement:Applicants and mentors/supervisors should have had thorough discussions prior to submission, showing a clear fit between the project and institution.
* Support Structure:Clarify how the applicant will be supported, especially in large research groups where day-to-day supervision may vary.
* Expertise & Environment:Supervisors/mentors must demonstrate relevant expertise in the proposed research and a supportive research environment.
* Focus on Applicant:Avoid listing CVs—emphasize how the supervisor/mentor will actively support the applicant’s development.
* Track Record:Include relevant information (e.g. years post-PhD, number of students/postdoctoral researchers supervised).
* Experience Gaps:If the supervisor/mentor lacks experience in supervising students or postdoctoral researchers, they should consider involving a senior co-supervisor, in the case of GOIPG applications or an advisor, in the case of GOIPD applications, and explain why the primary supervisor or mentor is still a strong choice as a researcher.
* International Context:Mention the research team’s standing globally, if applicable.

**Quality of infrastructure, facilities, and support to be provided by the eligible research body:**

* Avoid Templates:Provide a personal, well-reasoned justification for choosing the institution, linking its environment directly to the project.
* Distinctive Features:Highlight unique opportunities—industry placements, inter-lab exchanges, specialised equipment, datasets, internal grants, and outreach activities.
* Institutional Knowledge:Show familiarity with the host’s research culture, especially support for early career researchers.
* Training & Support:Emphasise comprehensive training programmes and support structures (academic, pastoral, administrative).
* Specialised Resources:For niche projects, detail access to necessary tools like specialised equipment or computing power.
* Collaborations:A research project is also about future networking links and organisations, which means it is almost impossible for a single eligible research body to offer the perfect setting, strengthen the case with planned collaborations to fill gaps.
* Interdisciplinary Support:For cross-disciplinary projects, provide evidence of inter-departmental or institutional support.

**Match between the applicant, supervisor(s)/mentor, and research body:**

* Alignment:Successful applications clearly demonstrate a strong fit between the applicant, supervisor/mentor, and eligible research body, with excellent infrastructure and support for the proposed research.
* Supervisor/Mentor Fit:Highlight the supervisor’s/mentor’s current research interests and track record, including outcomes of past PhD/postdoctoral researchers.
* Tailored Justification:Avoid generic research body descriptions—explain why the chosen research body and supervisor/mentor are uniquely suited to the project.
* Institutional Resources:Detail relevant training, networking, outreach, and research resources, linking them directly to the project.
* Collaborative Fit:Show how the research benefits from the wider institutional environment, not just the immediate department or supervisor.
* Expertise Match:Demonstrate how the applicant’s background complements the supervisor’s expertise and departmental specialisms.
* Supportive Environment:Emphasise the institution’s ability to meet the applicant’s specific needs, including academic and pastoral support.
* Current Experience:If already affiliated with the research body, reflect on that experience to strengthen the case.

**Key Considerations:**

* Research Costs: Supervisors/Mentors must clarify how any research costs not covered by the scholarship/fellowship will be funded.
* Multiple Supervisors: Clearly outline roles, expertise, and supervision logistics (e.g. meeting frequency, location, format) when more than one supervisor is involved in a GOIPG application.
* Established Relationship: Strong applications show an existing connection with the proposed supervisor/mentor and highlight their relevant qualifications and research interests for the proposed research.