



EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS
IRELAND



Cochrane
Ireland

ESI Study within a Review (SWAR) Award Scheme

Guidance Notes

Opening Date: 18th Jan 2024

Closing Date: 31st March 2024

Background

[Evidence Synthesis Ireland](#) (ESI) is an all-Ireland initiative funded by the Health Research Board (HRB) and the HSC R&D Division of the Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland. Our mission is to make evidence syntheses more usable in every sense of the word – better designed, conducted, and reported, more useable for decision-makers, and more usable within healthcare policy and clinical practice decision-making across the island of Ireland and beyond.

Alongside the increase in the number of systematic reviews and other evidence syntheses, there has been growth in the evidence base to inform decisions on how we plan, do and share the findings of systematic reviews. However, substantial uncertainties remain across many aspects of the systematic review process, including, for example:

- optimal approaches to searching and citation screening
- the effectiveness of machine learning in supporting screening and/or data extraction
- the effectiveness of different modes of sharing the findings of reviews with different audiences

Developments in systematic review approaches need high-quality evidence to inform decisions about how they are done. For example, living systematic reviews, which seek to reduce the time between the availability of the findings of primary research studies and their synthesis, need better evidence to inform decisions.

Such uncertainties can be resolved by doing a '**Study Within A Review**' or **SWAR**.

What is a SWAR?

[Video](#)

A SWAR is a research study that can provide evidence to inform decisions about how we plan, do and share the findings of future reviews. It addresses methodological uncertainty and is usually embedded within a systematic review or other evidence synthesis to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative ways of delivering or organising a particular review process. Guided by the methodological uncertainty they seek to address, a research team can select from diverse study approaches, including randomised and non-randomised comparisons, mixed-methods or qualitative study types to design a SWAR to explore the implications and consequences of such methodological decisions.

The SWAR Programme and [Store](#) was established by the All-Ireland Hub for Trials Methodology Research in collaboration with the Medical Research Council's Network of Hubs in the UK and the Global Health Network. That programme provides a library of SWAR methodology studies and a repository for people to log their studies and deposit their findings. Our SWAR programme builds on the learning from the Studies Within a Trial (SWAT) initiative of the [HRB-TMRN](#).

How is a SWAR done?

Some SWARs can be conducted within a single systematic review, whereas others might answer questions that require embedding in multiple systematic reviews. SWARs can be done in several reviews simultaneously or over time, building the evidence temporally. Multiple SWARs could be completed on the same topic, allowing for future cumulative meta-analyses of individual SWARs.

Alternatively, SWARs may explore qualitative considerations, such as the utility of the final review product or the quality of the interpretation associated with systematic review processes such as screening, data extraction, critical appraisal, synthesis, and sharing of findings. This could be considered a Study "Without" A Review. Given that much of the data required to answer SWAR research questions are either generated during a review or can be collected with relatively little effort, SWARs offer a potentially cost-effective approach to improving review processes.

Scope of the call

The scope of the current call is to facilitate the conduct of a SWAR. The SWAR should address an independent methodology research question on either the design, conduct, analysis, reporting, or

dissemination of a systematic review or other evidence synthesis, for which there is current uncertainty and a need to provide evidence to support alternative ways of delivering or organising review processes.

SWAR Topics

There are several topics already outlined for potential SWARs available to view at the [SWAR Store](#). Applicants are welcome to propose their own SWAR or submit for funding to complete one of the registered SWARs. We strongly encourage SWAR applications that address the prioritised [Priority III questions](#), and we welcome other topics.

Some examples of SWARs might include:

- Does single vs. double title and abstract screening impact the study selection process?
- What simplified or omitted systematic review methods are appropriate to apply in a rapid review, and what are the effects of these simplifications or omissions?
- Evaluating the effects of dual, independent screening compared with a continuous sampling plan.
- Investigating the effects of including automation techniques when conducting reviews (e.g., using robot reviewer, automatic extraction of metadata, or 'AI' technology to aid the literature screening process).
- What are the barriers and facilitators to involving the patients and public in rapid reviews?

SWARs that were awarded in the ESI SWAR Award Scheme 2023:

- Exploring the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Systematic Review Abstract Screening: A Comparative Study of AI-aided and Manual Reviewing Methods
- Investigation into the sensitivity and completeness of search strategies built using a text-mining word frequency tool (PubReMiner) compared to current best practice search strategy building: a study within a review (SWAR).
- Exploring the use of stakeholder consultation exercises within scoping reviews: a qualitative interview study

Number of awards

Two awards are available annually for up to €6250 each, inclusive of 25% overheads (i.e. €5000 exclusive of overheads). Overheads are calculated as 25% of direct project costs. Award duration is for up to 12 months from date of award, and strict timelines apply.

Who should apply

Evidence synthesis teams working on a planned or ongoing systematic review or other synthesis are invited to apply. Approval for the SWAR application must be obtained in writing from the Principal Investigator/Lead Reviewer for the host systematic review(s), if applicable.

- Lead applicants must be currently resident in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland and working in an eligible institution*.
- Host reviews and collaborators can be located anywhere in the world.
- Applications from early career researchers are welcome**. However, the research team must demonstrate sufficient breadth and depth of expertise across the team to successfully complete the SWAR. Such applicants should provide evidence of mentoring arrangements to provide academic and research support.

*HRB Host Institutions: <https://www.hrb.ie/funding/funding-schemes/before-you-apply/all-grant-policies/approval-of-host-institutions/>

** Early career researcher - one who is currently a PhD trainee or within their first five years of academic or other research-related employment after completing their postgraduate research training.

Application Process

1. **ESI SWAR Award application form** - Complete the application form and **sign**
2. **Curriculum Vitae** – 3-page (maximum) CV in **PDF** of Lead Applicant
3. Submit the Application Form and CV as a **single** PDF attachment to esi@universityofgalway.ie by **5pm on 31st March 2024**. Please include “**ESI SWAR AWARD**” in the email subject line

Peer Review Process

Applications will be subject to peer review. The review process is an independent process where conflict of interest rules is applied rigorously. All applicants will be notified when the peer review is complete.

Assessment Criteria:

Reviewers will review the applicant’s application form and CV and score the application based on the following criteria and weightings:

- Is the applicant an early career researcher? Is the mentoring arrangement satisfactory? - (10%)
- Track record of the applicant team - (20%)
- Rationale and potential impact of SWAR - (30%)
- Methodological approach of the SWAR - (30%)
- International collaboration - (10%)

Budget

Allowable costs include:

Salary (salary, PRSI, pension contribution)

Applicants should use the IUA website for the most up-to-date recommended salary scales for academic researchers (<http://www.iua.ie/research-innovation/researcher-salary-scales/>). Please note employee pension contribution of 5% has already been incorporated into the IUA gross salary figure. Please state the pay scale used and the level and point on the scale. This should be justified accordingly.

ESI does not provide funding for the salary or benefits of academic staff within research institutions who are already receiving salary or benefits. ESI does not provide a salary or buy-out time for collaborators. Employer's contributions to PRSI and/or national insurance at the appropriate rates (e.g. PRSI is calculated at 11.05% of gross salary in RoI).

Pension provision up to a maximum of 20% of gross salary will be paid to the host institution to enable compliance with the Employment Control Framework (an additional 5% employee contribution are part of the salary). The level of employer contribution should be in accordance with the model adopted by the host institution.

Running costs

For all costs required to carry out the activities (e.g. software, design costs etc). Funding for small items of equipment can be included in this section. Standalone computers will **not** be funded. All costs must be inclusive of VAT, where applicable.

Dissemination and knowledge exchange costs

This covers costs associated with the Dissemination and Knowledge Exchange Plan – i.e. article processing fees, Seminar/conference attendance (provide details of name and location, where possible), and any other means of communicating outcomes or engaging with stakeholders.

Overhead contribution

In accordance with the HRB Policy on Overhead Usage, ESI will contribute to the indirect costs of the research through an overhead payment of 25% of Total Direct Modified Costs. The overhead contribution includes the following items: recruitment costs, office space, and software.

Technical guidance:

Members of ESI's Executive Management Committee or Core Team are ineligible to apply or be collaborators on a SWAR Award. However, once awarded, awardees will be welcome to receive technical guidance on the SWAR methods from the ESI team.

References

Devane, D, Burke, NN, Treweek, S, et al. Study within a review (SWAR). *J Evid Based Med*. 2022; 1- 5. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jebm.12505>

(2012), Education section – Studies within a review (SWAR). *Journal of Evidence-Based Medicine*, 5: 188-189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1756-5391.2012.01193.x>