



# Evidence Synthesis Ireland Fellowship Scheme 2024

## Guidance Document

### Key points:

#### What is it?

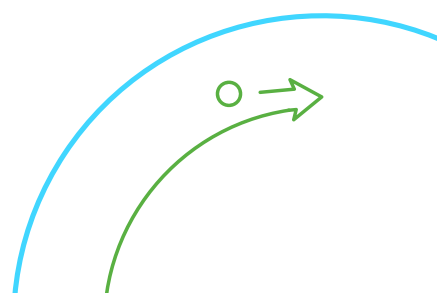
- The ESI Fellowship model places Fellows virtually with experienced evidence synthesis centres and review teams nationally and internationally, to gain hands-on evidence synthesis experience in a high-quality environment and one-to-one mentorship
- The aim is to provide Fellows with the opportunity to receive mentoring from experts in evidence synthesis and contribute to reviews that have a strong policy and/or practice impact
- Fellows have free access to ESI structured evidence synthesis training workshops for during the 2-year fellowship (subject to capacity)
- In addition to the training and mentorship described, Fellows receive access to a €1000 bursary, co-authorship on high quality review reports/publications and other benefits as described in the guidance documents.
- The scheme operates on a rolling call, up to 3 times per year where available reviews will be advertised

#### Who should apply?

- Fellows may be in full or part time employment, be clinicians or clinician-academic trainees, researchers, academics and/or postgraduate students working in health and/or social care areas
- Applicants must be resident of the **Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland** at the time of application
- The Fellowships are **not** paid, which allows those working full-time to apply<sup>1</sup>
- This scheme seeks to build capacity. It is therefore recommended that applicants justify the new skills/knowledge they will accrue from this Fellowship.

#### What's involved?

- Fellows are expected to commit to a minimum of 8 hours per week working on the review (may vary throughout the review process and flexibility is required).



## Introduction

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There has been a rapid expansion in the amount and availability of scientific evidence produced to inform policy and clinical practice. This creates challenges around quality assurance of the evidence generated (as not all evidence syntheses are created equal) and also dissemination of that information. Healthcare decisions should be based on a synthesis of the global body of evidence rather than relying on the convenient selection of one or more discrete studies.

Evidence synthesis methods seek to establish the overall balance of information on a given topic, and are based on identifying, assessing and examining all the available relevant evidence to inform healthcare decisions. Failure to use synthesised evidence in decision-making is known to lead to, at best, waste and, at worst, harm to the public, including increased mortality. Despite the growth in evidence synthesis and the increasing complexity of reviews of evidence, there is an urgent need to improve the capability to do and use evidence syntheses. Thus, the demand for evidence synthesis skills is gaining momentum and a critical mass of experts in a range of synthesis methodologies is required.

The primary aim of **Evidence Synthesis Ireland (ESI)** is to build evidence synthesis knowledge, awareness and capacity among the public, healthcare institutions and policymakers, clinicians and researchers on the island of Ireland. In order to build this capacity, to increase the capability of individuals, organisations and institutions to undertake evidence synthesis, and to promote the conduct of high-quality evidence synthesis methodology, ESI hosts the **ESI Fellowship Scheme**.

The overall **objective** of the Fellowship is to give the Fellow the opportunity to learn about evidence synthesis, and develop the practical skills of how to plan, design, conduct and report an evidence synthesis. By developing talented and skilled Fellows, the scheme will build our capacity to undertake high quality evidence syntheses on the island of Ireland.

The ESI Fellowship scheme involves placing Fellows (in a virtual environment<sup>1</sup>) with experienced evidence synthesis centres and review teams in Ireland and internationally. Fellows will receive structured theoretical training from ESI and join an existing or new review team being led by experienced reviewers within the respective centre to gain hands-on evidence synthesis experience in a high-quality environment. Fellows will also receive one-to-one mentorship from a designated mentor from the review centre. This will afford the Fellow the opportunity of networking with a range of stakeholders in evidence synthesis and will provide direct experience for ESI Fellows in the conduct of evidence synthesis projects that ultimately inform decision making for clinical practice, health services and health policy.

## Award details

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A number of Evidence Synthesis Ireland Fellowships are available per year. Award duration is until review completion or for up to 24 months<sup>2</sup>.

## Who should apply

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Fellows may be in full- or part-time employment, be clinicians or clinician-academic trainees, researchers, academics and/or postgraduate students currently resident in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland, and working in health and/or social care areas. As this is a training Fellowship, there are no restrictions on career stage and applications from those with no prior experience and/or structured training in conducting evidence synthesis are encouraged. Applicants should read the guidance documents carefully.

# Fellowship Process

## *Selection and identification of reviews and Fellows*

- ESI will work with review teams to maintain a register of early stage and upcoming reviews that would welcome Fellows for training and mentorship. Reviews will be announced as a rolling call up to 3 times per year.
- Fellowship calls will be disseminated through the ESI Fellowship application scheme and advertised through the ESI website, newsletter and social media accounts.
- ESI will identify the reviews into which Fellows can be embedded and then recruit Fellows through a formal application process to a **named review**.
- A candidate may decide to apply for a review that uses a particular method they want to develop expertise in, rather than a clinical topic.
- Candidates will be asked to select and apply for **one review**, but to also indicate if they have a second preference review. Second preferences will only be relevant if there are insufficient applicants or insufficient applicants deemed of appointable status for the review.
- Some reviews may accommodate up to two Fellows subject to agreement between host review centres and ESI.

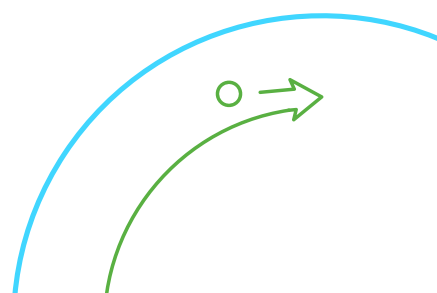
## *Training, mentorship and capacity-building*

- Each Fellow will have one named mentor within the review centre to guide and supervise the learning experience.
- Each Fellow will be able to avail of structured theoretical training which will be provided and funded by ESI.
- The Fellow will be engaged at the beginning of a review and facilitated to contribute to each step of the review process in a timely manner under guidance of an experienced mentor.
- Practical, hands-on evidence synthesis experience and mentoring will be provided by the experienced review teams within the respective centre.
- For the team to function, effective communication strategies and a schedule of mentorship meetings will be agreed by Fellows and mentors at the start of each Fellowship.

# Benefits for Fellows

It is expected that ESI Fellows will gain the following benefits from their participation in the Fellowship scheme:

- The opportunity to develop a variety of evidence synthesis methodology skills (expected competencies outlined in Table 1)
- Evidence synthesis experience without the need to manage or lead a review team
- Free access to Covidence during their Fellowship
- Free attendance at ESI evidence synthesis training workshops (subject to capacity)
- Co-authorship on high quality review reports/publications<sup>3</sup>
- €1000 bursary to support travel and/or dissemination
- Mentorship in evidence synthesis from high-quality review teams
- Networking and collaboration opportunities with national and international experts



## Financial contributions

- Fellows are **NOT** paid by ESI (nor indeed by host centres) and will work with the centre team remotely. There is access to a bursary, held centrally by ESI, for receipted travel and expenses up to a value of €1,000 available to each Fellow to support travel to the host centre and/or activities to promote review dissemination (e.g. presenting at conferences based on participation as an author on the review).
- ESI will make a financial contribution to the host centre (as per engagement agreement) to support the learning for each Fellow hosted.

## Expectations

### Host review teams are expected to

- Nominate a Mentor responsible for facilitating the ESI Fellowship programme.
- Provide a high-quality evidence synthesis environment within which the Fellow can learn the practical and logistical skills of evidence synthesis (Table 1).
- Afford the Fellow the opportunity of being involved significantly in the review process with the focus on the Fellows' developing evidence synthesis methodology skills (Table 1), with the opportunity for co-authorship with ICMJE guidelines.
- Afford the Fellow the opportunity of networking with a range of stakeholders in evidence synthesis.
- Provide evidence of mentoring arrangements to provide leadership and support for the Fellow.
- Keep ESI informed of the progress of the review and the Fellow, and inform ESI in good time if the Fellows' performance or the review progress is slower than expected or encountering other difficulties.
- Offer the Fellow opportunities to engage with other co-existing reviews where available and is mutually agreeable to both Fellow and review teams.
- Invite and give the opportunity for the Fellow to co-author potential reports/publications or funding proposals arising from the host review(s).
- Host teams are expected to comply fully with the terms of the Fellowship engagement agreement signed at the beginning of the Fellowship.
- Host teams are expected to acknowledge ESI as follows '<Fellow Name> was supported by the Irish Health Research Board and the HSC Public Health Agency (Grant number ESI-2021-001) in association with Evidence Synthesis Ireland/Cochrane Ireland' in all dissemination, publication and knowledge exchange activities

### ESI Fellows are expected to

- Spend a minimum of 8 hours per week (external to formal evidence synthesis theoretical training provided) working on their review. Although this may vary at different stages of the review this is the minimum expectation that Fellows are expected to commit to the review. Flexibility will be required.
- Be involved significantly in each step of the review process with the focus on the Fellows' developing evidence synthesis methodology skills.
- Participate in opportunities to co-author potential reports/publications or funding proposals arising from the host review(s).
- Report on outputs and other impacts they generate from the synthesis product (e.g. presentations, abstracts etc.)
- Engage with appropriate dissemination and knowledge exchange (e.g. to give a talk on their review and the process experiences of same, present at ESI events on their Fellowship experience).
- Acknowledge ESI as follows: '<Fellow Name> was supported by the Irish Health Research Board and the HSC Public Health Agency (Grant number ESI-2021-001) in association with Evidence Synthesis Ireland/Cochrane Ireland' in all dissemination, publication and knowledge exchange activities.
- Comply fully with the terms of the engagement agreement signed at the beginning of the Fellowship.

## Application Process

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1. Complete ESI Fellowship application form and **sign**
2. **Curriculum Vitae** – 2 page (maximum) CV
3. Submit Application and CV as a **single PDF** attachment to [esi@universityofgalway.ie](mailto:esi@universityofgalway.ie) by **26th Sept 2024 at 4pm**.
  - a) Include “ESI Fellowship Scheme” in the email subject line
4. **Academic References**<sup>4,5,6</sup>: **two** references are required that indicate your academic suitability and potential to undertake the Fellowship.
  - a) Complete Section A in two copies of the **Academic Reference Form** and provide these to your referees.
  - b) Each of your referees should complete Section B of the Academic Reference Form and submit in **PDF** format to [esi@universityofgalway.ie](mailto:esi@universityofgalway.ie) by **25th Sept 2024 at 4pm**.

Applicants are advised to **read carefully** these Guidance notes and FAQ which outline the conditions of the Fellowship before completing an application. All documentation must be submitted by email by the deadline listed.

## Peer Review Process

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Applications will be subject to peer review<sup>7</sup>. All applicants will be notified of outcomes.

## Frequently asked questions

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### *Do I have to be resident on the island of Ireland?*

Applicants must be resident of the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland at the time of application.

### *If I applied previously, can I use the same references?*

Yes, we will hold references on file for two rounds.

### *Are these Fellowships paid?*

The Fellowships are unsalaried, which allows those working full-time to apply, and allows us to place Fellows with highly experienced evidence synthesis centres and review teams nationally and internationally for first-rate training and mentorship.

### *Can I submit my own review title?*

Applicants must apply for the advertised reviews, and cannot submit their own review title.

## Important Footnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> Where applicable, please ensure the support and commitment of the employer/institution of the applicant to complete the Fellowship program (until review is completed or up to a max of 24 months). It is expected that the applicant and the institution work together to ensure appropriate support will be provided.
- <sup>2</sup> In certain cases, reviews may not be completed within the Fellowship duration of two years.
- <sup>3</sup> Please note that participation in the Fellowship scheme does not guarantee acceptance or publication of the review, as this is subject to editorial, statistical and peer review undertaken by the review centre and the decision to publish or not publish a review is made independently of ESI.
- <sup>4</sup> References from proposed Review mentors will not be accepted. Only two references will be reviewed per applicant – if more references are received, they will not be sent to reviewers.
- <sup>5</sup> It is the Applicant’s responsibility to ensure that references are submitted by the deadline.
- <sup>6</sup> References are supplied confidentially and are not made available to applicants at any stage during or after the competition.

## Appendix 1 - Assessment Criteria:

Reviewers will review the applicant's application form, CV and academic references and score the application based on the following criteria:

- Evidence of clear **justification** for the applicant's interest in choosing the review (i.e. **topic/clinical area** and/or **evidence synthesis methodology**)
- Evidence of a **clear plan** for how the applicant **intends to use** the Fellowship on furthering their **research interests, career trajectory** and **evidence synthesis learning**
- Evidence of how the applicant has demonstrated a beneficial **contribution by the impact or outcome** arising from research contributions\*
- Overall sense of applicant's suitability for Fellowship and potential to carry out the proposed research
- Academic references

\*Research contributions include peer-reviewed publications, research data, research material, databases, audio/video products, national and/or international reports or briefs, models and protocols, software, evidence of influencing policy and/or practice, outreach and/or knowledge exchange activities, media coverage or other relevant research-related activities.

**Table 1: Expected Evidence Synthesis competencies from Fellowship\***

Competency	Level of requirement
1. Building a case for a review and choosing useful titles, including working with stakeholders and searching the literature for existing reviews	Desirable
2. Contributing to the development of a protocol	Desirable
3. Familiarity with PRISMA reporting guidelines and methodological standards (e.g., MECIR standards for Cochrane reviews or other relevant standards for other types of evidence synthesis)	Essential
4. Learn the importance of the search strategy (including searches of electronic databases and grey literature) and contribute to a search strategy by reviewing the search terms and planned sources (e.g., databases) to search	Desirable
5. Experience of screening at both title and abstract and full text level	Essential
6. Experience of data extraction	Essential
7. Experience of quality assessment of included studies/reviews	Essential
8. Contribute to numerical and/or narrative synthesis	Essential
9. Contribute to write up if paper/report	Essential
10. Contribute to summary of findings tables as appropriate	Desirable
11. Writing plain language summaries, blogs or other media outputs to develop skills in 'translating' and communicating review evidence for a lay audience	Essential

\*It is acknowledged that some of these competencies may not be applicable to certain types of reviews (e.g. quality assessment for scoping reviews, evidence and gap maps)