

Immigration Group

Fast-Track Scientific Visa Scheme

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A fast-track scientific visa scheme, operated by EURAXESS Ireland, under the auspices of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (“DJEI”), offers a fast, effective and free means for organisations to employ non-EEA researchers in Ireland without the need for an employment permit. An additional incentive for eligible researchers is that their families are entitled to accompany them to reside and avail of public schooling in Ireland for the duration of their research agreement.

Accreditation of organisations

In order to avail of this scheme, public and private sector organisations must first be accredited by the Office of Science, Technology and Innovation (“OSTI”) within the DJEI and such accreditations are usually granted for a period of five years and are renewable.

The criteria for accreditation of a research organisation¹ are as follows:

- The organisation is carrying out one or more defined research² programmes; the programme or programmes are set out in one or more written statements containing objectives, tasks, timescales, staff resources, funding and projected outputs and outcomes;
- The research programme or programmes are within the scope of the functions of the organisation;
- The allocation of staff, facilities and financial resources to engage in the research programme or programmes has been approved by the research organisation; such approval to be given by the appropriate entity within the organisation with authority to allocate funding and staff to research programmes;
- The resources concerned have been or are in the process of being acquired.

Once accredited, the organisation can then proceed to enter into individual hosting agreements with a researcher, the details of which must be notified to EURAXESS Ireland, a support service for both European and non-European researchers wishing to pursue research careers in Ireland. In turn, EURAXESS Ireland maintains a database of the hosting agreements in Ireland and provides updates to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (“INIS”) of the Department of Justice and Equality to enable INIS to verify the existence of the agreements upon receipt of research visa applications or at the port of entry of researchers.

¹ ‘Research organisation’ means any public or private organisation which conducts research and which has been approved for the purposes of Council Directive 2005/71/EC by a Member State in accordance with the latter’s legislation or administrative practice.

² ‘Research’ means creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications.

Hosting Agreements

By registering for a hosting agreement participants can benefit from accelerated procedures for research staff coming from overseas.

EURAXESS Ireland is the government appointed central processing house for Hosting Agreements and plays a key role in the official accreditation and immigration process. In addition to providing assistance on the scheme via a help desk, the office ensures that paperwork is accurately completed and relevant information is sent to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service.

EURAXESS Ireland manages a central on-line database with details of Hosting Agreement holders and their dependants which can be accessed by Irish immigration authorities and Embassies worldwide. This fast tracks the visa application process for researchers and their families.

Research organisations may sign hosting agreements only if the following conditions are met:

- 1 the research project has been accepted by the relevant authorities in the organisation, after examination of:
 - (a) the purpose and duration of the research, and the availability of the necessary financial resources for it to be carried out;
 - (b) the researcher's qualifications in the light of the research objectives, as evidenced by a certified copy of his/her qualification in accordance with Article 2 (d);³
- 2 during his/her stay the researcher has sufficient monthly resources to meet his/her expenses and return travel costs in accordance with the minimum amount published for the purpose by the Member State, without having recourse to the Member State's social assistance system;
- 3 during his/her stay the researcher has sickness insurance for all the risks normally covered for nationals of the Member State concerned;
- 4 the hosting agreement specifies the legal relationship and working conditions of the researchers.

Application process

Under this scheme, all researchers must have sufficient financial resources to meet their day to day living expenses, return travel expenses and to ensure that they do not become a burden on the Irish social welfare system.

INIS deal with the visa requirements for entry into Ireland. Entry requirements vary according to nationality and for those non-EEA nationals who require a visa to travel to Ireland, they must apply for a 'research visa' in advance of travelling to Ireland. While INIS advise to allow approximately eight weeks for processing, this type of visa application is usually processed in approximately two to four weeks.

For non-visa requiring non-EEA nationals, they must ensure to travel with their original research agreement/contract to enable the immigration official at the port of entry i.e. airport, to enable immigration officials to satisfy themselves that the research agreement/contract is bona fides.

³ "Researcher" means a third country national holding an appropriate higher education qualification, which gives access to doctoral programmes, who is selected by a research organisation for carrying out a research project for which the above qualification is normally required. This includes a person selected by a research organisation for the post of academic lecturer/professor where a core part of their duties is carrying out research (at least 70%).
N.B. This does not apply to teaching-only positions.

Where non-EEA family members of researchers intend to accompany the researcher, they must also apply for a visa, if applicable, or ensure to bring documentary evidence of their relationship to the researcher with them, for example a certified copy of their marriage or birth certificate, in addition to a copy of the researcher's research agreement/contract to produce to the immigration official at their port of entry.

Residing in Ireland

All non-EEA nationals who intend to remain in Ireland for over ninety days must register with the Garda National Immigration Bureau and ensure to keep their permission to remain up to date at all times.

Success of the scheme

Approximately 40 organisations in Ireland and 1,720 researchers from 78 different countries such as China, the USA and India, have availed of it to date. The success of the scheme is no surprise given the fast, effective and free means for organisations to employ non-EEA researchers in Ireland without the need for an employment permit.

Fast-track immigration is an important consideration for internationally mobile scientists and helps to attract the best global talent to Ireland. We now know that facilitating non-EU researchers can be a critical part of their decision to come to Ireland. It is good to know that by adopting the scientific visa, Ireland has become a more attractive location for researchers.

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