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## Mobilitas Pluss järeldoktoritoetuse taotluste hindamisjuhend

### Guidelines for evaluating postdoctoral grant applications

#### I Introduction

The award of postdoctoral grants has been stipulated in the „Guidelines for Mobilitas Pluss postdoctoral grant applications“.

These „Guidelines for evaluating postdoctoral grant applications“ is a document which specifies the evaluation criteria set forth in the „Guidelines for Mobilitas Pluss postdoctoral grant applications“.

The purpose of postdoctoral grants is to supplement Estonian research and development institutions and businesses with young and talented researchers, who have studied or worked in foreign countries and have acquired skills and knowledge for conducting research and development.

The grant period is from 12 months to 24 months.

#### II Relevant terms

- 1) **Postdoctoral grant** is a grant awarded to researchers coming from a foreign country to an Estonian research and development institution for implementation of a specific research and development project.
- 2) **Postdoctoral project** is a description of scientific research, which includes a clearly defined research problem and a specification of basic or applied research to be used for resolving the problem.
- 3) **Postdoctoral fellow** is a researcher who has been awarded a doctoral degree or an equivalent qualification within the past five years as of the deadline for the submission of grant applications. In case the postdoctoral fellow was on pregnancy leave, maternity leave or parental leave or in compulsory military service (or equivalent alternative service) after the award of the doctoral degree, the period of qualification is extended by the corresponding period in full months, rounded up to the higher number of months.

The postdoctoral fellow has completed his or her doctoral studies and has been awarded a doctoral degree in a foreign country and who has not completed doctoral studies in and been awarded a doctoral degree, incl. under a co-supervision contract, by the institution that applies for the grant for implementation of the postdoctoral project); and

- 4) **The postdoctoral supervisor** has an Estonian doctoral degree or equivalent qualification and is a leader or principal investigator of a large-scale research project (i.e. an institutional research grant, personal research grant, a target-financed research topic, a European framework programme project, etc). The supervisor has an employment contract with the host institution.

### III Application

The application for funding for a Postdoctoral project (hereinafter *application*) shall include the following:

- 1) the host institution of the postdoctoral project grant;
- 2) details of the postdoctoral fellow and the supervisor;
- 3) the title of the postdoctoral project;
- 4) a project summary;
- 5) the requested grant period;
- 6) envisaged budget of the postdoctoral project
- 7) the general theoretical background to the postdoctoral project, previous research and development activities of the postdoctoral fellow and the supervisor and links with the postdoctoral project;
- 8) the main objectives of the research project, hypotheses, description of methods, and the annual research plans;
- 9) information on considerations how ethical issues involved in the proposed research will be followed. The applicants are required to consider the ethical risk of any procedure within a research project which involves human participation or personal data, including a description of how the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity of subjects will be followed, and a statement on how such data will be stored and protected. Use of research methods that require review or approval from a human ethics or a bioethics research committee, should be also clearly indicated in the application. If the corresponding approvals are available at the time of submission of the application, applicants are asked to attach them to the application.
- 10) the expected results and their potential applicability, as well as possible future research directions;
- 11) a description of the quality and adequacy of the infrastructure and research environment at the host institution for achieving the objectives of the research project; and
- 12) the expected impact of the postdoctoral project on society, economic development, objectives of the measure and horizontal themes (equal opportunities, regional development, integrated public governance, promotion of information society).

### IV Evaluation

Postdoctoral grant applications shall be evaluated by the Evaluation Committee of the Estonian Research Council based on the conditions specified in §21 (4) of the 2014-2020 Structural Assistance Act, the Minister of Education and Research Regulation No. 74 "Procedure for Formation and Rules of Procedure of the Evaluation Committee of the Estonian Research Council", and the well-reasoned opinions of the individual reviewers and expert panels. The following evaluation criteria will be considered:

- 1) justification and scientific quality of the application, methods, expected results, including particular field-specific or application-related characteristics, etc);

- 2) the qualification of the postdoctoral fellow and the supervisor and the capacity to implement the project;
- 3) infrastructure and research environment, budget and cost-efficiency of the application;
- 4) impact of the project on achievement of the objectives of the measure, on the development of Estonian society and economy, and on horizontal themes.

***When evaluating applications, reviewers should take into account the following guidelines.***

## **V Evaluation criteria to be used for reviewing postdoctoral grant applications**

Please make comments for all criteria.

### **1. Justification and scientific quality of the application**

*1.1. Is the application characterized by a conceptually innovative approach?*

*1.2. Is the application well-justified and clearly outlined and does it contain well-defined hypotheses and research questions?*

*1.3. Is the research plan clear and appropriate for its stated purpose and the elaboration of tasks justified and appropriate?*

*1.4. Are the proposed methods adequate, up-to-date and/or innovative?*

*1.5. Are there any ethical issues involved in the proposed research and if so, have they been adequately considered and addressed in the application?*

Other comments on Section 1.

Overall assessment of application justification and scientific quality.

### **2. The qualification of the postdoctoral fellow and the supervisor and the capacity to implement the project**

2.1. Is the postdoctoral fellow at a good (international) level in his or her respective field (in terms of the quality and number of publications, etc.) and do the competencies of the postdoctoral fellow support the achievement of the proposed objectives?

2.2. What is the postdoctoral fellow's experience in participation in (international) collaborative projects, conferences and other research-related activities?

2.3. Is the supervisor an internationally recognised researcher whose research is widely acknowledged (in terms of the quality of publications, number of citations, etc.) and do the competencies of the supervisor support the achievement of the proposed objectives)?

2.4. Has the supervisor been successful in obtaining additional funding (grants, sponsored research, etc.)?

2.5. What is the supervisor's experience in supervision of postdoctoral fellows and doctoral students?

Other comments on Section 2.

Overall competence and expertise of postdoctoral fellow and the supervisor.

### **3. Infrastructure and research environment, budget and cost-efficiency of the application**

*This section will be evaluated only by the expert panel and the Evaluation Committee, not by external reviewers.*

The evaluators should answer and comment on the following:

1.1. Is the budget appropriate for the planned research? Should the project be considered experimental or non-experimental?

1.2. *Is the infrastructure and research environment at the host institution appropriate for achieving the objectives of the proposed research project?*

Other comments on Section 3.

Overall assessment of the quality and adequacy of research environment and budget.

### **4. Impact of the project on achievement of the objectives of the measure, on the development of Estonian society and economy, and on horizontal themes.**

*This section will be evaluated only by the expert panel and the Evaluation Committee, not by external reviewers.*

The evaluators should answer and comment on the following:

4.1. Does the project help to achieve the Mobilitas Plus aims to strengthen the international competitiveness of Estonian researchers and research performing organisations, expand international collaboration and professional development opportunities by improving intersectoral and international mobility and cooperation?

4.2. Does the project have impact on the horizontal topics, i.e. regional development, environmental care and climate, civil society development, ensuring equal opportunities, state governing development, and information society development?

4.3. Does the project have impact on the development of Estonian society and economy?

Other comments on Section 4.

Overall impact on the development of Estonian research landscape, society and economy.

### **Overall assessment of the application**

*This section will be filled in by the expert panel and the Evaluation Committee.*

Overall comments on the application.

## **VI Rating scales to be used in the review**

### **Rating scales**

A five-point rating scale is used in evaluating the application (outstanding, very good, good, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory). The evaluation is provided to a level of precision of 0.5 points, i.e. intermediate values like very good – outstanding, good – very good, etc. can be used.

The numeric for evaluation in the drop-down menu are as follows:

- Outstanding (5);
- Very good (4);
- Good (3);
- Satisfactory (2);
- Unsatisfactory (1),

The final score can range from 1 to 5 and is calculated as an arithmetical mean from the sub-criteria points.

## **Threshold**

**Research projects which receive less than 3.5 points do not qualify for funding.**

The rating scales correspond to the following descriptions:

### 1. Justification and scientific quality of the application

#### **Outstanding**

The research ideas are highly original and innovative. An internationally competitive research project.

The application addresses crucial/cutting-edge research questions or knowledge gap. The objectives are very clearly articulated and justified. The hypotheses and research questions are very well elaborated.

The research plan is very clearly described and relevant for achieving the objectives. The tasks are very well justified and appropriate.

The application includes highly original methodology and/or design. The methods are very clearly described, up-to-date, very well-articulated and highly relevant for achieving the objectives.

Ethical issues are fully considered.

#### **Very good**

The research ideas are original and innovative, internationally competitive and cutting-edge nationally.

The project addresses an important research question or knowledge gap. The objectives are clearly articulated and justified. The hypotheses and research questions are mostly well elaborated.

The research plan is clearly described and relevant for achieving the objectives. The tasks are clearly justified and appropriate.

The application includes original methodology and/or design. The methods are clearly described, up-to-date, well-articulated and relevant for achieving the objectives.

Ethical issues are very well considered.

### **Good**

The research ideas are original and partially internationally competitive.

The application addresses a worthwhile research question or knowledge gap. The hypotheses and research objectives need some additional elaboration.

The research plan needs some clarification. The tasks can be implemented but certain improvements and adjustments are necessary.

A methodologically sound study. The methods are articulated and justified, up-to-date and/or innovative to some extent.

Ethical issues are well-considered.

### **Satisfactory**

The research ideas are somewhat original and innovative at the national level.

The application addresses a research question or knowledge gap. Justification needs additional clarifications and adjustments. The hypotheses and research questions need major additional elaboration.

The research plan needs some revision. Certain, but not all tasks can be implemented.

A methodologically sound study but some areas require revision. The methods are somewhat articulated and justified, not very up-to-date and/or innovative.

Ethical issues are adequately considered.

### **Unsatisfactory**

The proposed topic has been exhaustively studied. Limited likelihood of new knowledge generation.

A poorly defined research topic, lack of clear hypotheses and research questions.

The research plan and elaboration of tasks need profound revision.

The methods are inadequate for achieving the overall goal, not up-to-date nor innovative.

Ethical issues are not adequately considered.

## **2. The qualification of the of the postdoctoral fellow and the supervisor and the capacity to implement the project**

### **Outstanding**

The applicant has excellent potential for successfully implementing the proposed research plan. Publications and/or monographs are at a very good international level. Articles are published in respectable peer-reviewed journals or proceedings indexed in the leading databases of the field. Monographs are published by international top publishers.

The applicant has very good experience in participation in international collaborative projects, conferences and other research-related activities.

There is an excellent complementarity between the proposed project and the supervisor's field of research.

The supervisor is among the leaders in his/her field. Publications and/or monographs are at an outstanding international level. Articles are published in the best peer-reviewed journals or proceedings

indexed in the leading databases in the field. Monographs are published by internationally acknowledged publishers.

The supervisor has been very successful in obtaining additional funding (grants, sponsored research, etc.).

The supervisor has long and thriving experience in supervision of postdoctoral fellows and doctoral students and has the necessary supervisory skills.

### **Very good**

The applicant has very good potential for successfully implementing the proposed research plan. Articles are published in peer-reviewed journals or international proceedings. Monographs are published by acknowledged publishers.

The applicant has good experience in participation in international collaborative projects, conferences and other research-related activities.

There is a very good complementarity between the proposed project and the supervisor's field of research.

The supervisor is renowned in his/her field. Publications and/or monographs are at a very good international level. Articles are published in respectable peer-reviewed journals or proceedings indexed in the leading databases of the field. Monographs are published by internationally acknowledged publishers.

The supervisor has been successful in obtaining additional funding (grants, sponsored research, etc.).

The supervisor has long experience in supervision of postdoctoral fellows and/or doctoral students and has the necessary supervisory skills.

### **Good**

The applicant has good potential for successfully implementing the proposed research plan. Some articles are published in peer-reviewed journals or international proceedings. Monographs are published by national publishers.

The applicant has some experience in participation in international collaborative projects, conferences and other research-related activities.

There is good complementarity between the proposed project and the supervisor's field of research.

The supervisor is well-known in his/her field. Articles are published in peer-reviewed journals or international proceedings. Monographs are published by acknowledged publishers.

The supervisor has obtained some additional funding (grants, sponsored research, etc.) in the past.

The supervisor has supervised postdoctoral fellows and/or doctoral students and has the necessary supervisory skills.

### **Satisfactory**

There is questionable potential for successfully implementing the proposed research plan. The applicant's research and publishing record are very weak. The competencies of the applicant do not support the achievement of the established objectives.

The applicant has some experience in participation in national collaborative projects, conferences and other research-related activities.

There is fair complementarity between the proposed project and the supervisor's field of research.

The supervisor is not well-known in his/her field. Articles are published in journals and proceedings which are not indexed in the leading databases in the field. No monographs have been published.

The supervisor has obtained very little additional funding (grants, sponsored research, etc.).

The supervisor has supervised only a few postdoctoral fellows and/or doctoral students, his/her supervisory skills need improvement.

### **Unsatisfactory**

There is insufficient potential for successfully implementing the proposed research plan. The applicant's research and publishing record are very weak. The competencies of the applicant do not support the achievement of the established objectives.

The applicant has not participated in any collaborative projects, conferences and other research-related activities.

There is poor complementarity between the proposed project and the supervisor's field of research.

The supervisor's research and publishing record are weak. There is insufficient potential for successfully implementing the proposed research plan. The competencies of the supervisor do not support the achievement of the proposed objectives.

The supervisor has not been successful in obtaining additional funding (grants, sponsored research, etc.).

The supervisor has not supervised postdoctoral fellows and/or doctoral students before.

### **3. Infrastructure and research environment, budget and cost-efficiency of the application**

#### **Outstanding**

The budget is very well justified.

The physical infrastructure and research environment at the host institution fully meet the requirements and support the achievement of the established objectives.

#### **Good**

The budget is sufficient for the planned research, but not very cost-efficient.

The physical infrastructure and research environment at the host institution partly meet the requirements and support the achievement of the established objectives.

#### **Unsatisfactory**

The budget is not justified.

The physical infrastructure and research environment at the host institution are not adequate and do not support the achievement of the established objectives.

### **4. Impact of the project on achievement of the objectives of the measure, on the development of Estonian society and economy, and on horizontal themes.**

#### **Outstanding**



The application has a significant impact on the development of Estonian economy and society.  
The project is relevant for achieving the objectives set in the Mobilitas Pluss.

**Good**

The application has a potential impact on the development of Estonian economy and society.  
The project is relevant to some extent for achieving the objectives set in the Mobilitas Pluss

**Unsatisfactory**

The application has modest impact on the development of Estonian economy and society.  
The project is inadequate for achieving the objectives set in the Mobilitas Pluss.