

Lisa 5

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Mobilitas Pluss tagasipöördumistoetuse taotluste hindamisjuhend

Guidelines for evaluating returning researcher grant applications

I Introduction

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

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

The purpose of returning researcher grants is to bring researchers, who have studied or worked in foreign countries and have acquired skills and knowledge for conducting research and development, back to Estonian research and development institutions and businesses.

The grant period is from 6 months to 12 months.

II Relevant terms

- 1) **Return grant** is a grant awarded to researchers, who are Estonian citizens or are/have been Estonian residents, coming from a foreign country to an Estonian research and development institution for implementation of a specific research and development project.
- 2) **Returning researcher (Returnee)** is a current or former Estonian resident researcher who has worked outside of Estonia for at least two years immediately preceding the closing date of the call for applications and who is conducting basic or applied research or development and implement a returning researcher's project. Returnee has completed a postdoctoral fellowship or an equivalent level of research in a foreign country before the closing of the call for applications.

III Application

The application for funding for a Returning researcher's project (hereinafter *application*) shall include the following:

- 1) the host institution of the returning researcher's project grant;

- 2) details of the returning researcher;
- 3) the title of the returning researcher's project;
- 4) a project summary;
- 5) the requested grant period;
- 6) envisaged budget of the returning researcher's project
- 7) the general theoretical background to the returning researcher's project and its link with previous research carried out by the returning researcher;
- 8) the main objectives of the returning researcher's project and a research plan;
- 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 returning researcher's 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

Return 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, expected results, including particular field-specific or application-related characteristics, etc);
- 2) the qualification of the Returnee 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 return 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?

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

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 Returnee and the capacity to implement the project

2.1. Is the Returnee 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 Returnee support the achievement of the proposed objectives?

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

Other comments on Section 2.

Overall competence and expertise of returning researcher.

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

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

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

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

Ethical issues are adequately considered.

Unsatisfactory

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

The research topic is poorly defined.

The research plan and elaboration of tasks need profound revision.

Ethical issues are not adequately considered.

2. The qualification of the of the Returnee 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.

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.

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.

Satisfactory

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 participated in a few national collaborative projects, conferences and other research-related activities.

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.

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.