

The following is a translation from Estonian. In case of disputes, the Estonian text shall prevail.

## Conditions of and Procedure for Personal Research Funding Applications for Postdoctoral Grants

### Chapter 1 GENERAL PROVISIONS

#### 1. Scope of Application

- 1.1. This directive establishes the conditions and procedure for applying for, evaluating, awarding, allocating, and reporting on personal research funding (postdoctoral grants).
- 1.2. The Estonian Research Council (hereinafter *Council*) is entitled to make well-considered decisions and consult experts where necessary in relation to matters not covered by this directive.

#### 2. Goal

- 2.1. A postdoctoral grant (hereinafter also *grant*) is aimed at supporting the launch of a research career of the people with a doctoral degree or equivalent qualification at strong research and development (R&D) institutions and in highly qualified research groups either in Estonia or in a foreign country.
- 2.2. A postdoctoral grant is awarded for the implementation of an independent research project and its purpose is not funding self-financed research projects.
- 2.3. There are two types of postdoctoral grants:
  - 2.3.1. a grant for a postdoctoral fellow coming to Estonia (Mobilitas Plus postdoctoral grant);
  - 2.3.2. a grant for a postdoctoral fellow going abroad (personal research funding postdoctoral grant).
- 2.4. In the award of postdoctoral grants to applicants coming to Estonia from abroad, the applicants who have previously received the Estonian state scholarship in order to obtain a doctoral degree abroad as well as the requirement to return to Estonia to continue their research, will be preferred.
- 2.5. In awarding the grants, the Council is entitled to prioritise R&D fields and grant types for each year.

#### 3. Postdoctoral Project

A postdoctoral project (hereinafter also *project*) is a description of a scientific study with a clearly defined research problem and a plan for conducting fundamental or applied research to address this problem.

#### 4. Applicant of a Personal Research Funding Postdoctoral Grant

- 4.1. A person (hereinafter *applicant*) can apply for funding upon receiving consent from a positively evaluated Estonian R&D institution (hereinafter *host institution*). The host institution will give the

consent for submitting the application and for fulfilling its obligations by confirming the application.

- 4.2. The following individuals can apply for a postdoctoral grant:
  - 4.2.1. Individuals who have obtained their first doctoral degree or equivalent qualification in the R&D field in which the application is to be processed no more than five years prior to the closing date of the call. The date of awarding a doctoral degree or equivalent qualification is the date in the respective document issued by the awarding body. If the applicant has been on pregnancy, maternity or parental leave, or in compulsory military service after obtaining his/her first doctoral degree or equivalent qualification in the R&D field in which the application is to be processed, the period of qualification is extended by the corresponding period in full months and is rounded up to the higher number of months. In justified cases, the Evaluation Committee may consider eligible an applicant who does not have a doctoral degree or equivalent qualification at the time of submitting the application, provided that the applicant will obtain a doctoral degree or equivalent qualification before entering into the grant contract stipulated in clause 14.1.;
  - 4.2.2. who have neither undertaken doctoral studies nor obtained a doctoral degree, including the cotutelle agreement, at the same institution where the postdoctoral project will be implemented; who has undertaken doctoral studies at and obtained a doctoral degree from an Estonian university;
  - 4.2.3. who has worked or studied in Estonia for at least 12 months by the closing date of the call.
- 4.3. An applicant cannot apply for:
  - 4.3.1. more than one personal research funding grant simultaneously, but may be listed as a member of the senior research staff in one application for either a start-up or team grant.
  - 4.3.2. a postdoctoral grant to use it for implementing a project at an Estonian R&D institution. However, in justified cases and in agreement with the Evaluation Committee, it is possible to implement the project partially in Estonia.
- 4.4. A person cannot apply for the grant if:
  - 4.4.1. he/she has previously received postdoctoral research funding from the Council;
  - 4.4.2. his/her applications submitted during the two previous consecutive calls did not pass the threshold set by the Council in at least one evaluation criterion;
  - 4.4.3. he/she has, during the three years before applying for the grant, failed to submit the report on a previous project funded by the Council by the deadline without a valid reason or the report has not been accepted by the Council.

## **5. Host Institution, Collaborating Institution, and Postdoctoral Supervisor**

- 5.1. A host institution is an Estonian R&D institution that will enter into an employment contract with the postdoctoral fellow for implementing the postdoctoral project if such a contractual relationship does not already exist at the time of awarding the grant.
- 5.2. A collaborating institution is a foreign R&D institution where a postdoctoral fellow will carry out

the postdoctoral project.

- 5.3. A supervisor of the project must have a doctoral degree or equivalent qualification and have an employment contract with the collaborating institution. The supervisor cannot be the same person who has been the (co-)supervisor of the postdoctoral fellow's doctoral dissertation. In justified cases, the postdoctoral fellow can have a co-supervisor.

## 6. Processing Postdoctoral Grant Applications

The Council is responsible for processing grant applications.

### Chapter 2

#### CONDITIONS FOR APPLYING FOR A GRANT

## 7. Applying for a Postdoctoral Grant

- 7.1. The period of the annual call for applications is established and announced by the Council.
- 7.2. The applicant is to submit the application, which has been approved by the host institution, to the Council via the Estonian Research Information System (hereinafter *ETIS*).
- 7.3. The application must be written in English.
- 7.4. The application shall specify the following:
  - 7.4.1. the applicant and the supervisor(s);
  - 7.4.2. a letter of confirmation from the collaborating institution;
  - 7.4.3. the title of the project in Estonian and in English;
  - 7.4.4. a summary of the project in Estonian and in English;
  - 7.4.5. the requested grant period;
  - 7.4.6. the grant type applied for pursuant to the fixed amounts set out in the "Guidelines for Budgeting Personal Research Funding Applications" (hereinafter *budget guidelines*) and its justification, incl. the distribution of direct costs;
  - 7.4.7. the scientific background of the project, incl. (if applicable) the interdisciplinarity and intersectorality of the project;
  - 7.4.8. the main objectives of the project, hypotheses, methods, and the work plan, incl. tentative annual work plans and the availability of the infrastructure necessary for achieving the objectives of the project;
  - 7.4.9. the expected results and their potential applicability, importance for Estonian research, culture, society, and/or economy as well as the impact on the career opportunities of the postdoctoral fellow and possible directions for future research;
  - 7.4.10. an explanation about how the results of the project will be disseminated to the public;
  - 7.4.11. an explanation about how the compliance with ethical issues will be secured during the implementation of the project and a comment on whether the project requires a licence from a specific ethics committee or the licence has already been obtained, and if the project necessitates compliance with the Nagoya Protocol, an explanation about which genetic resources will be used and whether the project requires the due diligence declaration or the due diligence declaration has already been submitted;

- 7.4.12. an explanation about which data will be generated during the implementation of the project and how the data will be managed;
  - 7.4.13. a description of the applicant's previous R&D activities;
  - 7.4.14. a description of the supervisor's R&D activities and experience in supervising doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows during the past 10 years;
  - 7.4.15. if necessary, additional documents, incl. applications for making the exceptions stipulated in clauses 4.2.1. and 4.3.2., and a confirmation letter detailing that the host institution will enter into an employment contract with the applicant for implementing the postdoctoral project if such a contractual relationship does not already exist at the time of submitting the application;
  - 7.4.16. a confirmation that the principles of research ethics and good research practice will be adhered to during the conception and implementation of the project.
- 7.5. The Council is entitled to demand additional information and documents from the applicant and the host institution.

## **8. Postdoctoral Fellow**

- 8.1. During the grant period, the postdoctoral fellow shall work at the host institution on a full-time basis with a place of work at the collaborating institution.
- 8.2. During the grant period, the postdoctoral fellow cannot be any of the following:
  - 8.2.1. the postdoctoral fellow or the Principal Investigator, or a member of the senior research staff of another personal research funding (start-up, exploratory, or team) project;
  - 8.2.2. the Principal Investigator or a member of the senior research staff of an institutional research funding topic.

## **9. Amount of a Postdoctoral Grant**

- 9.1. A postdoctoral grant contains costs directly related to the implementation of the project and overhead costs. Direct costs consist of staff costs and research costs:
  - 9.1.1. Staff costs consist of the salary along with any and all state taxes, contributions, benefits, and compensation arising from law;
  - 9.1.2. Research costs are travel costs, subcontracting costs, costs related to the publication and popularisation of the R&D results obtained during the implementation of the project, costs related to the protection of intellectual property, and other direct costs that are necessary for conducting research and stem from the characteristics of the project.
  - 9.1.3. Overhead costs are ongoing operational costs incurred by the host institution that are related to the management of the grant by the institution.
- 9.2. The applicant is entitled to request a relocation allowance if he/she has not lived, worked, or studied 180 days prior to the closing date of the call in the country where the collaborating institution is located. The relocation allowance is a one-off payment and the taxes prescribed by Estonian law shall apply to it.
- 9.3. Each year, the Council establishes fixed amounts for the grants and the size of the relocation

allowance in the budget guidelines. The Council may also establish the maximum amounts for various types of costs.

#### **10. Funding Period of a Postdoctoral Grant**

- 10.1. The postdoctoral fellow has to begin working on the project within six months after the decision to approve the application was made. The funding period will begin on the date that has been agreed upon in the grant contract.
- 10.2. The funding period is a minimum of 12 months and a maximum of 36 months.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS AND AWARD OF GRANTS**

#### **11. Checking the Technical Details of the Applications**

- 11.1. The Council is responsible for checking the technical details of the applications.
- 11.2. When checking the technical details of the applications, it will be determined if the application, the applicant, and the host institution meet all the necessary requirements.
- 11.3. The content of the applications will not be evaluated.
- 11.4. In case formal inaccuracies which can be corrected without changing the content of the application are present, the Council will set a deadline of up to ten working days for correcting the mistakes.
- 11.5. If the applicant, the host institution, or the application does not meet the necessary requirements and it has been impossible to correct the inaccuracies stipulated in clause 11.4., the Council will reject the application without processing it.

#### **12. Evaluation of Applications**

- 12.1. The evaluation of grant applications is organised by the Council.
- 12.2. The applications are evaluated by the Evaluation Committee on the basis of the Regulation No. 74 "The Procedure for the Formation and the Rules of Procedure of the Evaluation Committee of the Estonian Research Council" issued by the Minister of Education and Research on 27 December 2011 and on the "Guidelines for Evaluating Personal Research Funding Applications for Postdoctoral Grants" (hereinafter *evaluation guidelines*) approved by the Council.
- 12.3. The Council may set thresholds in the guidelines when evaluating the applications. The grant will not be awarded if the application does not pass the threshold in at least one evaluation criterion.
- 12.4. The initial evaluation of the applications is carried out by field-specific Expert Panels that have been convened by the Evaluation Committee. The Evaluation Committee is entitled to decide which Expert Panel will process which application.
- 12.5. Each application will be given justified evaluations and scores by at least two independent reviewers.
- 12.6. Although non-binding, the Expert Panels shall rely on the evaluations and scores of the reviewers. The Expert Panels will submit the combined evaluations given to each application

belonging to their field of expertise to the Evaluation Committee.

- 12.7. The Evaluation Committee is responsible for giving each application its final evaluation and score. Although non-binding, the Evaluation Committee shall rely on the combined evaluations given by the Expert Panels when forming the consolidated evaluation.
- 12.8. Based on the final evaluations and scores, the Evaluation Committee will compile field-specific ranking lists for all applications. The applications of equal standing will be ranked by the Evaluation Committee according to the principles described in the evaluation guidelines.
- 12.9. In the final evaluation, the Evaluation Committee may prescribe certain conditions that the postdoctoral fellow and the host institution are required to fulfil upon receiving the grant.
- 12.10. The Council will make the evaluations and scores stipulated in clauses 12.5. and 12.8., the initial financing proposal (hereinafter *proposal*) of the Evaluation Committee, and the position of the applicant in the field-specific ranking list of postdoctoral grant applications known to the applicant and to the host institution.
- 12.11. The applicant and the host institution are entitled to submit a written joint opinion and make objections regarding the proposal within the time limit established by the Council (hearing). At the hearing, attention will primarily be paid to the assessment of the adherence to procedural rules and to the correction of possible factual errors. The scientific evaluation given by the reviewers or by the Evaluation Committee will not be re-evaluated. If the Evaluation Committee has prescribed certain conditions in the final evaluation that must be fulfilled in order to receive the grant, the applicant and the host institution have to submit a consent to secure the compliance with these conditions.
- 12.12. If an applicant whose application was to be approved by the Board of the Council based on the proposal made by the Evaluation Committee or who has been awarded a postdoctoral grant by the Board of the Council waives the grant, then the grant will be awarded to the next applicant in the same field-specific ranking list of postdoctoral grants. In justified cases, the Evaluation Committee may propose to award the grant to the next applicant in the ranking list of postdoctoral grants in another research field.
- 12.13. The Council is entitled to reject the application if intentional false information, plagiarism, or fraudulent activities become evident.

### **13. Award of a Postdoctoral Grant**

- 13.1. Considering the final evaluation, the results of the hearing, and the position of the applicant in the field-specific ranking list of postdoctoral grants, the Evaluation Committee will submit a justified and impartial proposal to the Board of the Council:
  - 13.1.1. to approve the application and award the grant;
  - 13.1.2. not to approve the application.
- 13.2. The decision to approve or not to approve the application is concluded by a directive of the Board of the Council. In case of approval, the directive shall indicate the grant period and the annual amount of the grant.

## **Chapter 4**

## ALLOCATION OF GRANTS AND CONTINUATION OF FUNDING

### 14. Allocation of a Postdoctoral Grant

- 14.1. The grant is allocated to the host institution based on a tripartite contract (hereinafter *grant contract*) entered into by the Council, the host institution, and the postdoctoral fellow that is signed via ETIS. The grant contract entails the rights, obligations, and responsibilities of the parties. During the period of the project, a grant contract is concluded each calendar year. The grant contract may be concluded for two consecutive calendar years if the contractual period during one of these calendar years is six months or less. The contractual period cannot exceed 18 months.
- 14.2. The grant contract shall be entered into no later than two months before the project is scheduled to begin. In case of multi-annual projects, a new grant contract is concluded no later than one month after the decision stipulated in clause 15.6. has been made.
- 14.3. Before entering into the grant contract, the host institution shall enter into an employment contract with the postdoctoral fellow for implementing the postdoctoral project if such a contractual relationship did not already exist at the time of awarding the grant or if the existing employment contract needs to be amended.
- 14.4. During the first six months of the project, the postdoctoral fellow shall submit the data management plan to the Council.

### 15. Continuation of Funding and Changing the Amount of a Grant

- 15.1. In order to continue receiving funding, the postdoctoral fellow has to submit the following information, which has been approved by the host institution, via ETIS before the grant contract expires and within the time limit established by the Council:
  - 15.1.1. the distribution of the direct costs financed with the grant money;
  - 15.1.2. the fulfilment of the conditions stipulated in clauses 12.9. or 15.4. in case such conditions were prescribed.
- 15.2. The Council is entitled to demand additional information from the postdoctoral fellow and the host institution.
- 15.3. Based on the information stipulated in clause 15.1., the Evaluation Committee will submit a justified proposal to the Board of the Council:
  - 15.3.1. to continue funding at the requested rate, but no more than at the rate of the fixed amount of this grant type, if the implementation of the project has been successful and there are no significant changes concerning the sustainability of the project or the fulfilment of the conditions established by this directive;
  - 15.3.2. not to continue funding if:
    - 15.3.2.1. the conditions stipulated in clauses 12.9. or 15.4. have not been fulfilled;
    - 15.3.2.2. the sustainability of implementing the project has significantly decreased or is insufficient;
    - 15.3.2.3. the postdoctoral fellow and the host institution have not submitted the information stipulated in clause 15.1. within the prescribed time limit;
    - 15.3.2.4. there are other adverse and justified circumstances.

- 15.4. The Evaluation Committee may prescribe certain conditions in the proposal stipulated in clause 15.3.1. that the postdoctoral fellow and the host institution are required to fulfil to continue receiving funding. If so, the postdoctoral fellow and the host institution have to submit a consent and an action plan to secure the compliance with these conditions.
- 15.5. In the case referred to in clause 15.3.2., the postdoctoral fellow and the host institution are entitled to submit a written joint opinion and make objections regarding the proposal within the time limit established by the Council.
- 15.6. The decision to continue or not to continue funding is concluded by a directive of the Board of the Council. In case of continuation, the directive shall indicate the grant period and the amount of the grant.

## **Chapter 5**

### **TEMPORARY SUSPENSION AND TERMINATION OF A PROJECT**

#### **16. Temporary Suspension of a Postdoctoral Project**

- 16.1. The project can be temporarily suspended only in case of pregnancy, maternity or parental leave, compulsory military service, serious illness, or other exceptional circumstances, due to which the implementation of the project will become impossible or significantly more difficult.
- 16.2. The application for a temporary suspension of the project has to be submitted prior to the beginning of the suspension period in agreement with the host institution to the Board of the Council.
- 16.3. The postdoctoral fellow may request a temporary suspension of the project for up to three years. The end date of the project will be extended by the period of suspension.
- 16.4. The grant contract will be suspended for the temporary suspension period of the project.

#### **17. Termination of a Postdoctoral Project**

- 17.1. The project will end on the end date of the grant period.
- 17.2. All the activities financed with the grant money must be carried out by the end date of the project.
- 17.3. The host institution is required to refund the unused grant money along with a proportional fee of overhead costs to the Council's bank account no later than seven calendar days upon receiving the corresponding claim for refund from the Council. The postdoctoral fellow and the host institution are required to submit the final report of the project pursuant to clause 18.

#### **18. Submission of the Final Report**

- 18.1. The postdoctoral fellow shall prepare the final report of the project either in Estonian or in English. The final report, after having been approved by the host institution, has to be submitted to the Council via ETIS no later than three months after the end date of the project.
- 18.2. The final report shall include the following:
  - 18.2.1. the results (incl. the main results of the project in the form of a popular science summary both in Estonian and in English, the full texts of the articles that have been

- published as a result of implementing the project and also contain a reference to the grant as well as the industrial property rights) in accordance with the objectives set in the application. Pursuant to clause 19.1., publications that do not contain a reference to the grant must not be included in the final report;
- 18.2.2. the potential applicability of the results and their importance for Estonian research, society, and economy as well as possible directions for future research;
  - 18.2.3. a report on the usage of the grant in accordance with the accounting data of the host institution;
  - 18.2.4. the realisation of the data management plan;
  - 18.2.5. the fulfilment of the conditions stipulated in clauses 12.9. or 15.4. in case such conditions were prescribed;
  - 18.2.6. if the project necessitated compliance with the Nagoya Protocol, the due diligence declaration;
  - 18.2.7. additional information directly related to the project that the postdoctoral fellow and the host institution deem relevant.
- 18.3. If the postdoctoral fellow fails to submit the final report by the deadline, the final report shall be prepared and submitted by the host institution.
- 18.4. The Council will assess the final report and make the assessment available to the postdoctoral fellow and to the host institution via ETIS.

## **19. Making the Results of the Postdoctoral Project Public**

- 19.1. Upon the publication of the results of the project, a reference to the grant that was used for funding the project must be included.
- 19.2. The full texts of the articles that have been published as a result of implementing the project and also contain a reference to the grant will be made freely available by the host institution via ETIS, unless limited by publishing restrictions, copyright, or intellectual property laws.
- 19.3. If a publishing house restricts access to the articles temporarily, the host institution will make the full texts of the articles published as a result of implementing the project freely available via ETIS once the restriction has expired.
- 19.4. The main results of the project in the form of a popular science summary both in Estonian and in English will be made freely available by the Council via ETIS.

## **Chapter 6**

### **PREMATURE TERMINATION OF THE GRANT CONTRACT AND RECLAMATION OF A GRANT**

## **20. Premature Termination of the Grant Contract**

- 20.1. The Council is entitled to revoke the decision of awarding the grant or the decision to continue funding and terminate the grant contract if:
  - 20.1.1. the postdoctoral fellow or the host institution have submitted a request to terminate the grant contract;
  - 20.1.2. the postdoctoral fellow does not meet the requirements stipulated in clauses 8. or

- 14.3., or is unable to continue with the project (the death of the postdoctoral fellow, serious illness, transitioning to other employment, or other substantial and justified circumstances);
- 20.1.3. the postdoctoral fellow or the host institution have fundamentally violated the requirements stipulated in this directive or by the legislation;
  - 20.1.4. the licence from a specific ethics committee has not been submitted prior to the beginning of human or animal experiments or it has become evident the due diligence declaration stemming from the Nagoya Protocol has been disregarded;
  - 20.1.5. the postdoctoral fellow has failed to submit the data management plan on time;
  - 20.1.6. the postdoctoral fellow or the host institution have intentionally presented false information, or plagiarism or fraudulent activities have become evident in the project-related activities of the postdoctoral fellow;
  - 20.1.7. there are other adverse and justified circumstances.
- 20.2. After the revocation of the decision to award the grant or to continue funding the project and after the termination of the grant contract, the host institution is required to refund the unused grant money along with a proportional fee of overhead costs to the Council's bank account no later than seven calendar days upon receiving the corresponding claim for refund from the Council. If the postdoctoral project is terminated prematurely during the first year, the Council is entitled to reclaim the relocation allowance from the host institution in accordance with the number of unused months. The postdoctoral fellow and the host institution are required to submit the final report of the project pursuant to clause 18.
- 20.3. If the decision of awarding the grant or the decision to continue funding is repealed retrospectively, the Council may reclaim the grant from the host institution.

## **21. Audit and Reclamation of a Grant**

- 21.1. The host institution is required to allow the Council or a person authorised by the Council to audit the use of the grant and provide necessary assistance, including allowing access to the premises and the territory of the host institution and submitting all the requested documents for the purpose of verifying the correctness of the information provided.
- 21.2. A grant not used for the intended purpose may be reclaimed by the Council from the host institution along with a proportional fee of overhead costs.