

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

Guidelines for Evaluating Postdoctoral Grant Applications

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This directive establishes the evaluation criteria and the principles for evaluating, compiling the ranking lists and final funding list of the applications submitted according to the “Conditions and Procedure for 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. Evaluation of Grant Applications

- 2.1. The evaluation of the applications takes place in the Estonian Research Information System (hereinafter *ETIS*).
- 2.2. All applications are to be evaluated according to the same criteria and procedures in order to ensure equal treatment of all applications.
- 2.3. The final funding list of the applications is formed by taking into consideration all relevant information and by comparing the applications in the (sub-)field-specific ranking lists. The Expert Panel and the Evaluation Committee may use the overview of the bibliometric indicators of the postdoctoral fellow and the supervisor as an additional material for evaluating the applications. The scores given to the application are not compared with the scores from previous calls.
- 2.4. The evaluation process is as follows:
 - 2.4.1. Processing the applications in the Expert Panel
 - 2.4.1.1. Each application will be reviewed by at least three independent experts, one of whom shall act as a rapporteur. At least two experts, incl. the rapporteur, have to be the members of the Expert Panel. In cooperation with and based on the evaluations given by the them, the rapporteur will prepare the preliminary final evaluation for each application.
 - 2.4.1.2. The Expert Panel will confirm the preliminary final evaluation of each application and form the preliminary funding list of applications.
 - 2.4.1.3. The preliminary final evaluation will be made available to the applicant and to the institution for the hearing. The names of the experts who have reviewed the application will not be disclosed.
 - 2.4.2. Processing the applications in the Evaluation Committee
 - 2.4.2.1. The Evaluation Committee will consider the results of the hearing, approve the final evaluation of each application, compile the funding list and waiting list of the applications, and forwards the applications to the Expert Panel on Research Ethics and Data Management.
 - 2.4.2.2. The applications that have received the funding proposal and at least the next three applications on the waiting list shall be forwarded to be evaluated by the Expert Panel on Research Ethics and Data Management.
 - 2.4.2.3. The Evaluation Committee will submit a proposal to the Management of the Council not to approve the rest of the applications.

2.4.3. Processing the applications in the Panel on Research Ethics and Data Management

2.4.3.1. This Panel will give an evaluation on the criteria of research ethics and research data management.

2.4.3.2. During the evaluation process, the Panel is entitled to request explanations and additional information from the applicant.

2.4.3.3. The Panel on Research Ethics may make suggestions or proposals for organising the activities of the project which are related to research ethics and/or data management more effectively, or submit a proposal to the Evaluation Committee to prescribe certain conditions that the PI and the institution are required to fulfil upon receiving the grant.

3. Evaluation Criteria and Rating Scale

3.1. Evaluation criteria

When evaluating the applications, the following evaluation criteria are to be used and the scores have to be justified. The justification has to be based on the sub-criteria. It is also possible to add other noteworthy observations for each evaluation criterion.

Evaluation criterion	Evaluation questions	Rating scale
1. Scientific justification for and feasibility of the research project	<p>In this criterion, the scientific justification for and the feasibility of the research project, the clarity of the objectives, the justification for the research plan and risk reduction measures, proposed methods, and resources are to be evaluated, based on the following questions:</p> <p>1.1. How clear and justified is the objective of the project?</p> <p>1.2. How good and how clear is the scientific justification, incl. how precisely are the research questions and/or (excl. justified exceptional cases) hypotheses defined?</p> <p>1.3. How suitable and justified are the proposed research methods?</p> <p>1.4. How reasonable and purpose-driven is the research plan, incl. how justified and how suitable is the place where the postdoctoral project is going to be implemented (will the project be carried out entirely at the collaborating institution or partially in Estonia)? If the project is partially carried out in Estonia, how justified is it?</p> <p>1.5. How well are the potential scientific or methodological problem areas acknowledged and how well are the risk reduction measures and the back-up plan described?</p> <p>1.6. How specifically and appropriately are the feasibility of the project explained and the necessary resources justified?</p>	From 1 to 5
2. Qualification of the applicant	<p>In this criterion, the qualification of the applicant is to be evaluated, based on the following questions:</p> <p>2.1. What are the research experiences and the quality of the results of the applicant's previous research activities, incl.</p>	From 1 to 5

	<p>participation in (international) cooperation and/or in research projects, number and quality of publications, conference attendance, skills obtained, and other research-related activities?</p> <p>2.2. How suitable are the scientific competences and the previous experiences of the applicant for successfully carrying out the proposed project?</p>	
3. Qualification of the supervisor	<p>In this criterion, the qualification of the supervisor is to be evaluated, based on the following questions:</p> <p>3.1. What is the focus and quality of the research and of the results of the research conducted by the supervisor during the past 10 years, incl. the number and quality of publications, the experience in supervising doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows; leadership of and/or participation in domestic and/or international R&D projects, and other research-related activities?</p> <p>3.2. How suitable is the supervisor's scientific qualification and experience in supervising postdoctoral fellows and doctoral students for supporting this project?</p>	From 1 to 5
4. Importance of the research project, incl. importance to Estonia	<p>In this criterion, the the importance of the research project, incl. the importance for Estonia, is to be evaluated, based on the following questions:</p> <p>4.1. How specifically and appropriately is the scientific importance and the potential impact of the project described, considering the specifics of the research field and topic?</p> <p>4.2. How clearly has it been defined where and how the new skills and knowledge acquired as a result of the project could be used, incl. in future research?</p> <p>4.3. How specifically and appropriately is the importance of the project outside academia, incl. the importance for Estonia, described, considering the specifics of the research field and topic?</p> <p>4.4. How well has the applicant planned the activities of the project for the development of his/her future research career (development of professional and transferable competences, training, supervision, etc.)?</p> <p>4.5. How well are the plans for public outreach (dissemination of the results among the wider public outside academia) considered?</p>	From 1 to 5
5. Research ethics, incl. the potential ethical risks accompanying the implementation of the project	<p>5.1. Has the applicant sufficiently, carefully, and properly assessed the potential ethical risks concerning research which may arise during research?</p> <p>5.2. Has the applicant sufficiently, carefully, and properly described the measures and activities with which the risks concerning research ethics are mitigated?</p>	Appropriate, conditionally appropriate

<p><i>This criterion will be evaluated only by the Panel on Research Ethics and Data Management</i></p>	<p>5.3. Has the applicant sufficiently, carefully, and properly addressed the ethical and legal requirements applicable to the research (e.g., requirements related to the processing of personal data or ethics committee approvals) and how the requirements are to be met during the project?</p>	
<p>6. Research data management</p> <p><i>This criterion will be evaluated only by the Panel on Research Ethics and Data Management</i></p>	<p>6.1. Has the applicant sufficiently, carefully, and properly described issues related to the management of research data and other research results throughout their life cycle?</p> <p>6.2. Has the applicant sufficiently, carefully, and properly addressed the ethical and legal requirements regarding the storage or use of research results and research data (e.g., issues related to open science or intellectual property), and explained the fulfilment of the requirements?</p>	<p>Appropriate, conditionally appropriate</p>

3.2. Rating scales and the formation of the final score

3.2.1. For criteria 1, 2, 3, and 4 a nine-point differentiated rating scale is used:

- Outstanding (5);
- Very good-Outstanding (4.5);
- Very good (4);
- Good-Very good (3.5);
- Good (3);
- Satisfactory-Good (2.5);
- Satisfactory (2);
- Unsatisfactory-Satisfactory (1.5);
- Unsatisfactory (1).

3.2.2. For criteria 5 and 6 a two-point differentiated rating scale is used:

- Appropriate;
- Conditionally appropriate.

3.2.3. Interpretations of ratings by evaluation criteria are presented in section 5.

3.2.4. The final score will be formed by summing up the scores given to the evaluation criteria. For criterion 3 (Qualification of the supervisor), the coefficient 0.8 is applied. The final score can range from 3.8 to 19 points.

3.3. Threshold

3.3.1. The qualification threshold for criteria 1, 2, 3, and 4 is 3 points (*good*) before applying the coefficient. If the application does not pass the qualification threshold, then it does not qualify for funding and limitations could be placed upon the applicant in the next call.

3.3.2. The application will not be approved if it receives less than 80% of the maximum possible final score, i.e., if the application receives less than 15.2 points.

4. Basis for the formation of the ranking and funding list

- 4.1. The applications will initially be placed into field-specific ranking lists based on the final score given to each application. The applications which have not passed the quality threshold or which have received less than 15.2 points as the final score will not be included in the ranking list.
- 4.2. For ranking the applications with the same final score, the criteria to be used is as follows:
 - 4.2.1. the applications of equal standing will be ranked according to the scores received during the evaluation process in the following order of the evaluation criteria: 1, 2, 3, and 4;
 - 4.2.2. the applications which sustain equal standing after the ranking procedure described in 4.2.1 will be prioritised according to the underrepresented gender among the applicants whose applications rank above the applications of equal standing;
 - 4.2.3. the applications which sustain equal standing after the ranking procedures described in 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 will be prioritised according to the underrepresented (sub-)field of research among the applications which rank above the applications of equal standing.
- 4.3. After the activities mentioned in points 4.1 and 4.2, applications are prioritized in a non-field-specific funding list based on the following principles:
 - 4.3.1. the applications which have been ranked first in each of the field-specific ranking list will sustain the equal standing;
 - 4.3.2. when ranking the following applications, the principles outlined in points 4.1 and 4.2 are followed.

5. Interpretations of Evaluation Criteria Grades

- 5.1. Interpretation of Grades for Criteria 1, 2, 3, and 4

Interpretation of Grades for "1. Scientific Justification and Feasibility of the Research Project"

Outstanding (5)

The scientific justification of the application is remarkable and clear. The application addresses high level research questions/hypotheses that are excellently outlined and clear. The objectives are very clearly stated and justified. The feasibility of the research project is appropriate and specific. The proposed research methods are excellently described, up-to-date, and suitable for achieving the objectives. The work plan is very clearly described and appropriate for achieving the objectives. Risk mitigation measures and contingency plans are very well thought out. The application is competitive in an international scale. An exceptionally strong application in all its aspects. The score "outstanding" is exceptional and it is necessary to provide an additional justification for this score.

Very Good (4)

The application addresses important research questions/hypotheses that are mostly well thought and clear. The objectives are clearly stated and justified. The feasibility of the research project is appropriate. The proposed research methods are very well described, appropriate, and suitable for achieving the objectives. The chosen disciplinary approach (single-discipline, interdisciplinary, or multidisciplinary) is very good and suitable. The work plan is clear and suitable for achieving the objectives. Risk mitigation measures are well thought out. Few changes are recommended. Most important aspects are very well addressed, with only a few deficiencies or uncertainties. Few changes are recommended. The application is competitive in an international scale.

Good (3)

The scientific justification of the application is good and addresses necessary research questions/hypotheses. The objectives are generally well described. The research project is feasible. The proposed research methods are suitable and justified. The chosen disciplinary approach (single-discipline, interdisciplinary, or multidisciplinary) is good and generally suitable. The work plan and risk mitigation measures are described but need some more precise explanations. Most important aspects are well addressed, but there are several deficiencies. Several important aspects would have needed a clearer and more detailed explanation. A decent research project with several uncertainties.

Satisfactory (2)

The scientific justification of the application remains general. The objectives are described, but there are several shortcomings. The research project is generally feasible. The proposed research methods are somewhat explained and justified but need revision. The chosen disciplinary approach (single-discipline, interdisciplinary, or multidisciplinary) is not quite suitable, with deficiencies. The work plan is described but is sometimes incomplete and not fully implementable. Risk mitigation measures are generally described. Most aspects related to scientific justification and feasibility are addressed very generally, with significant weaknesses that require substantial changes and clarifications.

Unsatisfactory (1)

The scientific justification of the application is very weak, and the project is not fully feasible. The application lacks clearly formulated research questions/hypotheses. The objectives are incomplete and unclear. The proposed research methods are not suitable for achieving the objectives. The disciplinary approach is inadequate or not described. The work plan and risk mitigation measures are not well thought out, with significant shortcomings. The feasibility aspects of the project are inadequately addressed and/or have numerous weaknesses.

*Interpretation of Grades for "2. Qualification of the applicant "***Outstanding (5)**

The applicant has excellent potential and is extremely competent and well-suited to implement the proposed project. The applicant has published internationally outstanding and significant publications/monographs. The applicant has participated in (international) collaboration and/or research projects and conferences. The applicant has other significant scientific achievements. This is an exceptionally strong applicant. The score "outstanding" is exceptional and it is necessary to provide an additional justification for this score.

Very Good (4)

The applicant is very competent and very suitable to implement the proposed project. The applicant's publications/monographs are of very high international standard and published in peer-reviewed journals or international collections. The applicant has participated in (international) high-level research projects and conference participation. The applicant has other significant academic achievements. A strong applicant.

Good (3)

The applicant is competent to implement the proposed project. The applicant's publications/monographs are of good international standard. The applicant has some experience in

(international) research and collaboration projects and conference participation. The applicant has other academic achievements. This is a good applicant.

Satisfactory (2)

The applicant is not fully competent to implement the proposed project. The applicant's publications/monographs are somewhat recognized internationally. The applicant has little experience in (international) research and collaboration projects and conference participation.

Unsatisfactory (1)

The applicant is not competent to implement the proposed project. The applicant's publications/monographs are somewhat recognized. The applicant has little to no experience in (international) research or collaboration projects or conference participation.

Interpretation of Grades for "3. Qualification of the supervisor"

Outstanding (5)

The supervisor is internationally recognized in the field. His/her publications and/or monographs are of outstanding international standard. Articles are published in the best peer-reviewed journals or are cited in leading field databases; monographs are published by internationally recognized publishers. The supervisor has very successful experience in leading and/or participating in national and/or international research projects. The supervisor has long and successful experience in supervising postdoctoral researchers and doctoral students, and there is excellent mutual complementarity between the proposed project and the supervisor's research field.

Very Good (4)

The supervisor is recognized in the field. His/her publications and/or monographs are of very high international standard. Articles are published in reputable peer-reviewed journals or are cited in leading field databases; monographs are published by internationally recognized publishers. The supervisor has successful experience in leading and/or participating in national and/or international research projects. The supervisor has long experience in supervising postdoctoral researchers and/or doctoral students, and there is very good mutual complementarity between the proposed project and the supervisor's research field.

Good (3)

The supervisor is well-known in the field. His/her Their publications are published in peer-reviewed journals or international collections; monographs are published by recognized publishers. The supervisor has some experience in leading and/or participating in national and/or international research projects. The supervisor has experience in supervising postdoctoral researchers and/or doctoral students; there is moderate mutual complementarity between the proposed project and the supervisor's research field.

Satisfactory (2)

The supervisor is not well-known in the field. His/her Their publications are published in journals and collections that are not are cited in leading field databases; monographs are not published. The supervisor has little experience in leading and/or participating in national and/or international research projects. The supervisor has supervised only a few postdoctoral researchers and/or doctoral students. There is little mutual complementarity between the proposed project and the supervisor's research field.

Unsatisfactory (1)

The supervisor's scientific and publishing activity is weak, and there is insufficient potential for the successful implementation of the proposed research plan. The supervisor's competencies do not support the achievement of the proposed objectives. The supervisor has not previously supervised postdoctoral researchers and/or doctoral students. There is little mutual complementarity between the proposed project and the supervisor's research field.

Interpretation of Grades for "4. Importance of the research project, including importance to Estonia"

Outstanding (5)

The applicant has excellently planned and clearly described activities in the project in the context of their further scientific career. The scientific importance of the proposed project is excellently and very clearly described and appropriate. The explanation of the use of new skills and knowledge acquired during the project is extremely well thought out and outstanding. The non-scientific importance of the project, including its importance to Estonia, is excellently described. Activities related to the dissemination of the research are exceptionally well thought out and planned. The expected impact of the proposed project is very significant both nationally and internationally. The score "outstanding" is exceptional and it is necessary to provide an additional justification for this score.

Very Good (4)

The applicant has very well planned and clearly described activities in the project in the context of their further scientific career. The scientific importance of the proposed project is very well and clearly justified. The explanation of the use of new skills and knowledge acquired during the project is very well explained. The non-scientific importance of the project, including its importance to Estonia, is very well thought out and described. Activities related to the dissemination of the research are very well thought out and planned. The expected impact of the proposed project is significant both nationally and internationally.

Good (3)

The applicant has well planned and described activities in the project in the context of their further scientific career. The scientific importance of the proposed project is generally explained. The explanation of the use of new skills and knowledge acquired during the project is not always very clear. The non-scientific importance of the project, including its importance to Estonia, is well described, but there are some deficiencies. Activities related to the dissemination of the research are not clearly outlined. The expected impact of the proposed project is foreseeable.

Satisfactory (2)

The applicant has planned and very generally described activities in the project in the context of their further scientific career. The scientific importance of the proposed project is vaguely explained. The explanation of the use of new skills and knowledge acquired during the project is inadequate. The non-scientific importance of the project, including its importance to Estonia, is vague. Activities related to the dissemination of the research are vaguely described. The expected impact of the proposed project is somewhat foreseeable.

Unsatisfactory (1)

The applicant has not substantially planned activities in the project for their further scientific career. The scientific importance of the proposed project is vaguely explained. The explanation of the use of new skills and knowledge acquired during the project is insufficient. The non-scientific importance of the project, including its importance to Estonia, is vague or missing. Activities related to the dissemination of the research are inadequately described, with several deficiencies. The expected impact of the proposed project is essentially non-existent.

5.2. Interpretation of grades for criteria 5 and 6

- **Appropriate** – there are no shortcomings; there are some shortcomings or issues to be considered; the Panel may make suggestions or proposals for organising the activities of the project which are related to research ethics and/or data management more effectively.
- **Conditionally appropriate** – there are significant shortcomings related to research ethics and/or data management and in order to ensure that the project will be implemented in compliance with the requirements of research ethics and/or data management, the Panel will prescribe certain conditions that the PI and the institution are required to fulfil upon receiving the grant.