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Guidelines for evaluating Mobilitas Pluss returning researcher grant applications

1. INTRODUCTION

The award of returning researcher 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 12 months to 24 months.

2. RELEVANT TERMS

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 implementing a specific research and development project.

Returning researcher project (hereinafter *application*) 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.

Returning researcher (Returnee) is a current or former Estonian resident researcher who has worked outside of Estonia for at least two years immediately prior to the closing date of the call for applications and who is conducting basic or applied research or development and implement a returning researcher 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.

3. THE APPLICATION INCLUDES:

- the host institution of the returning researcher project grant;
- details of the returning researcher;
- the title of the returning researcher project;
- a project summary;
- the requested grant period;
- envisaged budget of the returning researcher project
- the general theoretical background of the returning researcher project and its link to the previous research carried out by the returning researcher;
- the main objectives of the returning researcher project and a research plan;
- 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;
- explanation about how the data of the project will be managed;
- the expected results and their potential applicability, as well as possible future research directions;
- 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
- the expected impact of the returning researcher project on society, economic development, objectives of the measure and horizontal themes (equal opportunities, regional development, integrated public governance, promotion of information society).

4. EVALUATION PROCESS

4.1. 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:

4.1.1. justification and scientific quality of the application, expected results, including particular field-specific or application-related characteristics, data management, etc);

4.1.2. the qualification of the Returnee and the capacity to implement the project;

4.1.3. infrastructure and research environment, budget and cost-efficiency of the application;

4.1.4. impact of the project on achievement of the objectives of the measure, on the development of Estonian society and economy, and on horizontal themes.

4.2. Individual reviewers will only evaluate criteria 1 and 2 of the previous list.

4.3. 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.

4.4. The final score can range from 1 to 5 and is calculated as an arithmetical mean from the criteria points, given by the Evaluation Committee.

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

5. EVALUATION CRITERIA AND DESCRIPTION OF THE RATING SCALES

Please comment all criteria!

5.1. Criterion 1 - justification and scientific quality of the application.

5.1.1. The scientific quality and novelty of the application

Is the application characterized by a conceptually innovative approach? Is the application well-justified and clearly outlined and does it contain well-defined hypotheses and research questions?

- 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;
- 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;
- 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;

- 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;
- 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.

5.1.2. Methods and research plan

Are the proposed methods adequate, up-to-date and/or innovative? Is the research plan clear and appropriate for its stated purpose and the elaboration of tasks justified and appropriate?

- Unsatisfactory - the methods are inadequate for achieving the overall goal, not up-to-date nor innovative; the research plan and elaboration of tasks need profound revision;
- Satisfactory - a methodologically sound study but some areas require revision; the methods are somewhat articulated and justified, not very up-to-date and/or innovative; the research plan needs some revision; certain, but not all tasks can be implemented;
- Good - a methodologically sound study; the methods are articulated and justified, up-to-date and/or innovative to some extent; the research plan needs some clarification; the tasks can be implemented but certain improvements and adjustments are necessary;
- Very good - the application includes original methodology and/or design; the methods are clearly described, up-to-date, well-articulated and relevant for achieving the objectives; the research plan is clearly described and relevant for achieving the objectives; the tasks are clearly justified and appropriate;
- Outstanding - 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; the research plan is very clearly described and relevant for achieving the objectives; the tasks are very well justified and appropriate.

5.1.3. Ethical issues

Are there any ethical issues involved in the proposed research and if so, have they been adequately considered and addressed in the application? If the project necessitates compliance with the Nagoya Protocol, the applicant has to be aware of the fact that he/she has to obtain the due diligence declaration.

- There are ethical issues involved and they have not been adequately addressed and the application should not be funded;
- There are ethical issues involved and they have not been adequately addressed;

- There are ethical issues involved and they have been adequately addressed;
- There are no ethical issues involved.

5.1.4. Data Management

Have data managament issues, incl. data protection, been sufficiently addressed (if appropriate)? The applicants are also expected to consider the issues related to the secure storage of data either obtained or used during the period of the Project and make them available based on the open data principles (if not restricted due to data protection requirements).

- Not appropriate - crucial data management issues, incl. data protection, have not been sufficiently addressed.
- Appropriate - data management issues have been sufficiently addressed
- Not applicable

5.2. Criterion 2 - the qualification of the Returnee and the capacity to implement the project

5.2.1. The individual excellence of the Returnee

Is the Returnee at a good (international) level in his or her respective field (in terms of the quality and number of publications, patents, protected plant varieties etc.) and do the competencies of the Returnee support the achievement of the proposed objectives?

- 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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.

5.2.2. Returnee's research career

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

- Unsatisfactory - the applicant has not participated in any collaborative projects, conferences and other research-related activities or has had no research cooperation with the private sector;
- Satisfactory - the applicant has participated in a few national collaborative projects, conferences and other research-related activities or has had a little research cooperation with the private sector;
- Good - the applicant has some experience in participation in international collaborative projects, conferences and other research-related activities or has had some research cooperation with the private sector;
- Very good - the applicant has good experience in participation in international collaborative projects, conferences and other research-related activities or has had a lot of research cooperation with the private sector;
- Outstanding - the applicant has very good experience in participation in international collaborative projects, conferences and other research-related activities or has had very significant research cooperation with the private sector.

5.3. Criterion 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.*

5.3.1. Budget of the project and level of experimentality

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

- Unsatisfactory - the budget is not justified;
- Satisfactory – the budget is justified to some extent. The level of experimentality is not properly chosen:
- Good - the budget is sufficient for the planned research. The level of experimentality is not properly chosen;
- Very good – the budget is justified and sufficient for the planned research. The level of experimentality is properly chosen;
- Outstanding - the budget is very well justified and sufficient for the planned research. The level of experimentality is properly chosen.

5.3.2. Infrastructure and host institution

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

- Unsatisfactory - the physical infrastructure and research environment at the host institution are not adequate and do not support the achievement of the established objectives;
- Satisfactory – the physical infrastructure and research environment at the host institution do not support the achievement of the established objectives well, but the project could be carried out;
- Good - the physical infrastructure and research environment at the host institution partly meet the requirements and support the achievement of the established objectives;
- Very good – the physical infrastructure and research environment at the host institution meet the requirements and support the achievement of the established objectives;
- Outstanding - the physical infrastructure and research environment at the host institution fully meet the requirements and support the achievement of the established objectives.

5.4. Criterion 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.

5.4.1. Meeting the aims of Mobilitas Pluss

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?

- Unsatisfactory - the project is inadequate for achieving the objectives of Mobilitas Pluss;
- Satisfactory – the project has minor relevance for achieving the objectives of Mobilitas Pluss;
- Good - the project is relevant for achieving the objectives of Mobilitas Pluss;
- Very good - the project is very relevant for achieving the objectives of Mobilitas Pluss;
- Outstanding - the project is highly relevant for achieving the objectives of Mobilitas Pluss.

5.4.2. Impact on horisontal issues

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

- Unsatisfactory - the project has negative impact on the horisontal topics;
- Satisfactory – the project has some negative impact on the horisontal topics;
- Good - the project has neutral impact on the horisontal issues;
- Very good – the project has some positive impact on the horisontal topics;
- Outstanding – the project has very positive impact on the horisontal topics.

5.4.3. Societal and economic impact

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

- Unsatisfactory - the project has no impact on the development of Estonian economy and society;
- Satisfactory - the project has modest impact on the development of Estonian economy and society;
- Good - the project has a potential impact on the development of Estonian economy and society;
- Very good – the project has good impact on the development of Estonian economy and society;
- Outstanding - the project has a significant impact on the development of Estonian economy and society.