UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

Guidelines for "Excellence by Choice" Postdoctoral Programme (2021-2026)
(modified on 2023-05-03)

To strengthen world-class research activities in Umeå, Umeå Centre of Microbial Research (UCMR) and Umeå Plant Science Centre (UPSC), the two national Centres of Excellence, in collaboration with other research centres establish a new '***Excellence by Choice' Postdoctoral Programme*** in life science research. The programme is funded by Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation, Kempe Foundation and Umeå University **with Professor Emmanuelle Charpentier as patron and mentor of the programme.**

The programme will fund postdoctoral fellowships and organize activities to strengthen networking and collaborations. The programme aims to recruit 15 postdocs on fellowships through three international calls for 5 fellowships each. The programme will grant each fellowship 672,000 SEK over a 2-year term (28,000 SEK/month), as well as additional 320,000 SEK for running costs and 25,000 SEK for career development of the postdoc.

The mission of the programme:
1) to attract excellent young scientists to Umeå;
2) to promote new synergies and collaborations in life science with focus on molecular and translational microbial research and beyond;
3) to facilitate development of the Umeå University postdoctoral community and training of next generation scientists;
4) to reinforce internationally competitive research;
5) to overcome societal challenges.

1. General guidelines

1.1 Eligibility of PIs

- Main PI active affiliated with UCMR or UPSC with a position at Umeå University or SLU, Co-PI with a faculty position at Umeå University or SLU. Additional collaborations with an institution in Sweden or an international institution are encouraged.
- A PI can participate in only one project as a main PI or a Co-PI.
- The main PI and Co-PI should clearly demonstrate synergy (how their expertise complement with each other in the proposed new collaborative project) and statement from the main PI on their active role in UCMR and UPSC.
- The main PI must have on-going peer-reviewed project grant(s) obtained as the main applicant from VR or ERC.
- The main PI and Co-IP should explain how the new project idea is different from the ongoing projects and project applications.
- The main PI and Co-PI who currently are receiving support from the 'EC' postdoc programme are not eligible.

UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

1.2 Eligibility of postdocs

- To qualify as a postdoctoral fellowship holder, the postdoctoral fellow is required to have completed a doctoral degree or a foreign degree deemed equivalent to a doctoral degree. This qualification requirement is usually fulfilled after successfully completing all the requirements of the doctoral program, including passing their dissertation defence. This qualification requirement must be fulfilled no later than at the time of the closing date of the application.
- Candidates should have completed their doctoral degree, no more than three years before the closing date of the application. If there are special reasons, candidates who completed their doctoral degree prior to that may also be eligible. Special reasons include absence due to illness, parental leave, appointments of trust in trade union organizations, military service, or similar circumstances, as well as clinical practice or other forms of appointment/assignment relevant to the subject area.
- Candidates who have worked in the lab of the main PI or Co-PI during their PhD and postdoc are not eligible.
- Through international calls the programme aims to attract and select excellent postdoctoral candidates that are expected to strengthen the Umeå research environment and contribute to its renewal.

1.3 PI's responsibility

- The main PI and Co-PI should actively participate in the evaluation and selection of candidates. The project would not be considered for further evaluation if any of the main PI and Co-PI does not take part in the recruitment process.
- The main PI and Co-PI should be responsible for providing lab space, consumables and infrastructure required for the project, and supporting the postdoc's career development.
- The main PI and Co-PI should get permission from their department before participating the programme.
- The main PI should be the host of the postdoc.

1.4 Postdoc's responsibility

- The postdoctoral fellow is committed to develop the project.
- The postdoctoral fellow should actively participate in UCMR and UPSC programme activities, such as annual symposia, workshops, and retreats, etc.

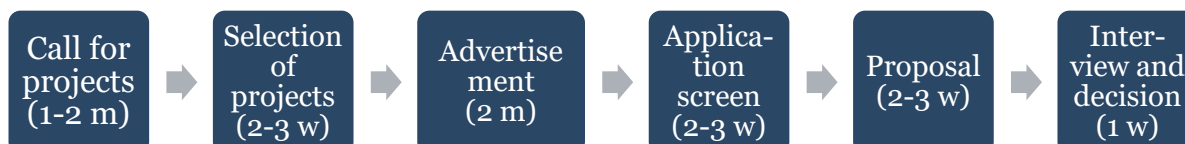### 1.5 Co-responsibility (PIs + postdocs)

- The postdoctoral fellow should start his/her fellowship in the host lab as soon as possible within one year after the closing date of the application. The funding and fellowship would be withdrawn if this requirement is not fulfilled.

UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

- A final scientific report (summary of the results, published papers and manuscripts, career development) should be provided jointly by the PIs and postdoctoral fellow within 3 months after the end of funding.
- Postdocs and PIs are committed to provide follow-up information for the evaluation/report of the programme upon request.

2. Recruitment procedure

Call for projects (1-2 m) → Selection of projects (2-3 w) → Advertisement (2 m) → Application screen (2-3 w) → Proposal (2-3 w) → Interview and decision (1 w)

2.1 Step 1: call for projects

- Project title
- A very short summary (max 2 sentences) of **the project idea** that a postdoc candidate should be developing.
- Abstract of the project (max 2000 characters including blank spaces) that describe in brief the following:
    - The background of the project
    - What is to be done: purpose and aims
    - How the research will be carried out: project organisation and scientific methods
    - What is important about the planned research

  The abstract shall provide a summary picture of the purpose and implementation of the research. Please use wording to ensure persons with another subject specialisation can understand the information.
- A statement (max 2000 characters including blank spaces) about PI's activities within the UCMR and UPSC research environment and how their expertise complements with each other in the proposed new collaborative project and its novelty.
- Information about your current research project support from the funding agencies, i.e. a copy of the project summary with information details from the project database.
- A statement (max 2000 characters including blank spaces) about how the new project idea is different from the ongoing projects and project applications in the PIs' laboratories.

2.2 Step 2: selection of projects

- The UCMR-UPSC committee evaluates the eligibility of the projects.

2.3 Step 3: selection of postdoctoral candidates

UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

- Publish the final list of project ideas and contact information for participating PIs as an international advertisement.
- PIs scrutinize applications for their own project and nominate up to 3 promising candidates to further evaluation.
- The UCMR-UPSC committee decides the short list of candidates to be invited to the final interview. The candidates will be asked to write and submit also a project plan before the interview.
- Thereby the candidates should design their own research project plan based on the project idea they selected, but NOT a copy of the PI's research proposal.
- The candidates are evaluated and interviewed by the interview panel.

3. Evaluation and selection

3.1 Scrutiny of applications

- PIs assess the complete applications for their own project. PIs should request at least two reference letters for each promising candidate and communicate with promising candidates. This process is mandatory for the nominated candidate to be considered for the next step.
- PIs nominate up to 3 promising candidates to final evaluation. PIs should rank the candidates and briefly describe the reason of nomination.
- The nominated candidates should be eligible for a 'EC' postdoc and meet the criteria of excellence, i.e., PIs should only nominate candidates whom they would offer a postdoc position.
- The UCMR-UPSC committee decides the short list of candidates to be invited to the final interview and submission of a research proposal.

3.2 Interview

- The interview panel consists of a chair, a co-chair, all participating PIs and invited experts.
- The panel members should carefully examine the application material of all candidates before the interview.
- Before the interview, the panel members should declare the conflict of interest.
- The candidates are interviewed by the panel members who have no conflict of interest.
- Each candidate is assigned two main examiners from the interview panel. The main reviewers will ask major questions in the interview. Other panel members who have no conflict of interest could also ask questions in the interview.

3.3 Rating and ranking

- Each panel member without a conflict of interest assesses the quality of the candidate and research proposal using a scale 1-7 (7 is the highest).

UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

- Each panel member without a conflict of interest should make a (yes/no) statement whether the candidate meet the criteria of excellence.
- Each panel member's rating will be compiled with showing the identity of the panel member. One highest and one lowest rate of each candidate will be removed before the average rate and the percentage of "yes" for the candidate is calculated.
- The interview panel meets in a closed session without the presence of panel members who have a conflict of interest to discuss the strength and weakness of each candidate.
- The interview panel decide the ranking of the candidates.
- The best candidates are selected into the programme.
- Excellent candidates who are not initially selected to the programme could be in the waiting list.

3.4 Decision

- The final decision is made based on the ranking.
- The selected candidates should not receive other funding support for the same project.
- The top ranked candidates are offered fellowships.
- The candidates in the waiting list could be considered if the offered candidates do not accept the offer.
- The candidates who are not selected for funding by the programme could be considered by the recruiting PIs if they want to fund the candidate on their own.