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Guidelines 'Excellence by Choice' Postdoctoral Programme in Life Science (2021-2026) (modified 2023-05-03 and 2024-04-26)

To strengthen world-class research activities in Umeå, Umeå Centre of Microbial Research (UCMR) and Umeå Plant Science Centre (UPSC), two national Centres of Excellence, in collaboration with other research centres have established 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 funds postdoctoral fellowships and organizes activities to strengthen networking and collaborations. The programme aims to recruit 17 postdocs on fellowships through four international calls for up to 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 programme aims to attract and select excellent candidates that are expected to strengthen the Umeå research environment and contribute to its renewal.

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 research;
- 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 should be active affiliated with UCMR or UPSC with a position at Umeå University or SLU. Co-PI should have 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 the Co-PI should clearly demonstrate synergy (how their expertise complement each other in the proposed *new collaborative project*).
- The main PI must have an active on-going research programme.
- The main PI and Co-PI have a new project idea that 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.



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1.2 Eligibility of postdocs

- To qualify as a postdoctoral fellowship holder, the candidate 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 programme, including passing their dissertation defence. **A proof of completion of the doctoral degree must be submitted at the latest together with the pre-interview project plan** (see date in the timeline document).
- 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 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.

1.3 PI's responsibility

- 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 postdoctoral fellow.

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 conferences, workshops, and networking activities, 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.
- 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 three 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.



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2. Recruitment procedure

2.1 Call for projects

Information needed for the application template:

- Project title
- A very short summary (max 2 sentences) of the project idea that a postdoc candidate should be developing.
- Abstract of the project idea (max 2,000 characters including blank spaces). 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. The following should be included:
 - 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
- A statement (max 2,000 characters including blank spaces) about the active role of the main PI and Co-PI in activities within the UCMR and UPSC research environment and how their expertise complements each other in the proposed *new collaborative project*.
- A statement (max 2,000 characters including blank spaces) about novelty and how the new project idea is different from the ongoing projects and project applications in the PIs' laboratories.
- A list of external funding (source and amount).

2.2 Selection of projects

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

2.3 Evaluation and selection of candidates

- A call with the list of eligible project ideas with contact information to participating PIs is published in an international advertisement.
- PIs scrutinize applications for their own project. 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 interview.
- PIs can nominate **up to 2 promising candidates** (if 2 candidates are proposed, one must be a woman) to further evaluation. The nominated candidates should be eligible for a 'EC' postdoc and meet the criteria of excellence, i.e., PIs should only



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nominate candidates whom they would offer a postdoc position. At this stage the PI should thus assess whether the candidate is worth bringing forward to the interview or not.

- If more than a total of 15 candidates are proposed at this stage, there will be an additional selection step by the UCMR/UPSC committee (*the exact selection procedure will be decided, if applicable*).
- All shortlisted candidates will be asked to design their own research project plan based on the project idea they selected. Ideally, the proposal should highlight how the candidate profile matches with and benefits to the project. It should NOT be a copy of the PI's research proposal.
- Before the interview, the shortlisted candidates must submit **research project plan, PDF for the interview presentation** and, those who could not send in their certificate earlier, **proof of completion of the doctoral degree**.

3. Interview and final decision

3.1 Interview procedure

- The interview panel consists of a chair, a co-chair, and main PIs and Co-PIs who already host an 'EC' postdoc. If needed, additional experts may be invited to the panel.
- The panel members should carefully examine the application material of all candidates before the interview session.
- Prospect supervisors are welcome to listen to the interview but will not be allowed to comment on the process.
- Before the candidate interview, the prospect supervisor will be given 5 minutes to introduce the candidate and answer questions about the candidate from the panel. This is done in absence of the candidate.
- Each candidate is assigned two main examiners beforehand 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 end of the interview. Before each interview, the panel members should declare the conflict of interest.

3.2 Rating and ranking

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



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- 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 prospect supervisors are not present at the panel meeting.
- The interview panel decide the ranking of the candidates.
- The best candidates are selected to the programme.
- Excellent candidates who are not initially selected to the programme are in a waiting list.

3.3 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 (*up to 4 in the fourth call*), that meet the criteria of excellence, are offered fellowships.
- In case of withdrawal, candidates on the waiting list could be considered.