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## **Guidelines ‘Excellence by Choice’ Postdoc Programme in Life Science 2021-2026**

*(modified 2023-05-03, 2024-04-26, and 2025-04-16)*

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. The programme is funded by the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation, the 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 five international calls. In the fifth call, the programme will grant fellowships over a minimum of 21 months, as well as an additional 320,000 SEK for running costs and 25,000 SEK for the post doc’s career development.

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 the 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**

- The main PI should be actively affiliated with UCMR or UPSC with a position at Umeå University or SLU. The 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 – i.e. how their expertise complement each other in the proposed *new collaborative project*.
- The main PI must have an active on-going research programme supported by external funding.
- The main PI and the Co-PI have a new project idea that is different from the ongoing projects and project applications.



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- The main PI and the Co-PI who currently are receiving support from the 'EC' postdoc programme, or have had received support in the current programme, are not eligible.

## 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 PDF presentation before the final interview (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 the Co-PI during their PhD and postdoc are not eligible.

## 1.3 PI's responsibility

- The main PI and the 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 the 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



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within three months after the end of funding. The PIs will receive the template at the end of the postdoc period.

- Postdocs and PIs are committed to provide follow-up information for the evaluation/report of the programme upon request.

## 2. Recruitment procedure

### 2.1 Call for project proposals

Information needed for the application template:

- Project title.
- A very short summary (max 2 sentences) of the project idea.
- Abstract of the project idea (max 2,000 characters including blank spaces) providing a summarising picture of the purpose and implementation of the research. Please use wording to ensure that persons with another subject specialisation can understand the information. Please, include the following:
  - The background of the project
  - Purpose and aims with the project – what will be done
  - How the research will be carried out – project organisation and scientific methods
  - The importance of 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

- Besides one common ad, each project will be advertised in a separate ad, clearly stating that the project is part of the 'EC' postdoc programme. UCMR/UPSC will coordinate the simultaneous publications of these ads. A template will be provided.
- PIs scrutinize applications for their own project. PIs assess the complete applications for their own project. PIs should request at least two reference letters



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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) for further evaluation. 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**. 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 is proposed at this stage, there will be an additional selection step in the short list by the UCMR/UPSC committee to decrease the number of top candidates.
- Before the interview, the shortlisted candidates must submit **a 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 a selected number of 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.
- The presentation should be 15 minutes in length. The first part (~10 min) should provide a concise summary of the candidate's PhD research. This summary should address a broad and non-specialized audience of scientists. The second part (~5 min) should be devoted to the planned activities for the postdoc with emphasis on explaining how the candidate's profile uniquely fits in the collaborative consortium of the project. Also, the added value to the candidate's career in light of his/her future plans and of the new competences brought to the hosting PIs in Umeå should be discussed.



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The presentation is followed by a 20-minutes interview by the panel (first by two main reviewers and in the end by other panel members).

### 3.2 Rating and ranking

- Each panel member without a conflict of interest assesses the quality of the candidate and his/her motivation 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). 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 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.
- The selected candidates should not receive other funding support for the same project.
- Excellent candidates who are not initially selected to the programme are in a waiting list.

### 3.3 Decision

- The top ranked candidates, that meet the criteria of excellence, are offered fellowships – **up to 2 in the fifth call.**
- The decision is documented and signed.
- In case of withdrawal, excellent candidates on the waiting list could be considered.