

Post-Doctoral Fellowship Scheme

Guidelines and Regulations 2024

ALLOCATIONS

MAXIMUM ELIGIBLE ALLOCATION	MAXIMUM DURATION
Up to EUR 68,000 per post-doctoral fellow per year	2+1 years ¹

CO-FUNDING	DISBURSEMENT
The fund will cover up to 100% of total eligible project costs, but may be topped up by the Economic Operator at the Economic Operator's discretion	100% for first year on the effective date of the grant agreement 100% of each subsequent year from 1 month prior to end of previous year, upon the presentation of an Annual Progress Report.

¹ Funding for the 1-year extension beyond 2 years is subject to approval and availability of funds.

1. Introduction

The Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR), in consultation with the University of Malta (UM), The Parliamentary Secretariat for Youth, Research and Innovation (PSYRI) and the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry (MCCEI), is pleased to relaunch the Post-Doctoral Fellowship Scheme to make available a number of post-doctoral research positions at the UM in collaboration with economic partners. Through the scheme, MEYR will promote Research and Innovation Projects between the UM and economic partners, aimed at providing a positive and constructive impact to the economic players and the Maltese economy.

The scheme shall provide financial support for Post-Doctoral Fellowships to enable economic operators and the UM to carry out joint Research and Innovation Projects, with an emphasis on, but not exclusive to, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

2. Definitions

Academic Member of Staff of the UM (Academic)

- An Academic is an employee of the UM who is a Resident Academic falling within the ambit of their duties in terms of the Collective Agreement for Academic Staff of the UM 2019 – 2023 or the subsequent Collective Agreement that supersedes it.

Applicant

- A Category 1 Applicant shall consist of one or more individuals in possession of a PhD degree (or who would have obtained their PhD degree by the start of the Project). Such an Applicant shall work closely with at least one Representative of an Economic Operator and one Academic to complete the Application.
- A Category 2 Applicant shall consist of at least one Representative of an Economic Operator and one Academic, one of whom will take the lead in submitting the Application.
- Specific details of who can apply may be found in Section 3.1.

Application

- An application is a submission, inclusive of all mandatory documents and any annexes made by an eligible Applicant.

Background Intellectual Property (IP)

- Background IP means any and all, data, information or know-how (tangible or intangible) whatever its form or nature, including any IP and IPRs that is/are:
 - i. owned by a party or that a party has a right to license, prior to the start date of the Project; or

- ii. developed or acquired by a party independently from the work in the Project even if in parallel with the performance of the Project,

but solely to the extent that such data, information, know-how, IP and/or IPRs are used in or introduced into the Project by the party who owns or has the right to license it.

Beneficiary

- The primary beneficiaries of the grant shall be the Post-Doctoral Fellows. The funds shall be transferred to the UM and managed by the Fellow with the support of the UM Project Support Office, subject to the Terms and Conditions of the grant. The Fellow shall be employed with the UM for the duration of the Research and Innovation Project. The Post-Doctoral Fellow shall be responsible for the implementation of the Research and Innovation Project, whereas the Representative(s) of the Economic Operator(s) and the Academic(s) involved in the Project shall be responsible to support the Post-Doctoral Fellow in the Project implementation.

Consumable Supplies

- Consumable Supplies are items used exclusively in support of the Project objectives and consumed completely in the course of the Project (e.g. laboratory supplies, laboratory notebooks, printer paper for research data and reports, etc.). They specifically exclude supply items that are purchased to support the multiple activities of Project personnel (e.g. stationery, pens, tablets, file folders, staples, paper clips, etc.).

Dissemination

- Dissemination costs represent conference fees, travel, events organisation and publications linked to the set of actions and strategies aimed at disseminating information on the results of the project to maximize its impact on individuals, entities, and communities.

Economic Operator

- An Economic Operator is a business or other organisation that supplies goods, works or services within the context of market operations. To be eligible to participate in this Post-Doctoral Fellowship Scheme, an Economic Operator must actively conduct economic operations in Malta.

Eligibility

- The Eligibility criteria are set out in Section 3 of this document. Applicants shall be screened by the Selection Board according to these criteria. Applications that are not eligible shall not be processed further and shall not undergo evaluation.

Eligibility and Evaluation Board (the Selection Board)

- An Eligibility and Evaluation Board (the Selection Board) shall be appointed for the purposes of awarding Post-Doctoral Fellowships to the best applicants in accordance with the Guidelines and Regulations in this document. The Selection Board shall be constituted of a Chairperson and at least two other competent individuals proposed by the Management Board, and appointed by the Permanent Secretary (MEYR). The Selection Board shall rank the Applications in order of merit, and shall present the results of their evaluation to the Management Board.

Equipment

- Equipment consists of tangible implements with a value greater than €500 purchased for the purposes of carrying out the Project. Items of Equipment proposed for acquisition for the Project should be itemized by descriptive name and estimated cost, and an adequate justification should be provided in the Project Application.

Evaluation

- Applications that pass the Eligibility criteria shall be evaluated by the Board according to the Evaluation criteria listed in Section 5 of this document.

Management Board

- A Management Board shall be appointed for the purposes of managing and overseeing the Post-Doctoral Fellowship Scheme. The Management Board shall be constituted of a Chairperson and at least two other competent individuals proposed by the MCCEI and the UM, and appointed by the Permanent Secretary (MEYR). A secretary to the Management Board shall also be recommended in agreement between the MCCEI and the UM and appointed by the Permanent Secretary (MEYR).

Maximum Funding

- The maximum amount of funding that may be allocated per Post-Doctoral Fellow employed on a Research and Innovation Project shall be up to €68,000 per year. The maximum amount of funding allocated to a Project shall be calculated as follows: the total cost of employment to the UM of the Post-Doctoral Fellow(s) employed on the Project through the Scheme (including the salary of the Fellow(s)) plus Consumable Supplies, Dissemination, Equipment, Project Support Office costs (set at € 1,500 per year per Fellow employed) and Specialised Services. A post-Doctoral Fellow may be employed for a maximum of two years, with the possibility of a further one-year extension (subject to approval and availability of funds).

Project Support Office costs

- Costs related to the Project Support Office at the UM for the administrative and financial implementation of the project which are set at € 1,500 per year per Fellow employed.

Representative of an Economic Operator

- A Representative of an Economic Operator is an individual who is an employee of the Economic Operator, or a person closely associated with the Economic Operator (such as a consultant), who is formally appointed to this role by a legal representative of the Economic Operator.

Research and Innovation Project (Project)

- A Research and Innovation Project is a project that will be supported through this scheme. One or more Post-Doctoral Fellows may be engaged through the Scheme to work on a Project. The Research and Innovation Project shall be described in detail in the Application.

Specialised Services

- Specialised Services refer to services provided by a technical expert or a specialised company for the purposes of carrying out the Project and which cannot be performed by the UM or the Economic Operator(s) involved in the Project. They specifically exclude general services routinely supplied to the UM in the general course of its operations. Specialised Services proposed for acquisition for the Project should be itemized by descriptive name and estimated cost, and an adequate justification should be provided in the Project Application.

3. Eligibility

Applications shall first be screened in terms of eligibility criteria listed in this section 3. Ineligible applications in terms of the points below shall not be processed further and shall not undergo evaluation.

Incomplete Applications or Applications submitted after any submission deadline shall be automatically deemed ineligible.

3.1 Who Can Apply?

Applicants shall fall under either of two categories:

- i. An individual who is in possession of a PhD degree or who would have obtained their PhD degree by the start of the Project. (Two or more such applicants may apply together for a single Research and Innovation Project). At application stage, such applicant(s) shall have obtained the backing and support of at least one Representative of an Economic

Operator and at least one Academic.

- ii. A Representative of an Economic Operator, together with an Academic, either of whom will take the lead in submitting the application. (More than one Representative of one or more Economic Operator and more than one Academic may be involved in the application, and the Research and Innovation Project may employ more than one Post-Doctoral Fellow). The selection criteria for the recruitment of the Post-Doctoral Fellow(s) shall be clearly outlined.

To be eligible under this scheme, a Post-Doctoral Fellow shall be an EU citizen or the spouse of an EU citizen, and shall need to be employed on the Research and Innovation Project on a full-time basis.

3.2 Project Duration

A Research and Innovation Project shall have a minimum duration of one (1) year and a maximum duration of two (2) years and three (3) months. The Research and Innovation Project proposal may include an optional additional research component to be carried out over a period of one additional year following the end of the initial period of the Project. Funding to cover this one-year extension may be allocated, subject to the availability of funds.

A Post-Doctoral Fellow may be engaged on a Project for a maximum duration of two (2) years, with the possibility of an extension of one (1) additional year, subject to the request for funding for a one-year extension to the Project being granted. The Post-Doctoral Fellow shall be engaged within one (1) year from the effective date of the Grant Agreement.

A Project shall start on the date of employment with the UM of the first Post-Doctoral Fellow to work on the Research and Innovation Project where start date shall not be later than one (1) year from the effective date of the Grant Agreement. Should the Project involve other Post-Doctoral Fellows, these shall be employed within three months of the start of the Project. The Project shall terminate not later than two years after the date of employment of the last Post-Doctoral Fellow engaged on the Project, or not later than three years after this date should a one-year extension be granted to the Project.

3.3 Eligible Costs

Eligible costs for a Research and Innovation Project include:

1. The cost to the UM for employment of the Post-Doctoral Fellow(s)
2. Costs of Consumable Supplies
3. Costs of Dissemination
4. Costs of Equipment
5. Costs for the Project Support Office
6. Costs for procurement of Specialised Services

The total of Cost Items 1-6 funded through the Project shall not exceed €68,000 per Fellow per year.

The Economic Operator may top up this amount at the Economic Operator's discretion. Prior written approval for expenditure over and above the approved budget needs to be sought from the Economic Operator and should not be presumed by virtue of the Economic Operator's support of or participation in the Project.

The Applicant shall include a budget for the Research and Innovation Project and, based on this, the Selection Board shall approve all eligible costs prior to the start of the Project. A Category 1 Applicant shall be required to work closely with an Academic, a Representative of the Economic Operator and the UM Project Support Office to draw up the budget. A Category 2 Applicant shall consult with the UM Project Support Office in drawing up the budget.

Spending during the Project shall be in accordance with the pre-approved budget. However, amendments to the budget that do not affect the basic purpose of the Project, where the financial impact is limited to transfers between main budget headings that are cumulatively up to 20% of the grant value or changes within the same budget category, may be effected in discussion with the Project Support Office at UM. Any budget transfers between main budget headings which cumulatively are more than 20% of the grant value, shall require the prior written approval of the Management Board.

The grant may cover up to 100% of the eligible project costs, up to a maximum of €68,000 per year per Post-Doctoral Fellow, whichever is the lowest.

3.4 Timeframes

Issue Date	29 th February 2024
First Deadline for Submission	30 th April 2024 12.00pm CET
Evaluation Period*	Up to 31 st May 2024
Date of Notification*	28th June 2024
Signature of Grant Agreement*	Before December 2024

*Subject to change.

4. Application Submission

Applicants are required to submit all the following documentation:

For Category 1 Applications (applications by individuals):

1. A completed Category 1 Research and Innovation Project Application Form;
2. A completed Project Budget Form approved and stamped by the UM Project Support Office;
3. A signed Letter of Support from each Economic Operator;
4. A signed Letter of Support from each participating Academic; and
5. A one-page biography of the Applicant, and of the participating Academic(s) and Representative(s) of the Economic Operator(s).

For Category 2 Applications (applications by a representatives of an Economic Operator together with Academics):

1. A completed Category 2 Research and Innovation Project Application Form;
2. A completed Project Budget Form approved and stamped by the UM Project Support Office;
3. If the Lead Applicant is an Academic, a signed Letter of Support from the Economic Operator(s), or, if the Lead Applicant is a Representative of an Economic Operator, a signed Letter of Support from participating Academic(s);
4. A one-page biography of each participating Academic and Representative of an Economic Operator, including the Lead Applicant; and

5. The Call for Applications that will be used to recruit the Post-Doctoral Fellow(s) for the Project, including details of the necessary qualifications and experience, and their responsibilities within the Project.²

Proposals are to be submitted by emailing the Board on: postdocfellowship@um.edu.mt

Queries relating to the Post-Doctoral Fellowship Scheme may be emailed to: postdocfellowship@um.edu.mt

It is the Applicants' responsibility to present a complete Application Form as explained in these Guidelines and Regulations. To be eligible, an Application must be submitted within the stipulated deadline and shall include all the necessary information and documentation. Ineligible applications shall not be evaluated.

5. Evaluation

5.1 Conditions for Evaluation

- To be evaluated Applications must satisfy all Eligibility Criteria as detailed in section 3.
- Only complete applications shall be evaluated.

5.2 Evaluation Criteria

The Selection Board shall base its decision upon the following criteria:

1. Excellence and Quality of Research (40 marks):
 - *Excellence of Project (based on Project Description) (20 marks)*
 - *Quality and Strength of Research Team in relation to Project Proposal (20 marks)*

Excellence of the proposed Project shall take into consideration how innovative, well-timed, cutting edge and ambitious the research is.

The quality and strength of the team shall take into consideration the complementary, suitability and expertise of the Fellow(s), the Academic(s), and the Representative(s) of the Economic Operator(s) involved in the Project.

2. Relevance to the Economic Sector (40 marks):
 - *Strength of Letter of Support from Economic Operator (20 marks)*

² A template for this purpose may be obtained for the UM Human Resources Office (contact postdocfellowship@um.edu.mt to request one).

- Impact and Benefits to the Economic Sector (20 marks)

This criterion considers the commitment of the Economic Operator to the Research and Innovation Project, as well as the impact and benefits of the Project to an Economic Sector of relevance to the Economic Operator.

The impact shall take into consideration the potential for exploitation and dissemination of results, the ability to strengthen the competitiveness of economic sector and any influences the Project may have on practice or policy.

3. Project Plan and Implementation (20 marks):

- Realistically Time-Framed Milestones and Deliverables (10 marks)

- Well-structured Project Plan (10 marks)

This criterion considers how well structured the Project proposal is, including the Project plan, management structure and budget, and how well planned and realistic the presented milestones and deliverables are. The Project should have clear goals and risks should be identified and managed.

6. Evaluation Process

This scheme is competitive and shall be evaluated according to the evaluation criteria and their weighting as indicated above.

Eligible applications will be assessed by the Selection Board, and the best applications shall be shortlisted, ranked and recommended to Management Board for funding. The Management Board, in consultation with the MEYR, shall make the final decision on the awards based on the recommendations of the Selection Board. Evaluation and funding decisions shall depend on the quality of the submitted applications and on the availability of the funds.

The Management Board, in consultation with the MEYR may decide not to allocate the total funds available for a particular call if the proposed projects do not reach the required level in terms of the evaluation criteria.

7. Project Implementation and Monitoring

A Grant Agreement shall be signed between MEYR, the UM and the Economic Operator(s) prior to commencement of the Project.

For Category 2 Project Applications that are awarded, the UM shall be responsible to issue a call for applications leading to the selection of the individuals(s) who will be granted a Fellowship to work on the Project. An interviewing board (the "Interviewing Board") shall be set up by UM as per normal practice for such purposes. The Economic Operator(s) shall have the right to appoint one representative on this Interviewing Board. Shortlisted candidates for the position would be required to make a

presentation to the Interviewing Board following which the Interviewing Board's decision shall be final and, in doing so, the Interviewing Board shall determine its own procedures, which must be documented by it.

For both Category 1 and Category 2 Applications, successful candidates shall be employed with the University as a Research Support Officer III or Research Support Officer IV depending on their experience, as per standard UM policy. They shall be required to sign the standard UM employment contract for these positions. Employment shall be conditional on UM receiving the funds for the Project from MEYR, and on satisfactory progress on the Project being achieved.

Funds for each Project shall be transferred to UM in line with the Disbursements table in this document. The salary for the Fellow shall be paid from these funds, and the Fellow shall be able to procure Consumables, Equipment, and Specialised Services in line with the approved Project budget and in accordance with the normal UM procurement regulations.

A Final Report shall be due by the Fellow(s) employed on the Project within one month from the end of the Project. This shall include:

1. A description of activities carried out through the Project
2. The deliverables, milestones and results achieved with supporting documentation
3. A list of publications, patent applications, and dissemination events carried out.
4. A financial report issued together with the UM Project Support Office including proof of expenditure.

Any left-over funds at the end of the Project shall be returned to MEYR, unless MEYR approves an extension of the Project or alternative use of the funds towards the Project's targets following a proposal by the Fellow(s) in the Final Report.

For Projects longer than twelve months, an Interim Technical Progress Report (including elements 1. – 3. listed above for the Final Report) up to the end of the eleventh (11th) month shall be submitted to the Board. Funds for the remaining period of the Project shall be transferred by MEYR to the UM on satisfactory review by the Board of the Progress Report.

If the Research and Innovation Project proposal includes an optional additional research component to be carried over a period of a year following the end of a two-year project, the Fellow(s), in agreement with Academic(s) and Representative(s) of the Economic Operator(s) involved in the Project, must submit a request in writing for funding for the additional year to the Board seven (7) months before the end of the two-year initial period. The Board shall inform the Fellow whether the request shall be accepted or not within 30 days of receipt of the written request. Should the additional year of funding be approved, this shall be subject to a Progress Report being submitted to the Board during the final month of the two-year period (including an expenditure report approved by the UM Project Support Office). Funds for the additional period of the Project shall be transferred by MEYR to the UM on satisfactory review by the Board of this Progress Report, including the finances. Funds that have not been spent during the first two years may be carried over to be used during this period.

MEYR reserves the right to audit the finances relating to any of the projects.

8. Intellectual Property and Dissemination of Results

8.1 Intellectual Property (IP)

The Research and Innovation Project shall be carried out in collaboration between the UM and the Economic Operator(s). If any Background IP belonging to any of these parties is required for implementation of the Project, such IP shall remain the exclusive property of that party, who shall grant the other parties access rights to the Background IP on a non-exclusive, royalty-free basis for the sole purpose of carrying out the Project. The party receiving the access rights to the Background IP shall keep the information received confidential.

8.2 Dissemination of Results

Any results produced through that Research and Innovation Project shall be disseminated by the parties, subject to the condition that any Background IP shall be kept confidential unless the owning party consents in writing to its publication. Consequently, before the publication of any results, consent in writing shall be obtained from all parties involved in the Project to ascertain that such publication contains no Background IP or commercially sensitive information that a party would not wish to publish.

Should one of the parties object to a specific publication, the parties shall discuss how to overcome the justified grounds for the objection on a timely basis (for example by amending the planned publication). The objecting party shall not unreasonably continue the opposition if appropriate measures are taken following the discussion.

8.3 Publicity

MEYR encourages the broad publicity and dissemination of results through publications and events organised both for specialists in the Economic Sectors of relevance to the Project and for the general public.

The Post-Doctoral Fellow shall ensure that copies of any relevant publications as well as any marketing, publicity and informational material developed as part of or in relation to the Project shall be passed to MEYR.

Any publications resulting from the Project and events organised in relation to the Project shall acknowledge MEYR for its financial support.

9. Complaint procedure

All complaints will be treated with confidentiality.

9.1 Grounds for complaints

Applicants can file a complaint regarding procedural anomalies and irregularities during the submission and evaluation process in terms of the procedures stipulated in these guidelines and regulations. Complaints cannot be made concerning:

- The Government's policies and procedures
- The merits of the application in terms of the criteria stipulated in these guidelines and regulations

Only applicants may file complaints concerning their Projects.

9.2 Filing a complaint

Complaints must be made in writing and must be as clear as possible. The complainant must state the grounds and the reasons for the complaint, providing a detailed explanation and justification supported by relevant documentation or testimonials as to why the complainant deems that irregularities were committed in the procedure/s stipulated in these Guidelines and Regulations or in standard good governance rules and regulations governing the public sector. Complaints must be made to the Permanent Secretary (MEYR) within five (5) working days of receipt of the Board's communication of the funding decision pertaining to the Project Application.

Should Applicants not be satisfied with the reply, the Permanent Secretary (MEYR) will convene a Complaints Board that will discuss the particular complaint further. If an Applicant submits a complaint, then the Applicant is accepting that information pertaining to the Applicant's Project may be used to address the complaint. The decision of the Complaints Board shall be final.

10. Dispute Resolution

The parties involved in a Project shall reasonably endeavour to settle any disputes amicably amongst themselves. If, however, the settlement of a dispute cannot be successfully achieved in this manner, the parties shall bring the dispute to the attention of the Permanent Secretary (MEYR), who shall meet the parties and attempt to resolve the dispute through mediation. Should this mediation be unsuccessful, MEYR reserves the right to terminate the Project, and the UM shall be obliged to return any unspent funds received for the Project to MEYR.