

Annex I – Notice of the Call

Evaluation Guide

Maria de Sousa Call for PhD Studentships – 2021

SEAGULL – Seeking Epidemiological and Virological Answers

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ACRONYMS

COI – Conflict of Interests

FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P.

myFCT – FCT Information and Management System of FCT

CV – *Curriculum Vitae*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Evaluation Guide is the document prepared to help evaluators and applicants understand the procedure associated to applications evaluation of the Maria de Sousa PhD Studentships Call – 2021: SEAGULL -Seeking Epidemiological and Virological Answers.

No information contained in this Guide replaces or overlaps with what is stated in the Research Fellowship Holder Statute, the FCT Regulation for Studentships and Fellowships and the Notice of the Call.

2. EVALUATION PROCESS

2.1 Guiding principles for peer-review evaluation

The mission of FCT is to ensure the scientific quality of the peer review process. Therefore, evaluators shall give precedence to quality and originality over quantity, when analysing applicants and supervisors' CVs. The scientific content represents the essential core of peer review, which requires a global and integrated vision of all components of the applicant's scientific and professional career and the research work plan. The application must be evaluated taking into consideration its originality, consistency and coherence, and its contribution to the progress of knowledge in all of its components.

Impartiality and transparency are fundamental principles for evaluation decisions. All applications will be treated and assessed impartially, on the base of their merit, regardless of origin or identity of the applicant, supervisor(s) or affiliation institution(s), safeguarding situations of conflict of interests (COI).

2.2 Conflict of Interests (COI)

If any of the panel member is in a situation of COI regarding any of the applications submitted to the panel, he/she must declare it to FCT as early as the first contact with the application is made.

Panel members in any declared COI situation cannot be assigned by the chair or co-chair as readers of the respective applications, and will be prevented from contacting in any way with the applications or their evaluation, throughout the evaluation process.

The COI declarations must mandatorily be included in the panel meeting report. The chair of the evaluation panel, in collaboration with FCT, is responsible for compiling the list of declared COI situations that include the application reference, name of the applicant and the respective panel member.

The situations of COI of the chair, evaluators and external reviewers include, but are not limited to:

- a) Belonging to the **same academic organizational unit¹ and/or the same R&D unit² of the host institution** of the work plan associated to the application;
- b) Belonging to the **same academic organizational unit and/or the same R&D unit** of the higher education institution of the **supervisor and/or co-supervisor(s)** associated to the application;
- c) Having published scientific work with the applicant or with the applicant's supervisor or co-supervisor(s) in the **three years prior³** to the date of opening of the application period;
- d) Having **on-going scientific collaboration with the applicant, their supervisor or co-supervisor(s)**;
- e) Being related (**family relationship**) to the applicant, supervisor or co-supervisor(s);
- f) Having a **scientific or personal conflict** with the applicant supervisor or co-supervisor(s);
- g) Being in **any other situation that may raise doubts** to her/himself, to third parties, namely the applicant or an external entity, about their capacity to assess the application impartially.

2.3 Terms of Reference and Confidentiality

All panel members, including evaluators and chair, as well as potential external reviewers, who do not participate in the panel but who collaborate with it, establish with FCT the commitment to respect a set of responsibilities essential to the evaluation process, such as impartiality, declaration of potential COI and confidentiality. During all the evaluation process, confidentiality must be fully protected and ensured in order to guarantee the independence of all opinions produced. All panel members, as well as external reviewers, are responsible for ensuring confidentiality about the entire evaluation process, as well as the content of the applications, being prevented from copying, citing or using any type of material contained therein.

2.4 Constitution of the Evaluation Panel

The evaluation panel are constituted by experts with acknowledged scientific merit and experience in the fields of knowledge involved in this call. The evaluation panel is also established according to coverage of scientific fields and sub-fields, gender balance, geographical and institutional diversity.

All the panel members, including the chair, and external reviewers that may eventually collaborate with the panel, **may never be a supervisor or co-supervisor** of applicants with applications submitted under the evaluation panel.

The assessment work developed by the panel is coordinated by the panel chair, under FCT's invitation. The chair has the responsibility to assure that the evaluation exercise is carried out with transparency,

¹ Academic organizational unit refers to the department, if the structure of the faculty/school is organized by organizational units of a departmental nature, or to the faculty/school if not.

² In case there are more than one cluster/pole of the same R&D unit, the entire institution should be considered, regardless of the indicated cluster/pole

³ It will be considered for this purpose the printing date or the publication date of the book, volume of the edition or of the journal issue.

independence and equity.

The chair shall not assess any applications, except in particular situations such when there is a lack of scientific coverage in the panel or COI of the remaining panel members.

The constitution of the evaluation Panel is made public in the FCT's website before the beginning of the evaluation period.

2.5 Role and Responsibilities of the Panel Chair

In collaboration with FCT, the chair is responsible for:

- a) Ensuring that the evaluation exercise is carried out with transparency, independence and equality;
- b) Allocating to each application two evaluators, appointing them as 1st and 2nd readers, considering their fields of expertise and the application's subfield and the declared COIs;
- c) Identifying applications that may need external reviewers;
- d) Managing the identified COIs;
- e) Ensuring that all panel members follow the guidelines and clarifications provided by FCT throughout the process;
- f) Verifying, in a joint action with the panel members, the suitability of the applications to the panel, identifying any applications outside the scope of the panel that may be considered as "Non-assessable";
- g) Ensuring that all panel members know and apply the established criteria and sub-criteria, and the respective weighing of such criteria and sub-criteria, when filling in the individual evaluation reports;
- h) Assuring the compliance with the deadlines granted to evaluators to prepare the individual and pre-consensus evaluation reports;
- i) Ensuring that, when filling in the evaluation reports, evaluators justify their grading with clear and substantive arguments that allow understanding the correspondence between both;
- j) Moderating the panel meeting and ensuring a collegial process of decision;
- k) Assuring that the final evaluation report is prepared until the end of the panel meeting;
- l) Guaranteeing that all the final evaluation reports produced by the panel, that will be communicated to applicants, are consistent and coherent with each other, that the comments demonstrate the relative merit of the applications and are in accordance with the provisions of this guide, the applicable legislation and with the respective scores;
- m) Preparing the panel meeting report, together with all the panel members;
- n) Collaborating with FCT to solve any unexpected event that may occur before, during and/or after the panel meeting;

- o) Coordinating the preliminary hearing process.

2.6 Evaluation

Before the beginning of the evaluation process, all panel members (including chair) will have to indicate on the FCT's information system, myFCT, the applications with which they are in a situation of conflict of interests, thus preventing access to the details of these applications. The list of COIs declared will be included in the panel meeting report, which will be made available to the applicants.

The evaluation process has two sequential periods: remote evaluation and panel evaluation.

2.6.1 Remote evaluation

The remote evaluation is divided in two stages: i) individual evaluation and ii) pre-consensus evaluation, both of which are carried out in myFCT portal. In the first stage, each evaluator must complete their individual evaluation forms as 1st and 2nd reader, and in the second stage, the 1st reader will be responsible to produce the pre-consensus report that should reflect the analysis of both readers allocated to the application.

2.6.1.1 Individual Evaluation

- a) Each application is individually assessed by two panel members who are not in a situation of COI with the applicant and respective supervisor(s) and affiliation institution(s).
- b) If any of the evaluators identifies an additional situation of COI concerning any application(s) attributed to her/him, it must be immediately and formally declared to FCT and to the panel chair, who is responsible for the reallocation of the application(s).
- c) Whenever justified, as in the case of interdisciplinary applications, the chair should request to FCT the opinion of external reviewers, during the individual remote evaluation period, considering the transdisciplinarity of the proposal and the institutional collaborations described in the application.
- d) An application shall be considered **non-assessable** when it **strays considerably from the objectives establish in point 1 of the Notice of the Call**. The evaluation panel must analyse and jointly validate this decision during the panel meeting. The decision must be made explicit in the final evaluation report and justified in the panel meeting report.
- e) An application shall also be considered non-assessable when a violation of at least one of the mandatory admissibility requirements of the applicant or application is identified, whenever it has not been identified in the prior stage of administrative review of admissibility (as, for example, the case of submitting the same recommendation twice).
- f) Each evaluator must fill in an individual evaluation report for each of the applications that they are assigned to, score the three evaluation criteria separately (see section 6. Notice of the Call) and prepare the respective comments in order to clearly justify the score awarded.

2.6.1.2 Pre-consensus Evaluation

- a) At the end of the individual evaluation stage, the 1st reader is responsible for preparing a pre-consensus report within the pre-established deadline that takes place before the panel meeting.
- b) When preparing the pre-consensus report, the 1st reader must take into consideration the two individual evaluations (and external reviewers' assessment, if applicable).

2.6.2 Panel evaluation

The panel evaluation consists on the reunion of all panel members where the **collegial discussion of all applications submitted to the panel** is promoted. This meeting comprises the following:

- a) Analysis and joint discussion of all applications, taking into consideration the individual and pre-consensus evaluation reports previously produced which constitute the working documents for the panel;
- b) During the meeting, the 1st readers must be prepared to present a summary of strengths and eventual weaknesses of each application that has been assigned to them. During the discussion, the participation of all panel members should be encouraged;
- c) The final evaluation of each panel is performed by discussing the relative merit of all the applications, after which the final score for each application is established. If any panel member is in a situation of conflict of interests with any application, he/she will not be able to participate in the discussion and should leave the meeting. If this situation applies to the chair, another panel member should be assigned to moderate the meeting and the discussion of these applications;
- d) The 1st reader is responsible for preparing the final evaluation reports, taking into consideration the discussion and the collegial decision of the panel;
- e) All the final evaluation reports produced must be consistent and coherent with each other, also exhibiting a correspondence between the scores and respective comments;
- f) All panel members are responsible for the discussion of the relative merit of all the applications. From the collegial discussion shall result a single provisional ranked list, per evaluation panel.

2.7 Comments to be transmitted to Applicants

The panel should pay attention to present, in a clear, consistent and coherent manner, the arguments that led to the scores awarded **to each of the evaluation criteria and sub-criteria**; the eventual disability bonuses and respective degree of disability should also be mentioned. It is the responsibility of the chair to ensure that the panel justifies the scores with substantive arguments that allow the understanding of the meaning of the evaluation, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each application for each evaluation criteria (see point 5. of the Notice of the Call).

In case the applicant presents more than one graduate and/or master degree, the panel should indicate which of the degrees has been selected for the calculation of sub-criterion A1 – Academic Career. In case of academic degrees obtained in a foreign country, the panel should mention if the applicant has submitted, or not, the respective recognition and/or conversion to the Portuguese grading scale.

The comments in the final evaluation reports should comply with the following recommendations:

- a) Do not use the 1st person; alternatively, as an example, use "The panel considers that (...)";
- b) Avoid descriptive comments or that are a mere summary of elements included in the application;
- c) Avoid generic and/or vague comments, such as "very weak work plan", "adequate CV", "excellent hosting conditions", etc.;
- d) Use analytic and impartial language, avoiding depreciative comments about the applicant, the work plan proposed, the supervisors, etc.;
- e) Avoid asking questions since the applicant cannot reply.

2.8. Panel Meeting Report

The panel meeting report is a responsibility of all panel members and must be signed by all, being the chair responsible for writing it down.

The panel meeting report must include:

- a) The name and affiliation of all panel members;
- b) The identification of all the applications considered as "non-assessable";
- c) The panel adopted methodology used for particular cases;
- d) The provisional ranked list of all the applications evaluated by the panel, in descending order of the final score.

In addition, the panel meeting report must include the following annexes:

- e) The list of COI declared by all the panel members;
- f) Eventual vote and competence delegations for justified absences.