



NOVEL MSCA

POSTDOCTORAL
PROGRAMME

GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS



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GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

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NOVEL MSCA POSTDOCTORAL PROGRAMME

GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

1 Purpose of the guide

The aim of this guide is to provide potential applicants with an overview of the NOVEL MSCA Postdoctoral Programme and NOVEL MSCA fellowship, practical information on how to apply, and a description of the evaluation procedure. Concerning applying, this guide should be read in combination with the NOVEL MSCA call text. If you require further information about the NOVEL MSCA Programme, please consult the contact information in section 6 of this guide.

2 NOVEL MSCA Postdoctoral Programme

NOVEL targets diverse talents and variety of brain health research perspectives. We welcome researchers from diverse social, cultural and disciplinary backgrounds, and accommodate interdisciplinary research designs. The selected applicants will have full-time positions for three years to advance their career and make a significant impact in brain health research.

2.1 Objectives of the programme

Novel brain health solutions across four focus areas: Prevention and Care, Methods and Data, Innovation and Society, and Ethics and Well-being (NOVEL) is a globally unique interdisciplinary postdoctoral training. This programme is dedicated to inclusive interdisciplinary brain health research and the associated competencies in innovation, management, leadership and ethics. Over the project's lifetime (2024-2029), NOVEL will provide training for 14 postdoctoral research fellows (PFs) with diverse backgrounds, who will be hosted by the research groups within the University of Eastern Finland's NEURO Research Community (NEURO RC).

NOVEL has the following objectives:

- Attracting talented PFs across Europe and globally through provision of outstanding research environments, intersectoral mentoring and secondments, and the opportunity to actively participate in and develop the world-class NEURO RC,
- Nurturing a rich pool of research excellence that has a tangible impact on society and the region,
- Reinforcing intersectoral networks involving both academic and non-academic stakeholders at regional, national, and international levels,
- Establishing itself as an international benchmark programme for interdisciplinary postdoctoral training in brain health,

- Enhancing career development opportunities for researchers, especially historically under-represented ones, within Europe and beyond.

2.2 Research areas and themes

The novelty of the NOVEL research framework lies in its multifaceted approach to addressing critical aspects of current and emerging brain health challenges. It integrates cutting-edge technology, interdisciplinary collaboration with intensive collaboration between basic and clinical neuroscience, and a strong ethical foundation to drive innovation and societal impact. By combining sophisticated machine learning and legal expertise, it advances prediction and early diagnosis while ensuring patient rights and inclusivity. It also promotes efficient knowledge transfer from science to clinic and from academia to industry using advanced data-sharing strategies. Emphasizing both commercial and social innovation, the research extends beyond scientific complexities, fostering co-innovation among diverse stakeholders and enhancing well-being through patient-centered practices. This holistic and ethics-driven approach sets a visionary standard for interdisciplinary brain health research. The PF are invited to plan their research activities in line with these research areas taking into account the extraordinary possibility for interdisciplinary research proposals.

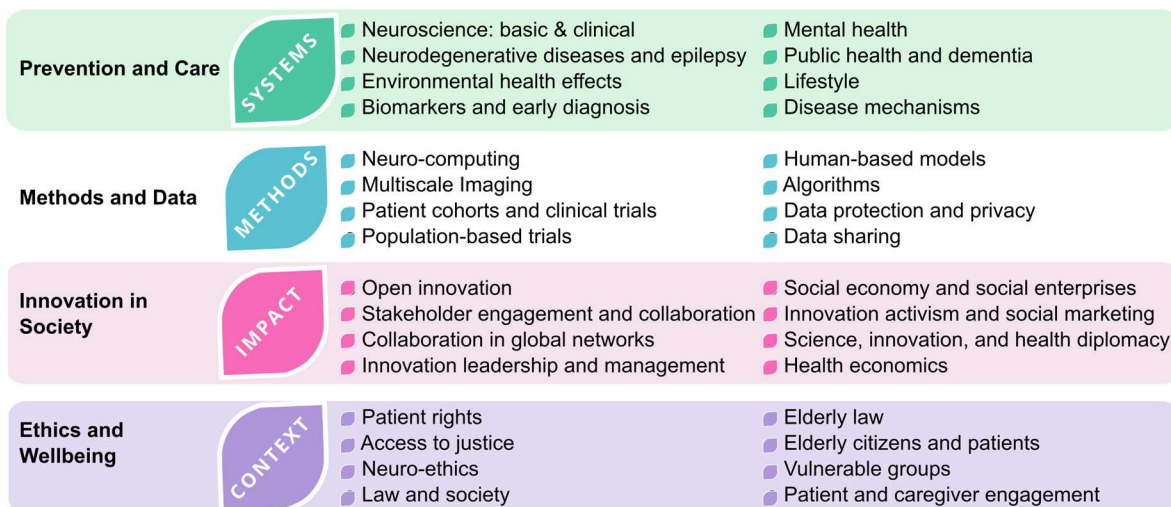


Figure 1. Outline of the NOVEL research areas

Postdoctoral Researchers are recruited into two research areas per call. The first call (open March-May 2025) focuses on the research areas of Prevention and Care as well as Methods and Data. The second call (open November 2025-January 2026) focuses on the research areas of Innovation and Society as well as Ethics and Wellbeing. Applicants will define their own research topic within these four broad areas.

2.2.1 Research areas of the first call: The prevention and Care and Methods and Models

Both genetics and environmental factors contribute to brain diseases, with environmental and lifestyle factors significantly influencing their global burden. In addition to genetics contributing to disease risk, we emphasize the importance of environmental and lifestyle factors. Effective prevention will require integrating large exposure datasets, multi-omics, imaging, epigenetics, and advanced data analytics to uncover biomarkers, assess disease risk and suitability of treatments. This knowledge will support better personal lifestyle choices, identify therapeutic targets, reduce healthcare costs, and guide regulatory efforts to protect public health.

We also actively develop human-based disease models and technologies related to the use of human brain tissue samples. iPSC technologies, patient brain biopsies and resections, and novel human-based cellular models will be used to study genetic, lifestyle, and environmental factors in brain disorders. These efforts are complemented by studies on living human brain material using electrophysiology, single-cell technologies, and omics approaches to bridge preclinical findings with clinical applications.

By integrating human-based models and advanced methodologies, we aim to uncover disease mechanisms, identify therapeutic targets, and develop novel diagnostic and prognostic tools. Approaches include omics-based analyses (transcriptomics, epigenomics, proteomics), imaging, behavioral studies, deep phenotyping, electrophysiology, histopathology, and AI-driven neuroinformatics, enabling personalized insights into brain disorders. We actively develop new AI-based approaches to answer the needs in analyzing and integrating heterogeneous brain data originating from a variety of sources and measurements

For further details, see descriptions of the research groups and supervisors on NOVEL webpage: www.uef.fi/novel.

2.2.2 Research areas of the second call: Innovation in Society and Ethics and Wellbeing

This call focuses on two research areas: Innovation in society and Ethics and wellbeing. Within these areas, we examine how brain health can be understood, supported, and improved from diverse social and economic perspectives. Our research addresses the socio-legal-economic dimensions of brain health innovation, while also exploring broader questions around ethics and wellbeing, as well as societal and economic

impact.

We investigate how challenges, such as neurological disorders and mental health issues can be addressed through innovations, systems, policies, and laws that prioritize accessibility, fairness, and effectiveness. This includes examining the role of new products, services, and companies, as well as preventive measures, care paths and treatments, in improving outcomes by focusing on ethics, wellbeing, and cost-effectiveness. In these contexts, we explore Public and Patient Involvement (PPI), patient rights, and access to services and care, including the cultural, social, and economic forces guiding these activities.

By integrating perspectives from innovation research, health economics, and legal studies, we provide insights into solutions that deliver tangible value and societal impact. We are further interested in how specific brain health issues and solutions influence individuals, communities, and societies. Our research highlights existing inequalities and offers actionable strategies to make health and social care systems more inclusive. Also, we aim to ensure that health research, development, and innovation (RDI) practices and processes are responsive and supportive for diverse populations.

Our research is grounded in a wide range of research methods, including interviews, surveys, and registry data analysis, alongside participatory and co-research strategies. We also offer possibilities to use existing data sets (e.g., SHARE Home) to create new knowledge and robust evidence. By evaluating the potential of novel, inspiring approaches, we support brain health solutions that are not only effective but also equitable and deeply rooted in the lived experience of citizens, patients, and caregivers.

For further details, see descriptions of the research groups and supervisors on NOVEL webpage: www.uef.fi/novel.

3 The NOVEL Fellowship

NOVEL will fund 14 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellowships (PF) during the Programme's lifetime (2024-2029). Each fellowship will have a **3-year duration**. During their fellowship, the Fellows will undertake a research project, participate in training and career development activities and undertake a secondment at a partner organisation. All fellowships will be based at UEF Kuopio Campus, Finland, within participating faculties.

3.1 Eligibility criteria

The candidates must fulfil the following eligibility criteria (detailed instructions and fillable forms for reporting these in the application will be provided):

- hold a **PhD degree** (or equivalent, incl. a research-based thesis) by the closing of the call
- should have **less than 7 years of research experience** (full-time equivalent research work at a university or research institution, assessed from the date when the PhD study right ended)
- **fulfil the mobility requirement of the MSCA actions:** at the date of the call deadline, the applicant must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies) in the country of their host organization (Finland) for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before the reference date. Compulsory national service and/or short stays are not considered. Procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention is also not considered.

3.2 Roles, Responsibilities, and Benefits

Postdoctoral Fellows in the NOVEL Programme are required to reside and carry out their work activities in Finland. The full-time positions are at the University of Eastern Finland's Kuopio campus.

During their three-year employment period, PFs are committed to:

Designing and conducting their cutting-edge research within one of the programme's four main areas. The research must also

- be in line with the strategic areas of the UEF
- include intersectoral and international mobility
- collaborate with stakeholders who will assist in generating increased impact
- make use of interdisciplinary expertise of the NEURO Research Community
- exploit the cutting-edge infrastructure available at the UEF
- exploit the extensive clinical and medical databases of UEF and its partners
- plan for innovation and translational medicine approaches that have clinical and societal impact and contribute to the development of new technologies, therapies, and policies aimed at improving brain health.

The PF's research also involves collaborating across disciplines, such as

- Working closely with a diverse team of scientists, including experts in neuroscience, data science, and social sciences.
- Fostering partnerships with external stakeholders such as companies, universities, patient groups, and health organizations both in Finland and internationally.

Disseminating Findings

- Publishing research findings in high-impact journals and present at international conferences.
- Engaging with the broader community to communicate the significance of research.
- Showcasing Achievements nationally and internationally to various stakeholders to elevate their profiles
- Adhering to Open Science principles.

Participating in Secondments and Visits

- Each PF will commit to a compulsory intersectoral secondment (lasting 2-6 months) with NOVEL partners that include e.g., ecosystems, companies, hospitals/healthcare organizations or patient advocacy organizations.
- Additional optional secondments (2–6 months): a) an extension of the cross-sectoral secondment in the same organization or in a new one, b) academic secondment to another university or research institution in Finland or abroad or c) interdisciplinary internal secondment to another than their primary hosting research group within UEF.
- Short visits (1-4 weeks): learning professional, collaborative, entrepreneurial and business skills and building international, national, and regional networks with academics and stakeholders.

During secondments and short visits, researchers will work on their research project under the supervision of a co-supervisor from the hosting organization, benefit from knowledge and networks, and utilize their infrastructure.

Engaging in Professional Development:

- Preparing a personal career development plan
- Receiving personalized supervision and career guidance to support your professional growth.
- Engaging in a mentorship process with an intersectoral mentor. Each PF is appointed a mentor. Mentoring plays a crucial role in fostering career development and helps to identify professional skills and expertise.

Undergoing training

NOVEL's training programme consists of three training pillars, as depicted in Figure 2.

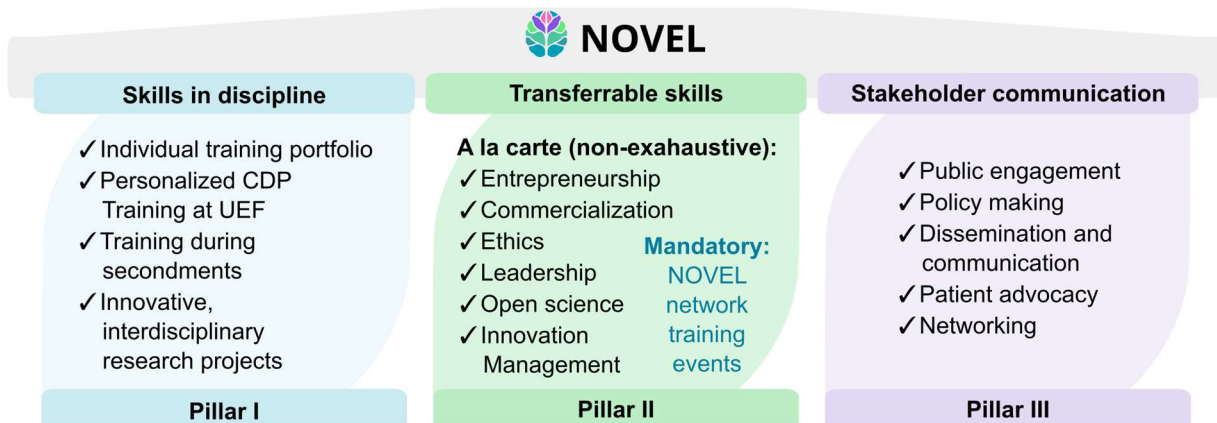


Figure 2. Outline of the NOVEL training pillars

Postdoctoral fellows are expected to participate in training activities and NOVEL community's events and meetings. Mandatory activities include:

- **Regular NOVEL Workshops:** Covering research presentations, partner interactions, career coaching, and updating career and dissemination plans.
- **Strategic and Operative Project Management Coaching:** Project planning, data management, interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral integration, and communication skills.
- **Social Lab with Stakeholders Summer School:** Skills for collaborating with multiple stakeholders, creating impactful, future-oriented solutions, and achieving social impact.
- **Empowering Team Leadership Summer School:** Fostering leadership and teamwork skills, with a focus on diversity, equality, and inclusivity.
- **IPR and Commercialisation Workshop:** Training in intellectual property management, patenting, and entrepreneurial strategies.
- **NOVEL Symposium:** A platform to present brain health research and innovation, aligned with the Kuopio Alzheimer Symposium in 2029.

Researchers can also access additional courses and training at UEF and are encouraged to mentor and supervise PhD candidates.

Our programme equips researchers to:

- Build strong networks
- Foster interdisciplinary research, collaboration and teamwork
- Showcase achievements nationally and internationally to elevate their profiles
- Develop transferable skills in business, ethics, leadership, and innovation
- Enhance communication, dissemination, and problem-solving abilities
- Gain expertise in supervision and teaching
- Expand mobility and cultural exposure through diverse environments
- Foster technology development and commercial awareness
- Contribute to public outreach and policymaking
- Publish in high-impact international journals
- Strengthen scientific integrity and interpersonal skills
- Promote resilience and cultural understanding

By combining rigorous training with a supportive environment, we prepare researchers to lead transformative projects in brain health and beyond.

3.3 Working conditions

Postdoctoral Fellows in the NOVEL Programme are required to reside and carry out their work activities in Finland. The full-time positions are at the University of Eastern Finland's Kuopio campus.

Working conditions in the NOVEL programme fully correspond to those of the national Finnish postdoctoral training system and the UEF practices. The PFs will receive a monthly salary in accordance with the UEF and Finnish standards, and as extra compared to the standard, a family allowance if they have a spouse and/or dependent children. The PFs' working time is specified according to the national collective agreements of researchers in Finland. **The PFs enjoy the same, rather generous government-funded benefits as any other employees in Finland.**

UEF has HR Excellence in Research status, and the guidelines Charter and Code for the Recruitment of Researchers are followed. UEF offers high-quality Central Services and the UEF administrative staff is fluent in English and in assisting international employees. The International Office coordinates, supports and develops staff mobility, assists international staff, and offers orientations **Migration support will be offered for non-EU PFs, and a dedicated HR officer will assist international staff in any issues of employment throughout the intake process.**

A full-time employment contract (1612 hours work plan annually) is made with each PF for three years (36 months), including a mandatory initial four-month trial period. Employment contracts include:

- occupational health care, social security insurance (incl. sick leave), pension contributions, unemployment insurance, annual paid leave, parental benefits, meal benefits and access to university sports services. The university's occupational accident insurance policies cover all employees during work-related travel.
- office space with required IT tools (computers, email accounts, access to e-publications, etc.), open access publishing benefits, and admission to state-of-the-art research/learning infrastructure and laboratory facilities.

3.4 Appointment conditions for researchers

The following amounts that will be provided for the benefit of the researcher e.g. living, mobility, travel and family allowances:

Living allowance: Following the MSCA guidelines, an average gross salary of €3980/person-month (pm) is paid to each PF, of which income tax (appr. 35 %) will be deducted. The UEF covers social and health care, pension rights, unemployment compensation, holiday pay and compensation and sickness and parental benefits

Family allowance: €100/pm (plus 21,2 % side costs) is allocated for PFs with a spouse and/or dependent children, determined when the employment contract is signed, but may also be started during employment.

Mobility allowance: €28/pm is allocated to each PFs for covering expenses incurred when relocating to Finland.

Travel allowance: €375/pm is allocated to each PF (incl. secondments, short visit, and conference costs).

Research costs: €111 is allocated to PFs, incl. lab consumables, data collection costs, publication costs, etc.

Innovation costs: €217/pm is allocated to each PF to support innovation activities (e.g., Proof of Concept)

The salary evaluation system and the salary components are defined in the Finnish General Collective Agreement for Universities. The salary is comprised of the job requirement component and the personal performance component, and the employer may pay a job requirement bonus and/or a performance bonus. The salary will be re-evaluated in six months from the beginning of the employment contract at the latest. Thereafter, each PF may ask the supervisor for salary evaluation at regular intervals, which secures the acknowledgement of work well done.

Following UEF policy, NOVEL is committed to raising awareness and competence in DEI issues, offering information on these to PFs and supervisors. Accessibility of physical, mental, and social environments where everyone, regardless of their personal characteristics, can act and interact equally with others, is emphasized throughout. Different treatment of individuals/groups based on their background, harassment or inappropriate treatment defined by law, agreements, or good manners is not tolerated. Primary supervisor sees that workloads are equally distributed, and salary increases are based on achievements and division of responsibilities. Career advancement of women and minority PFs is supported using role models, mentoring and career planning.

4 How to apply

The summary of the application process can be described as follows:



Figure 3. Outline of the NOVEL application process

More detailed information about the application process is described in the following sections.

4.1 Call and selection schedule

The five-stage selection process is planned with the expectation of selecting 14 PFs in two calls (9+5). The process will start by opening 9 positions in first call (open March-May 2025) in the research areas of Prevention and Care and Methods and Data. In second call (open Dec-Feb 2025, 5 positions will be opened in the research areas of Innovation in Society and Ethics and Wellbeing.

First call: Research areas of Prevention and Care and Methods and Data
Call open /closed, from 1 March 2025 until 31 May 2025
Eligibility & ethics check, notification, appeal possibility beginning of June, 2025

External peer review, notification, appeal possibility from 9 June until end of September 2025
Selection Committee review, ranking October 2025
SteerC final decision, notification, appeal possibility, October 2025
Appointment procedure, November 2025 until February 2026
Second call: Research areas of Innovation in Society and Ethics and Wellbeing.
Call open from 1 November 2025 until 31 January 2026
Eligibility & ethics check, notification, appeal possibility, beginning of February
External peer review, notification, appeal possibility, from 9 February until end of May 2026
Selection Committee review, ranking, June 2026
SteerC final decision, notification, appeal possibility, June 2026
Appointment procedure, from August 2026 until November 2026

Table 1: Call timeline

The application deadline for the first call is 31 May 2025 at 16.00 (UTC +2/Helsinki). The application deadline for the second call is 31 January 2026 at 16.00 (UTC +2/Helsinki).

4.2 Eligibility criteria and application requirements

4.2.1. Eligibility criteria

The candidates must fulfil the following eligibility criteria to be able to apply for the programme (detailed instructions and fillable forms for reporting these in the application are provided on NOVEL’s webpage, www.uef.fi/novel):

- hold a **PhD degree** (or equivalent, incl. a research-based thesis) by the closing of the call
- should have **less than 7 years of research experience** (full-time equivalent research work at a university or research institution, assessed from the date when the PhD study right ended)
- **fulfil the mobility requirement of the MSCA actions:** at the date of the call deadline, the applicant must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies) in the country of their host organization (Finland) for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before the reference date. Compulsory national service and/or short stays are not considered. Procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention is also not considered.

4.2.2 Required application documents

The electronic application of the candidates must contain the following documents and information in English:

- electronic application form in the UEF recruitment system
- certified copy of the PhD degree diploma (or other certified proof if diploma not received yet)
- curriculum vitae (CV) (maximum 6 pages, including a list of 10 most important publications) and information on the length of research experience)
- summary of the research proposal (one page)
- research proposal (maximum 8 pages with sections of Excellence, Impact and Implementation)
- Ethical Declaration and Ethical Self-assessment
- preliminary Data Management Plan (one page)
- at least one support letter from a supervisor indicating technical fit of the proposal with the hosting research group.

Proof of English language proficiency may be asked if it is not indicated in the academic degrees or diplomas.

You can find needed documents templates on NOVEL's webpage (www.uef.fi/novel).

4.2.3 Research proposal and support letter

Application requirements include that the candidates need to:

- **write a research proposal** independently before submitting the application by the given deadline. Research proposal needs to contribute to at least one research area of the NOVEL programme, and interdisciplinary and intersectoral proposals are strongly encouraged.
- **contact at least one preferred supervisor** prior to submitting the application to discuss the technical fit of the candidate's research idea with the competence and infrastructure of the hosting research group (incl. major equipment, lab resources, availability or possibility to access required data, and supervisory expertise).
- if an appropriate technical fit exists, **ask for at least one support letter** to be attached to the application.
- **use the templates** provided (if documents are not in English and/or if given templates and forms are not used, the application will not be processed further)
- **submit only one application** per call (if one submits many, the application submitted first will be acknowledged)

- **commit to follow** HE2022 ethical principles and guidelines by filling in and attaching into their application the Ethics Declaration and Ethics Self-assessment forms.

You can find needed documents and templates on NOVEL's webpage (www.uef.fi/novel).

4.2.4 Submission

Applications must be submitted via University of Eastern Finland's electronic application form. Please doublecheck that you have attached all the required attachments. You can refer to Appendix 1 to assist you in this.

Applicants will receive confirmation on the submission of an application. Link to the application form is on NOVEL webpage. Please note that once the application has been submitted the applicant can continue to make further adjustments to the application up until the end of application period. We strongly recommended that the application is completed as early as possible.

The application deadline for the first call is 31 May 2025 at 16.00 (UTC +2/Helsinki). Processing of applications starts immediately after the end of the application period and therefore late applications, i.e. applications sent after the application deadline or changes made to applications after the application deadline will not be considered.

5 Evaluation and selection process

5.1 Selection stages

The five-stage selection process is planned with the expectation of selecting 14 PFs in two calls (9+5). The process will start by opening 9 positions in first call (open March-May 2025) in the research areas of Prevention and Care and Methods and Data. In second call (open Dec-Feb 2025, 5 positions will be opened in the research areas of Innovation in Society and Ethics and Wellbeing.

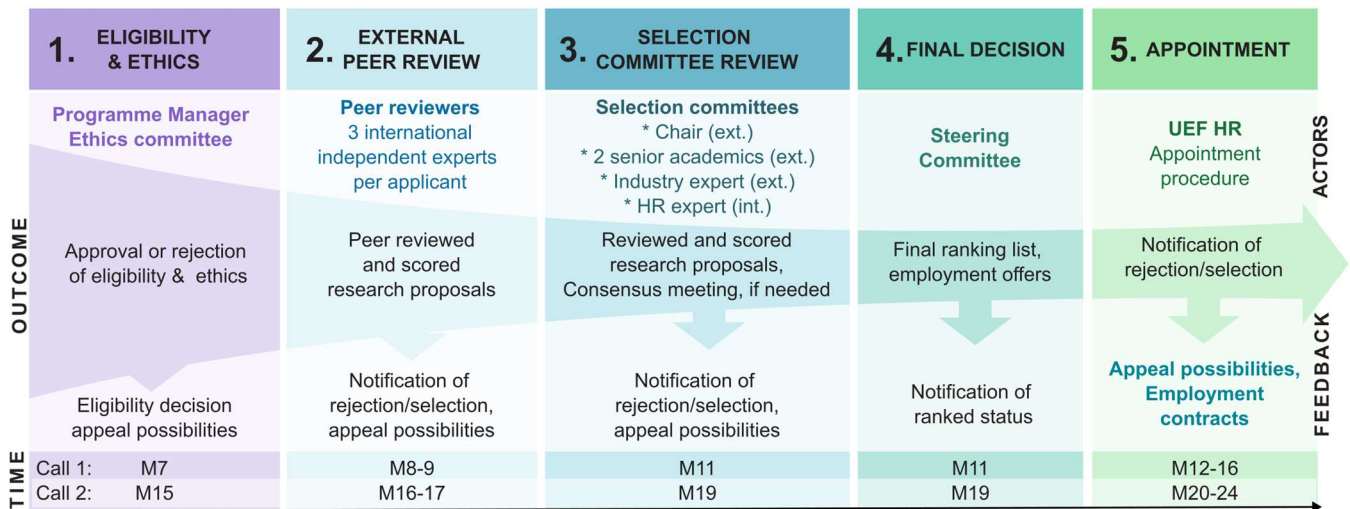


Figure 4. Outline of the NOVEL selection process

5.1.1 Eligibility check

The first step of the selection workflow is the eligibility check pursued by the **Programme Manager** to determine whether the candidates fulfil the predefined eligibility criteria. This is followed by the ethics check pursued by the **Ethics Committee** to evaluate relevant ethical aspects and infrastructure needs for the applicants' research proposals. If needed, consultation can be asked from the **UEF Ethics Board**. Applications not meeting the pre-set criteria, lacking required documents, or having severe ethical problems will not proceed to the next stage. All eligible applicants passing the ethics check will proceed to the next stage of the selection procedure.

All mandatory eligibility criteria are described in part 4.2.1. of this Guide for Applicants (Eligibility criteria). In sum the eligibility criteria are that:

- Appointees are within seven years of having received their PhD
- Appointees must meet the [MSCA mobility rule](#)
- All relevant documentation must be submitted on time

5.1.2 External Peer review

The second step is the external peer review conducted by international external science experts with no conflict of interest with the applicants or applications. Research proposals and CVs of the applicants will be evaluated independently by **three science experts**, who provide both numerical scoring and verbal feedback. The **PM** will calculate the total scores as an average of the individual reviewer's scores. All candidates reaching a pre-given threshold score will proceed to the next stage of the

Selection Committee review. See evaluation criteria in section 5.2..

5.1.3 Selection Committee review

The third step is the Selection Committee (SelectC) review. Each applicant's research proposal and CV will be evaluated by one of the four dedicated SelectCs, each representing one of the NOVEL research areas.

The Selection Committees are composed of a chair, two international senior academic experts, an industry expert, and an HR expert from UEF. All members except the HR expert are external to UEF. All evaluators provide numerical scoring and verbal feedback to the applicants. The industrial expert will evaluate only section 2 (Impact)

Selection Committees also monitor that the applicants were evaluated fairly in the previous evaluation stage. In case of considerable difference (10 points or more of the maximum of 30 points available) between the scores given by the three peer reviewers in the previous stage, SelectCs discuss and may change the outlier scores within the limit of 5 points out of the maximum of 30 points that one applicant may reach.

The project manager will calculate the total scores for each candidate as an average of the individual reviewer's scores. The candidates reaching a pre-given threshold score will proceed to the final ranking list (see next section)

5.1.4 Final decision

The fourth step is the final ranking lists and making the final decision by the programme's Steering Committee (SteerC).

The final decision is based on the weighted final scores of the applicant (External peer review 60 % and the Selection Committee review 40 % of the total scores) calculated by the **Project Manager**, as an average of the two stages of evaluation (the maximum weighted average score is 30 points).

If two or more candidates receive the same score, the SteerC considers the gender balance of the programme/research areas, in addition to scientific balance and the resources of the hosting research groups. In case of similar scores, the Finnish law allows the SteerC to offer the position first to a candidate representing the minority gender within the programme/research area.

The Project Manager will inform the selected PFs of the final decision and provides instructions on the appointment process and signing of employment contracts.

The remaining candidates will be placed on a waiting list until the selected applicants have confirmed acceptance of the position within 10 days. In case of vacancies, the next person on the waiting list will be offered an employment contract. When all positions have been filled, the **Project Manager** will inform the applicants on the waiting list about the completion of the selection process.

If less than 9 positions are filled in the first call, the unfilled positions will be opened again in the second call. If any of the 14 positions remain unfilled in the two calls, a third call will be opened.

5.1.5 Appeals & Redress

Applicants will receive feedback in the different stages of the evaluation process together with information on the appeal procedure via a dedicated electronic form. Applicants have **5 days** to send complaints in each stage, which will be resolved during the following **5 days**.

Feedback and appeals will be addressed by the Appeals Committee consisting of two external experts and with two internal experts.

Appeal may result in one of the following outcomes:

- rejection of the request with justification and formal notification sent to the applicant or
- the request is declared admissible and justified, with corrective action being taken to allow the applicant to proceed in the evaluation process.

5.1.6 Results of the call

The successful candidates will be informed directly by email with an offer of the position. If the offer is declined or ignored for three weeks, positions will be offered instead to the top ranked applicant on the reserve list.

For transparency purposes, the names and project titles of selected Fellows are published on the NOVEL website, following confirmation that successful candidates have accepted the positions offered to them.

5.2. Evaluation criteria and scoring

Four specific criteria are used for evaluation: the excellence of a) the applicant, b) the research project, c) its impact, and d) its implementation. See Table 1 for focus of assessment in each evaluation category.

SCORING	EXCELLENCE OF	FOCUS OF ASSESSEMENT IN EACH EVALUATION CATEGORY
6 = Outstanding (novelty and innovation at global level) 5 = Excellent (extremely good in international comparison) 4 = Very good (only minor elements to be improved) 3 = Good (some elements need improvement) 2 = Satisfactory (substantial improvement needed) 1 = Poor (includes severe intrinsic weaknesses)	APPLICANT	Quality of applicant at international level (considering career stage and plans). Record of scient. publications, teaching, supervision, innovation, dissemination. International networks, collaboration, awards, grants, technical competency.
	RESEARCH PROJECT	Quality and credibility of the proposed project, incl. RQ, theory and methods. Originality, ambition level of novelty. Adherence to Open Science principles. Strategic fit with UEF and NOVEL. Potential to reach/re-enforce professional maturity/independence during the fellowship. Quality and appropriateness of the proposed collaborations, within UEF, regionally and internationally.
	IMPACT of the research project	Potential of the plan to produce scientific breakthroughs and advance applicant's personal career aspirations. Quality of the proposed exploitation, dissemination, and communication strategies to academic and non-academic audiences, including publications. Quality of the planned networking activities.
	IMPLEMENTATION of the research project	Overall clarity, coherence, level of detail and feasibility of the work plan, work packages and the workflow. Appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources, project management structure, and the risk management plan. Feasibility of completion within the 36-month fellowship.
	OVERALL SCORE	Overall quality, coherence and comprehensiveness of the plans and competence. Acknowledgement of mobility and diversity as a potentially valuable contribution to the

		applicant's professional development and the NOVEL PF community.
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Table 2: Evaluation Criteria

The peer reviewers and Selection Committee evaluators are requested to score each of the four criteria and provide a separate assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the research proposal as whole, using a scale from 1 to 6 (see table one for details of scoring). This overall score should not be the simple mathematical average of the other sub-ratings, but additional valuable aspects can be acknowledged in that, e.g., concerning applicants' professional development. **The use of the whole scale is encouraged, with maximum total points of 30.**

Evaluators are also requested to comment (not score) on the ethical aspects of the plan and the one-page preliminary Data Management Plan (DMP). The project manager will calculate the average scores for each applicant in all stages of the evaluation.

In the External peer review, the candidates must reach **a threshold of 20 points** in the total average score to proceed to the next stage.

In the Selection Committee review, **a threshold of 24 points** in the total average score is needed to proceed to the final ranking list. In final ranking, the weight of the External peer review score is 60 % and the weight of the Selection Committee review score is 40 % of the final total score.

6 Further information and contacts

For more information on the NOVEL MSCA Postdoctoral Programme, please see the programme website: www.uef.fi/novel.

Applicants can follow the status of the selection process at the Programme's website. During the submission phase, the online recruitment system (Varbi) sends an automatic email confirming the successful submission of the application. All evaluated applicants will be notified of their selection status, providing information about their external evaluation results along with details about the appeal procedures.

Further inquiries related to NOVEL and application process can be directed to the following address: novel@uef.fi.

6.1 NOVEL organisation

- Coordinator, Professor Tarja Malm
- Co-coordinator, Professor Päivi Eriksson
- Programme Manager, Paula Inkeroinen
- Impact Manager, Piritta Parkkari

6.2 Moving to Finland

All non-EU citizens planning to work or stay in Finland for more than 90 days must apply for a residence permit from the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) before their arrival. If accepted to the NOVEL MSCA Postdoctoral Programme, we recommend you start the residence permit application process at least 3 months prior to your planned arrival in Finland.

If you are a citizen of an EU country, Liechtenstein or Switzerland, you do not need a residence permit to stay in Finland. However, if you live in Finland for over 90 days, you must register your right of residence. You are allowed start working as soon as you have arrived in Finland. Please make sure your passport is valid.

As a Nordic citizen, you are allowed to arrive and work without a residence permit. However, if your stay in Finland exceeds six months you need to register as a resident within one month of moving to Finland.

Helpful information for a smooth entry into the University of Eastern Finland community has been gathered in the UEF website:

<https://www.uef.fi/en/internationalstaff>

Information about immigration formalities is available on the following websites:

- Moving to Finland: <https://www.infofinland.fi/en/moving-to-finland>
- Finnish Immigration Service: <https://migri.fi/en/home>

Appendix 1: Checklist for preparing your application

Applicants may use the following checklist of obligatory requirements and documents before submitting their application. You can download the necessary documents from NOVEL's webpage (www.uef.fi/novel).

Obligatory requirements

<input type="checkbox"/>	PhD PhD Doctoral degree by the call deadline, awarded no longer than 7 years prior to the call deadline (excluding any career breaks, such as parental leave or national service).
<input type="checkbox"/>	MSCA Mobility Rule Applicants must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Finland for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before the call deadline.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Research aims to improve brain health.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The research topic aligns with one of the research areas of the programme.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Compliance with UEF policies and with local law.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Full-time dedication (1,612 hours/year) to research and training activities, unless duly justified.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Commitment to a mandatory intersectoral secondment, if accepted to the programme.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Commitment to move to work in Kuopio, Finland, if accepted to the programme.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Adherence to the principles of Open Science, provision of immediate Open Access to all peer-reviewed scientific publications of research and ensuring all research data is managed responsibly, in line with FAIR principles

Documents

<input type="checkbox"/>	Submitted online application
<input type="checkbox"/>	Curriculum Vitae (max. 6 pages, including a list of 10 most important publications and information on the length of research experience)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Summary of the Research Proposal (1 page)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Research Proposal (max. 8 pages with sections of Excellence, Impact and Implementation)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Copy of Doctoral Certificate
<input type="checkbox"/>	At least one support letter from a supervisor indicating technical fit of the proposal with the hosting research group

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethics Self-Assessment form & Infrastructure table
<input type="checkbox"/>	Preliminary Data Management Plan (1 page)