

Human Technopole Early Career Fellowship Programme

Human Technopole (HT)'s overarching mission is to promote and contribute to improving human health and wellbeing, including healthy ageing. It pursues these aims by carrying out frontier research (mix of fundamental and translational) in the life sciences, particularly focussing on developing novel approaches for personalised and preventive medicine. The HT operating model represents a combination of creating an internationally competitive research institute and being a contributor to the Italian research community by broad academic and translational collaborations.

Aim of funding scheme

The purpose of the Human Technopole Early Career Fellowship Programme (ECF Programme) is to help talented researchers start their own independent research at Italian Universities or research institutes.

With this programme, under the patronage of the Ministry of University and Research, HT aims to foster the development of young, independent, talented early-career scientists who have achieved significant results and recognition and who wish to carry out their research activity at an Italian institution (research centre or University) different from HT in the field of life sciences, contributing to the advancement of fundamental knowledge. At the same time, the ECF Programme will facilitate collaborative relationships between HT and the Italian research system.

Guidelines

The research activity proposed in the application should be in line with HT's overall research programme and, in particular, consistent with the one of the scientific areas of the [HT Research Centres](#): Functional Genomics, Population & Medical Genomics, Neurogenomics, Computational Biology, Structural Biology, and Health Data Science.

The ECF researchers will have access to HT's research infrastructure at the same conditions as internal researchers and will be expected to participate in internal meetings and/or events with HT Research Group Leaders.

Applications for the ECF Programme must be submitted by an individual researcher (PI - Principal Investigator) together with a Letter of Intent from an Italian host institution (HI - Host Institution). The HI must undertake to provide the researcher with all the necessary facilities, equipment, and infrastructure to carry out the research proposed in the application, while ensuring agile and autonomous access to the awarded funds by the PI.

Prior to the start of the PI at the Host Institution, an agreement between HT and the HI will be signed, with the specific purpose of ensuring and guaranteeing the independence of the PI. PIs are entitled to change their HI during the period of the ECF Programme, providing adequate motivation and notice to the original HI and to HT; in such cases an agreement between the old and the new HI will need to be put in place.

PIs are expected to report annually on scientific achievements, usage of resources and impact of the ECF Programme on their career development.

Funding

Early Career Fellows will receive a total "research and remuneration package" of up to 200,000.00 euros per year for a period of five years. The award of up to five ECF grants is planned for the current call. The initial ECF package is intended to cover the salary of the PI, as well as of junior researchers, and/or other research related costs including publications, travel, and training costs. The PI's employment contract will be concluded directly by HT and/or by the HI. The research funds will be managed by the Host Institution and dedicated exclusively to the ECF research project. The funds may also cover specialised equipment

not already available at the HI. In this case, with the consent of the PI, the equipment may remain in the possession of the HI at the end of the five-year research programme.

A candidate who receives the ECF award may not hold it concurrently with another grant designed to assist in establishing the scientist at a host institution in Italy and to pursue the same line of research. Exceptions to this rule may be made only under exceptional circumstances, which must be communicated promptly to HT for consideration. Co-funding from the host institution, on the other hand, is positively considered.

Requirements and eligibility criteria

The **ECF Programme** is aimed at researchers of all nationalities who have acquired research experience after their PhD and are ready to hold a position as independent Group Leaders. More specifically, candidates must:

1. **hold a doctoral degree and have no more than 8 years** of experience from the date of its award. The calculation of this period is made by comparing the date the degree was awarded to the ECF application deadline (i.e., January 31, 2022). This limit may be extended in the case of maternity or paternity leave, serious and documented illness and for national service (military or civil), for a period corresponding to the leave granted by the relevant research organisation for the reasons mentioned above (in these cases, appropriate documentation must be provided);
2. not hold a long-term position at Universities or IRCCS (i.e., RTD-B or higher) and/or a position as Group Leader at the time of the ECF Call deadline (i.e., January 31, 2022);
3. demonstrate significant **mobility** and independence between the current and future host institution, i.e. must have carried out their latest research activities independently of their PhD supervisor and, in any case, at a different institution than that attended during the doctorate. The Host Institution of the ECF must be different from the institution where the applicant is currently working;
4. have identified a host institution established **under Italian law**, with headquarter in Italy, and operating in the Italian territory. The **Host Institution commits to support the career development of the PI** and to provide the necessary facilities, equipment, and infrastructure to carry out the research proposed in the ECF application by signing the Letter of Intent (see below “Structure of the application”);
5. develop a research plan that is in line with one of the scientific areas of HT, i.e. Functional Genomics, Population & Medical Genomics, Neurogenomics, Computational Biology, Structural Biology, and Health Data Science;
6. be willing to **start during 2022**, in agreement with the Host Institution and HT. Latest expected starting date is January 2023.

Structure of the application

All documents must be submitted in English and in pdf format. Please include your name in the title of each pdf document (e.g. MillerL CV.pdf, MillerL Publications.pdf, etc.) and the document title in the header of each document.

Applications must include:

1. CV of the candidate, up to 2 pages (please download and fill in the template provided below);
2. PhD certificate including the date of the degree;
3. list of scientific publications of the applicant, with specific indication of those produced independently of the PhD supervisor;

4. title and abstract: the abstract, not exceeding one page in length (1.15 spacing; minimum font size 11), should include Background, Objectives/Aims, Preliminary results, Strategy/Methods, Significance/Relevance;
5. scientific research proposal – (please see below for a detailed description of the structure);
6. the corresponding financial plan of the research proposal, broken down by year with an indication of costs for staff, equipment, travel, supplies, meeting expenses and overheads, if relevant (please download and fill in the template provided below);
7. two letters of reference: These letters should be on institutional letterhead, signed and scanned and include the name of the applicant and referee in the file title (e.g. MillerL_from_SmithC.pdf). They must be sent directly by the referee via e-mail to earlycareerfellows@fht.org only (without cc to the candidate) by the submission deadline (i.e., January 31, 2022). It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that such letters are received on time;
8. a Letter of Intent (LoI) signed by the legal representative – or their delegate (e.g. Head of Department) – of the Host Institution confirming the full support and commitment of the institution towards the independent scientific research programme of the candidate and indicating the willingness to provide space and facilities for the implementation of the project, as well as agile modalities and procedures for access to the dedicated funding transferred by HT and exclusively dedicated to the PI's research project – (a list of all aspects to be included in the LoI can be downloaded below);
9. if applicable, certification(s) by a previous host institution/employer of the period of leave granted for maternity or paternity, serious and documented illness or national service (military or civil);
10. if applicable, letters of collaboration by scientists who will contribute to the ECF research project (max 2).

Applications lacking any of the above will not be considered.

The scientific project proposal must be sufficiently detailed to enable its evaluation by a panel of experts in the relevant field. The proposal should be in line with HT's scientific programme, indicating which of the HT's scientific areas it is aligned with and commenting on how the PI plans to collaborate with the relevant HT Research Centre. The proposal, not exceeding ten pages in length (1.15 spacing; minimum font size 11) excluding bibliography, should allow for the evaluation of the quality of the candidate as well as of the originality and feasibility of the proposed research.

It must include the following sections:

- a. introduction, with a description of the preliminary work and background information;
- b. objectives to be achieved during the five years of the programme, including a description of the contribution of the proposed research to the relevant scientific area, highlighting its novelty, originality and/or innovative potential relative to the international scientific landscape;
- c. experimental programme and methods to be used;
- d. motivation for why the particular Host Institution was selected and justification of its suitability to support the proposed research programme;
- e. bibliography (not included in the ten-page count).

How to apply

Please apply online by uploading all required documents, apart from the reference letters, in English by **January 31, 2022, 23:59 CET**. Please make sure to inform your referees to send their confidential recommendation letters to earlycareerfellows@fht.org by the above-mentioned deadline. Any questions or requests for clarification regarding the scope of the call or mode for applying should be addressed to earlycareerfellows@fht.org.

**Early Career Fellowship (ECF) Programme
Evaluation Procedure**

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1. Early Career Fellowship Programme Evaluation and Selection Procedure

The purpose of the Early Career Fellowship (ECF) Programme is to help talented researchers start their independent research programme in the fields of specialisation of HT and with visits to HT also to use its facilities, while being based in Italian institutions outside HT.

With this programme, HT aims to foster the development of young, talented scientists who have achieved significant results and recognition in the field of life sciences, thereby contributing to establishing a new generation of excellent scientists in relevant areas of biomedical research, in line with HT's scientific activities. At the same time, the ECF Programme will further facilitate collaborative relationships between HT and the Italian research system.

HT has established a transparent and meritocratic evaluation process that consists of four steps and involves independent review panels composed of internal and external experts, as described in detail below.

Throughout all steps of the evaluation process, reviewers are appointed in such a way as to avoid Conflicts of Interest, while reviewers also agree to maintain the utmost confidentiality with regard to applications and the related documentation (please see the *Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy and Self Declaration* at the end of this document).

1.1. Step 1: Formal eligibility check

The ECF coordinator, appointed by the HT Director, verifies the conformity of all submitted applications to the formal eligibility criteria, as described in the ECF Call; Applications that do not comply with such formal eligibility criteria are rejected. No feedback is provided to applicants at this stage.

1.2. Step 2: Scientific pre-screening

In the application form, applicants are required to select the HT Research Centre(s) that their research proposal best aligns with. Eligible applications are evaluated by the Head of the selected HT Centre(s), who evaluate applications based on their alignment with the scope of the respective Centre and overall competitiveness. Applications that are considered meritorious move on to Step 3. No feedback is provided to applicants at this stage.

1.3. Step 3: Scientific evaluation

Each application is shared with three experts, one internal and two external, for comprehensive evaluation and review. All external reviewers are internationally known scientists, selected by the HT Heads of Research Centre and HT Director, based on their

ECF Evaluation Procedure

expertise in the research field of the applications. In particular, each application is assigned to:

- Head of the relevant HT Research Centre
- One reviewer, common among all proposals of a selected Centre, with a broad view and expertise of the relevant scientific area
- One reviewer expert in the specific field of the proposal

For each application, each reviewer provides a written comment on each of the following criteria:

EVALUATION CRITERIA
Scientific excellence of the applicant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which the candidate has demonstrated ability to conduct excellent research (e.g. strong track record, internationally competitive).
Scientific excellence and novelty of the proposal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which a key scientific question or knowledge gap is addressed; • Extent to which the proposed research contributes to the field, including the design of novel approaches to address the scientific question of choice.
Feasibility of research plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likelihood of successful delivery (are the risks well managed? Is the most appropriate methodology and approach proposed?) within the proposed timeframe; • Financial plan is compatible and in line with the aims of the proposal; • Extent to which the host institution provides a suitable environment (e.g. necessary know-how and infrastructure and commitment to making those available) for the successful completion of the project.
Overall <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General enthusiasm (or lack thereof) for the application.

For each application, each reviewer provides an overall score based on the following:

OVERALL SCORE	
1	Outstanding (exceptionally strong and internationally competitive) TO BE INVITED
2	Excellent (very strong and likely to make an impact, only minor weaknesses) TO BE INVITED
3	Very good (strong, competitive, with moderate weaknesses) MIGHT BE INVITED
4	Good (some positive features, but unlikely to have a big impact in the field) NOT INVITED
5	Marginal (average or weak, inadequate) NOT INVITED

ECF Evaluation Procedure

The final score for each applicant is calculated as the average of all of the reviewers' scores and serves as the basis for an overall ranking of the applications. Top-ranked applicants are invited for Step 4, i.e. on-site evaluation. Roughly twice as many candidates as the number of available fellowships are invited, provided that sufficient number of applications are deemed competitive (i.e. overall score 1-3).

At this stage all applicants are notified of whether they are invited for the on-site evaluation via an official communication from HT.

1.4. Step 4: On-site evaluation

Candidates are invited to HT to deliver a presentation of their project proposal, followed by a discussion and interview with a Selection Committee. In line with internal HT procedures, the composition of the ECF Selection Committee is submitted to the Scientific Advisory Board and Management Committee for approval.

The evaluation committee is chaired by the HT Director and will include representatives of the following categories, while ensuring that the majority of members is external to HT:

- Heads of HT Research Centres and Director
- External expert reviewers selected from those involved in the written evaluation of the applications on the basis of scientific match to the candidates interviewed
- Scientific members of the HT Management Committee
- A scientific expert suggested by the Ministry of University and Research (MUR)

The meeting of the Selection Committee will be minuted and the minutes of the meeting, as well as the final ranking of the candidates, will be presented to the HT Management Committee for approval. A maximum of five ECF candidates will be funded.

All interviewed applicants are notified of the final decision regarding their application via an official communication from HT.

2. Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy and Self Declaration

Human Technopole commits to ensure the most transparent and impartial review process. For this reason, reviewers who have a conflict of interest with an application (e.g. related to the applicant, proposal, or Host Institution) are excluded from its evaluation and do not participate in the discussion of that application during interviews or committee meetings.

2.1. Conflict of Interest

Conflicts of interest arise when an individual (*i.e.* reviewer) has an interest in an application that might bias his/her evaluation of it.

Conflicts of interest may arise when:

1. The reviewer has – or has had in the last five years – a close professional or contractual relationship with the applicant's Host Institution, such as employment contract or managerial or governance role
2. The reviewer is or has been the supervisor or a collaborator of the applicant and/or they have co-authored publications in the last five years
3. The reviewer has a commercial interest in the project being considered for funding
4. The reviewer has a non-monetary interest (e.g. personal or family interest) in the application being funded
5. The reviewer has an established scientific or personal conflict with the applicant

The list above is not to be considered comprehensive, and reviewers must declare all conflicts of interest of whatever category.

Please contact the Early Career Fellowship coordinator in case of doubts.

2.2. Confidentiality and non-disclosure rules

The content of applications and/or information about the review process cannot – by any means – be shared with people not directly involved in the evaluation or management of the ECF Programme.

Reviewers shall not:

1. Share applications, proposals, or information about the project evaluation with anyone who has not been officially designated to participate in the peer review process, including but not limited to colleagues, lab members, fellows or students
2. Use information contained in an application for his/her personal or professional benefit or make such information available for the personal or professional benefit of any other individual or organisation.

2.3. Self declaration

When accepting to evaluate ECF applications, reviewers automatically declare that they don't have conflict of interest with the application(s) assigned to them for evaluation. Moreover, they agree to maintain confidentiality and not to disclose any information related to application(s) and/or to the ECF Programme evaluation process.