Guidelines for preparing and conducting candidate interviews

Article 114 of the Rules on procedures for financing, co-financing, evaluating and monitoring the implementation of research activities stipulates criteria for the evaluation of early-stage researcher candidates, including the “Candidate interview evaluation”. The intent and purpose of the following Guidelines for preparing and conducting interviews with candidates is to provide assistance in preparing and implementing the candidate interview process.

Selection committee

The text of the Public Call is published in Slovenian and English language on the websites of the University of Maribor as well as on the Pan-European EURAXESS Portal. Therefore, we expect applications from candidates outside of Slovenia as well. Committee members should therefore be qualified to process applications and conduct interviews in English.

The Dean of the Faculty shall nominate the Selection Committee.

Selection Committees are independent. Their members shall avoid conflict of interest and their decisions shall be objective and based on evidence.

The number of members and composition of the committee may vary according to the profile of the offered vacant researcher post and the type of contract, whereby it is necessary to consider the following elements:

- composition with at least three members\(^2\);
- composition that ensures gender balance\(^3\), if the committee composition does not provide for this balance, an elaboration shall be given;
- cooperation of at least one external member who is not employed at the UM with adequate competencies and language skills; however, if this is not possible an elaboration shall be given;
- including experts from various sectors (public, private, academic, non-academic), insofar it is appropriate and feasible;
- the Committee as a whole has to hold appropriate experience, qualifications and competencies for the adequacy assessment of the candidates.

If a Committee member is:

- related to the candidate;
- related by blood in a straight line or removed within the fourth degree;
- related by marriage within the second degree even if the marriage was dissolved;
- lives or lived in a non-marital partnership;
- a guardian, adoptive parent or foster parent;

---

1 Terms in this Public Call refer to subjects in masculine form. It shall be understood that the masculine gender is used as a neutral form for both feminine and masculine subjects.
2 If an even number of Committee members is voting, the vote of the President of the Committee shall prevail.
3 For example not less than a third of men and women in the Committee.
– in the event of conflict of interest as per Article 13 of the Code of Conduct for Public Servants and Articles 35 and 36 of the General Administrative Procedure Act (ZUP); he shall not be allowed to serve on the Committee. If his serving on the Committee cannot be avoided, the Committee shall be supplemented with an additional neutral member.

Pursuant to the Code of Conduct for Public Servants, Committee members are obligated to notify the appointing body on the conflict of interest and pursuant to the first paragraph of Article 37 of ZUP, the party can require elimination due to circumstances referred to in the preceding paragraph.

Any deviation must be elaborated.

Preparing and conducting the candidate interview

An invitation to an interview shall be extended to candidates who:

1. meet criteria for early-stage researchers laid down in the Public Call for Early-Stage Researcher Candidates and Article 113 of the Rules on procedures for financing, co-financing, evaluating and monitoring the implementation of research activities and
2. have filed an application in compliance with the provisions of the Public Call.

The invitation to an interview may be sent to the mailing address and/or email given by the candidate in the application.

If the candidate fails to attend the interview in the time slot allocated in the invitation, it shall be assumed that the candidate withdrew his application. The candidate shall be rejected without evaluation, irrespective of whether he meets the terms and requirements laid down in the Public Call.

Candidate interviews shall be conducted by supervisors and with attendance of other Committee members. The purpose of the interviews is to assess the candidate’s experience, skills, knowledge, competencies and behavioural characteristics, if necessary, with regard to:

1. A short description of the training programme prepared by supervisors, which is considered an integral part of the Public Call documentation.
2. Researchers’ tasks and duties including the classification of the vacancy “H017002 Early-stage researcher” in the staffing table, and the pay bracket associated therewith, i.e. 31st pay bracket, carrying baseline remuneration in the gross sum of EUR 1,428.34.

The primary emphasis during the course of the evaluation process relates to special characteristics of the (sub)field of research and the short description of the training programme. The supervisor shall have discretion in determining the relevance and scoring method applied to the candidate’s experience, skills, knowledge, and behavioural characteristics, if necessary, for the purpose of ensuring that the selected candidate will be able to successfully complete the training programme and earn his PhD. The number of points scored in the candidate interview shall be recorded on the form “Candidate confirmation and evaluation sheet” (UM-MR/OC) and shall be supplemented with a written elaboration of points awarded.

---

The key to a successful interview and selection of the best candidate available is thorough preparation for the candidate interview.

The Selection Committee and supervisor shall decide in advance on the manner in which the candidate will be evaluated, on the structure of questions, and the interview format.

In order to select the best candidate, who will be able to complete the training programme and earn his PhD within the timeframe allocated by Article 116 of the Rules on procedures for financing, co-financing, evaluating and monitoring the implementation of research activities, the candidate interview shall be structured in advance and conducted in a structured manner, meaning that:

- Questions have been planned and prepared in advance and are related to the description of the training programme for the early-stage researcher.
- Questions may relate to other skills, competences and behavioural characteristics required to successfully complete the training programme.
- All candidates applying with the same supervisor shall be asked the same questions or questions of the same type.
- Answers shall be graded in a systematic and consistent manner.

We advise against asking the following types of questions:

1. Questions featuring numerous follow up questions, e.g. “In your opinion, what makes a good researcher? Do you think you have these characteristics and how can you prove that?” Candidates often do not respond to these types of questions in any relevant detail. We therefore advise asking a series of shorter questions.

2. Multiple choice questions, e.g. “Are you leaving your current employment because you wish to gain additional experience or because of a better paycheck?” Ask questions that allow a focused answer, without resorting to suggestions or what you consider to be the real reason.

3. Rhetorical and leading questions. Both types feature the opinion of the interviewer, allowing only for an affirmative answer or no answer at all. These types of questions are commonly, and more appropriately, used in a teaching environment and other academic situations, however, are less appropriate in a job interview, as it is unlikely that the candidate will decide to challenge the interviewer. Open questions are thus the most appropriate means to determine the opinions and experience of the candidate (i.e. questions that cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or no”), e.g. “What do you think...”, “Please talk about...”, as well as non-leading questions “Why did you decide to do/choose...”, “Can you give me an example to support your claim?”

Proposed interview structure:

1. Opening presentation.
2. Information on interview structure and allocated time.
3. Details on submitted application (if necessary).
4. Structured interview with emphasis on planned training programme.
5. Questions on availability to start work as of 1 October this year (planned), remuneration and other questions relating to terms of engagement (e.g. flexibility for extra hours work).
6. Questions of the candidate.
7. Information on additional testing and evaluation, if necessary.
8. Information on future steps and timeframe in which the decision will be communicated to the candidate.

During the interview, the supervisor shall:

- Present to the candidate the work at the University (e.g. describe advantages and benefits, training, culture of the department/chair/institute).
- Relay to the candidate a positive and, most important, realistic image of the department/chair/institute where the selected candidate will undergo training, as well as of the University as a whole.
- Help the candidate in understanding the training programme, work and responsibilities.
- Give the candidate an opportunity to ask questions on the position of employment, tasks and duties, department/chair/institute, University, remuneration, etc.
- Discuss with the candidate other material details, such as the starting date of training, availability of candidate and other terms.

No new candidate evaluation criteria and conditions shall be set and no applicable criteria and terms shall be removed in this stage of the interview.

We recommend that the supervisor or Committee members keep notes of the interview and findings during the interview. Notes shall be recorded in Appendix 1 to these Guidelines, “Candidate interview record sheet”, which is an integral part of these Guidelines. The focus of the interview should be on collecting relevant information and details, not taking a decision. Taking a premature and/or erroneous decision shall be avoided. The Committee shall be flexible and allow candidates to ask any additional or follow up questions.

The supervisor shall refrain from asking direct or indirect questions related to the candidate’s protected personal circumstances, as laid down by Article 14 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia5.

The application and supporting documents submitted by the candidate and information obtained during the interview may reveal characteristics and circumstances that could lead to premature or erroneous assumptions, such as:

- A candidate with disabilities will not be able to perform his duties and obligations.
- A candidate who is a foreign national will not be able to obtain necessary permits in due time.
- A candidate who is of a particular national origin, sex, race or sexual orientation will not fit in with the predominant “culture” of the position of employment within the department/chair/institute where the training programme will be conducted.
- Age and sex may be indicators of the candidate’s frequent absence due to parental leave, etc.

Even though the discussion during the interview may take different courses and involve different topics, depending on the interests and answers of respective candidates, it is imperative to maintain consistency of questioning in terms of asking questions of the same type, and prevent selective questions based on age, sex or any other protected personal circumstance of the candidate:

5 Article 14 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia:
In Slovenia everyone shall be guaranteed equal human rights and fundamental freedoms irrespective of national origin, race, sex, language, religion, political, or other conviction, material standing, birth, education, social status, disability, or any other personal circumstance.
If the candidate is expected to travel as part of his duties and obligations, all candidates shall be notified of the fact and asked, whether they will be able to perform this type of duty. Candidates shall not be asked about their situation at home or arrangements regarding child care.

If the candidate is expected to be flexible in terms of working extra hours, all candidates shall be notified of the fact and asked, whether this could present an issue for them and whether they would be willing to work in excess of eight hours per day, if such a need should temporarily arise.

After interviewing all eligible candidates who applied with a certain supervisor, the Committee shall complete the form “Confirmation and evaluation sheet for early-stage researchers” (UM-MR/OC). The supervisor shall provide a written elaboration of the interview evaluation.

The supervisor shall subsequently create a list of candidates per total sum of points scored. The candidate with the highest overall score shall be selected. When filing the documentation, the supervisor shall also provide reasoning for the selection and rejection of respective candidates. The elaboration is not mandatory, if the selected candidate was the only applicant.

The candidate interview record shall be enclosed to the Evaluation Sheet and delivered to the address University of Maribor, Office for Research and Arts Support Services, Slomškov trg 15, SI-2000 Maribor, Republic of Slovenia.
Appendix 1: Candidate interview record sheet

Candidate interview record sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vacancy</th>
<th>H017002 - Early-stage researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name and surname of candidate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of the Selection Committee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name and surname of interviewer (supervisor)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The candidate can be awarded **maximum of 5 points**.

Name and surname of the President of the Selection Committee:

Signature: