



## GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

version April 1, 2019

This guide aims to provide practical information to potential applicants on how to apply, together with a description of the assessment procedure. For further and up-to-date information, please visit the website [www.olife-programme.eu](http://www.olife-programme.eu).



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# 1. ABOUT THE OLIFE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

The oLife Fellowship Programme is a joint initiative by seven world-leading research institutes of three universities in The Netherlands. Supported by funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, we offer 18 post-doctoral fellowships for interdisciplinary research on fundamental questions concerning the origin and evolution of life, and its distribution in the universe.

## Interdisciplinary research programme on the origin and evolution of life

The origin and nature of life, and its distribution in the universe, are fundamental questions for humanity. Key questions revolve for instance around the formation of biomolecules, the emergence of life on planetary surfaces, the evolution of cellular functions, extra-terrestrial life and how life will cope with human-induced challenges. To successfully address these challenging research questions, collaboration is needed between multiple disciplines: (bio)chemistry, (bio)physics, molecular biology, computational science, systems biology, evolutionary biology, ecology, astrophysics and geoscience. Within the oLife Fellowship Programme, 18 postdocs will collectively conduct interdisciplinary research with the aim to break new grounds in four [Scientific Research Areas](#):

- i. Planetary preconditions and boundary conditions of Life, and its origins here on Earth
- ii. Defining properties and synthesis of Life, from the molecular to the biosphere level
- iii. Modelling, predicting and steering of Life
- iv. Distribution of Life across the universe

Read more about the [rationale of oLife's research programme](#).

## Joint training programme

As a fellow in the oLife Fellowship Programme you are given the opportunity to work on your own interdisciplinary research project with advisors and research institutes of your own choice. Together with 17 other fellows, you will follow a joint research and [training programme](#), consisting of scientific lectures, academic and professional skills training, and career guidance. In the Netherlands, teaching and supervising students is an integral part of a researcher's position. Therefore, you will be expected to prepare and teach your own lecture series on your field(s) of expertise and to supervise student research projects. Also, you are offered the opportunity to go on secondments with our leading industrial, academic or non-profit [partner organisations](#).

Read more about the [Content and Planning of oLife Scientific Lectures and Incorporated Tracks](#)

## Opportunity to work with prominent scientists

Within oLife, you may freely choose from [a pool of 18 advisors](#) and freely propose your research topic. This gives you the opportunity to work directly with top-level academics who have won prestigious prizes and grants, such as the Nobel Prize, ERC Advanced Grant and NWO TOP grant. Many advisors have vast experience as institute directors or board members, are members of esteemed platforms such as the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) or the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), and/or have much experience with European training or networking programmes. Apart from their high quality scientific and managerial experience, all oLife advisors have their own research group and are experienced in supervising researchers, both on PhD and post-doc level.

**We explicitly encourage you to contact your preferred advisors when developing your idea, prior to submitting your application.**

### Participating institutes

The oLife Fellowship Programme is a joint initiative by seven world-leading research institutes of three universities in The Netherlands: the University of Groningen, Leiden University, Eindhoven University of Technology.

The seven participating research institutes are:

- TU/e Institute for Complex Molecular Systems
- Groningen Biomolecular Sciences & Biotechnology Institute
- Groningen Institute for Evolutionary Life Sciences
- Kapteyn Astronomical Institute
- Leiden Institute of Chemistry
- Stratingh Institute for Chemistry
- Zernike Institute for Advanced Materials

### Embedding in the Dutch National Science Agenda

The oLife Fellowship Programme is not only funded by the European Union, but also by the participating universities and/or research institutes. In addition, the programme collaborates closely with the [Dutch national Origins Center](#), which is funded through the [Dutch National Science Agenda](#).

## 2. ABOUT THE POSITION

As a fellow in the oLife Fellowship Programme you are given the opportunity to work on your own interdisciplinary research project with advisors and research institutes of your own choice. Together with 17 other fellows, you will follow a joint research and [training programme](#), consisting of scientific lectures, academic and professional skills training, and career guidance. In the Netherlands, teaching and supervising students is an integral part of a researcher's position. Therefore, you will be expected to prepare and teach your own lecture series on your field(s) of expertise and to supervise student research projects. Also, you are offered the opportunity to go on secondments with our leading industrial, academic or non-profit [partner organisations](#).

### Conditions of employment

You will receive a full-time (38 hours)<sup>1</sup> employment contract according to the Collective Employment Agreement (CAO-NU) of the Dutch universities.

You will be offered a starting salary depending on the date you obtained your PhD and your postdoctoral years. According to the Collective Employment Agreement (CAO-NU) of the Dutch universities, the UFO-profile Researcher/Lecturer (scale 10) applies. In addition to the primary salary, the University offers 8% holiday allowance and an end-of-year bonus of 8.3%:

- 0 years' experience: € 3,255 gross per month for a full-time position
- 1 year experience: € 3,389 gross per month for a full-time position
- 2 years' experience: € 3,514 gross per month for a full-time position
- 3 years' experience: € 3,637 gross per month for a full-time position.

You will have an initial appointment of 12 months that will be extended by 24 months if you perform satisfactorily. The fellowship will not be extended after the 36 months period.

The oLife Fellowship Programme has an inclusive policy. Therefore, candidates who have had career breaks or a diversified career path are especially encouraged to apply.

### Start and duration of your position

The preferred starting date is between January and April 2020.

### Working at a Dutch University and living in the Netherlands

General information about life at a Dutch University can be found in the [Beginner's Guide to Dutch Academia](#).

Find out all about living in [Eindhoven](#), [Groningen](#) and [Leiden](#).

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<sup>1</sup> In compliance with the EU grant, only full-time positions are offered. Only in exceptional cases it will be possible to have a part-time position, of which the final approval lies with the European Commission.

### 3. HOW TO APPLY

The oLife application procedure<sup>2</sup> consists of two stages: a Preliminary Proposal stage and a Full Proposal stage.

#### Preliminary Proposal

You may apply for a position on the oLife Fellowship Programme **until 12 May 23:59** (Dutch local time) by submitting your application via the online application form.

**The online application form will be available from 15 April 2019.**

For the **Preliminary Proposal** round, you are required to:

- a. Complete **an online application form**, containing:
  - Personal and contact details.
  - Applicable oLife FP research areas (two or more).
  - Max. 5 keywords.
  - A chronological overview of activities and countries of residence in the past 3 years prior to the application deadline *to be able to assess eligibility for the EU's mobility rule*.
  - Academic qualifications.
  - Date(s) of award(s) and awarding institution(s) *to be able to assess eligibility for the EU's Experience Researcher rule*.
  - Indication of any career break or unconventional career path.
- b. Submit a digital application file consisting of **one PDF file**<sup>3</sup>, containing in **the following order**:
  - A motivation letter
  - A detailed Curriculum Vitae, including a publication list (max. 4 A4)
  - A description of relevant research experience and most noticeable research results, including an abstract of your PhD thesis (max 2 A4)
  - A brief description and motivation of your proposed research project (max. 2 A4)
  - A copy of your PhD certificate (in English or with official translated copy)

You may freely select your own main advisor and co-advisor (via the online application form) and freely propose your research topic. Your research topic should fit within the [oLife research framework](#) and should address at least two of the four [oLife Scientific Research Areas](#).

**We explicitly encourage you to contact your preferred advisors when developing your idea, prior to submitting your application.**

Only applications that are complete and submitted before the application deadline via the e-application tool will be considered.

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<sup>2</sup> The oLife application, evaluation and selection procedure commits to the principles of the [European Charter and Code for Researchers](#), and specifically the [Code of Conduct for Recruitment](#).

<sup>3</sup> All application documents should be in English.

## Full Proposal

Candidates who are eligible and whose application has passed the threshold will be invited by June 20, 2019 to submit a Full Proposal.

You may submit your application for the Full Proposal **until 31 July 23:59** (Dutch local time) by submitting your application via the online application form.

For the **Full Proposal** round, you are required to submit:

- A more detailed research proposal (max. 10 A4).
- A self-assessment form on ethical issues.
- At least three reference letters (dated and signed) by academic referees, preferably experts in the chose oLife FP scientific areas. One of these should be your PhD advisor.
- *Information about the duration of a possible visa application needed if invited for the Selection Days.*

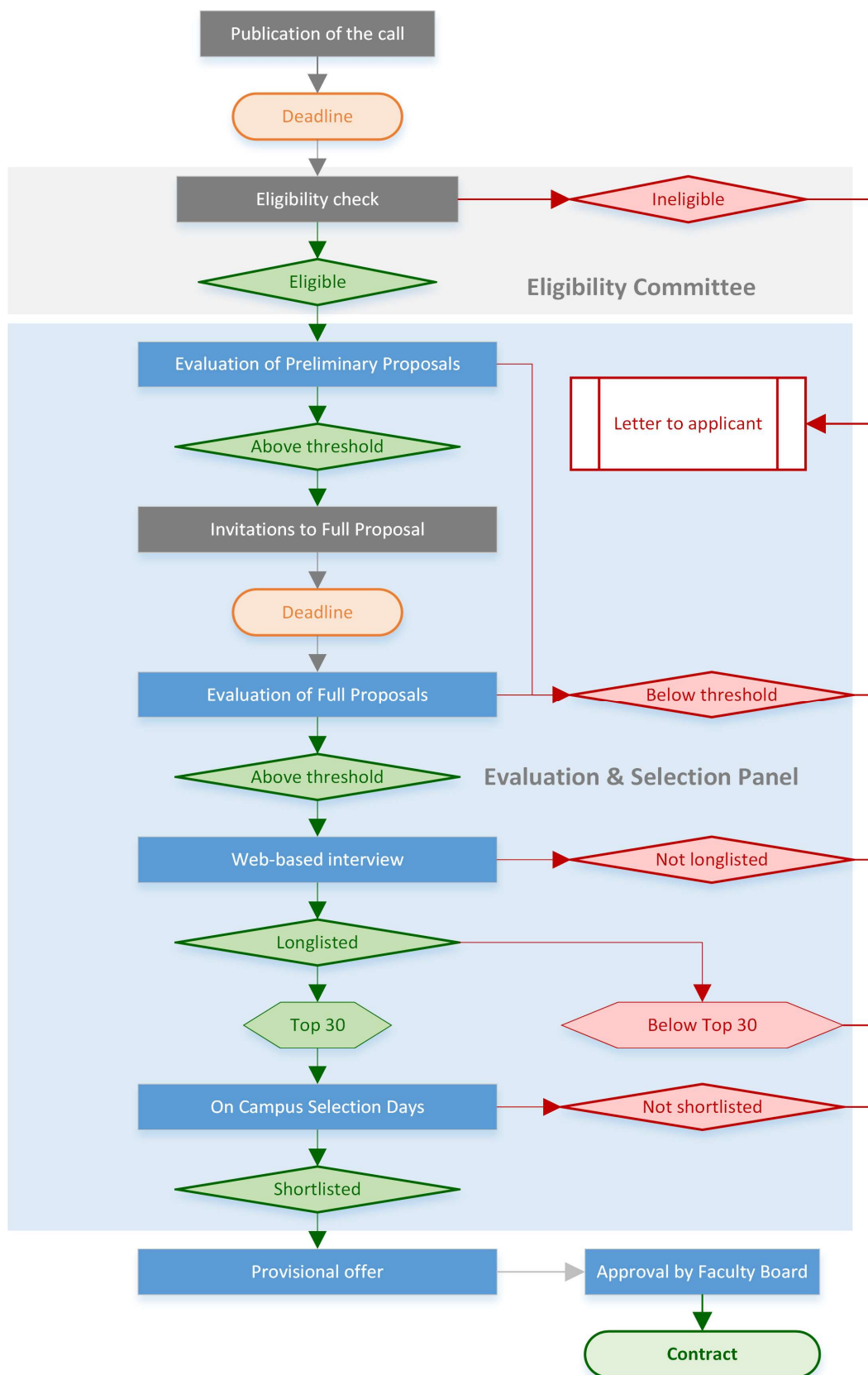
## 4. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

1. You qualify as an Experienced Researcher, meaning that you are in the possession of a doctoral degree or have at least four years of full-time equivalent research experience by July 31, 2019.
2. You have research experience in one or multiple fields relevant to the oLife Fellowship Programme, such as (bio)chemistry, (bio)physics, molecular biology, computational science, systems biology, evolutionary biology, ecology, astrophysics, geoscience or a combination thereof.
3. To comply with EU funding rules, you will not have resided in the Netherlands for more than 12 months during the 3 years prior to July 31, 2019.
4. You are proficient in English language (academic level).

Only applications that are complete and submitted before the application deadline via the e-application tool will be considered.



## 5. EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCEDURE



Workflow of oLife evaluation and selection procedure

## A. ELIGIBILITY CHECK

1. After the application deadline, all applications will be assessed on the eligibility criteria (section 4) by the Eligibility Committee.
2. Eligible applications will be forwarded to the Evaluation & Selection Panel for evaluation; non-eligible applications will be rejected.
3. Applicants will receive a (non-)eligibility notification by e-mail within 14 days after the deadline for submission of the Preliminary Proposal, with information on the possibility for redress.

## B. EVALUATION OF PRELIMINARY PROPOSALS

1. Eligible Preliminary Proposals will be evaluated by the **Evaluation & Selection Panel (ESP)**.
2. The composition of the ESP shall be based on the number of applications, consisting of **at least two domain specialists** and **at least one external expert per scientific area**, including the Chair, with a fair representation of participating host institutes.
3. The **Evaluation and Selection Panel will be appointed by the oLife Steering Committee** according to the following criteria:
  - Internationally recognized experience in fields related to the scientific theme,
  - Significant experience in international research projects,
  - Gender balance,
  - Non-academic experience sufficiently represented,
  - Avoidance of any possible conflict of interest. Conflicts of interests may include: a) family or other close relationship, b) previous close collaboration with the candidate; c) a direct involvement in the specific proposal<sup>4</sup>.
4. All Preliminary Proposals will be evaluated according to the following **evaluation criteria**:

WEIGHTING		
Scientific & Technological Quality (60%)	Researcher Curriculum (40%)	
Overall threshold is 3.5		
Scientific & Technological Quality	Threshold	Weight
Quality, originality and innovative nature of proposed project	3.5	35
Integration level with oLife FP and main activities of prospective host institute(s)	3.5	25
Timeliness and relevance of proposed project	3.5	15
Research methodology	3.5	15
Impact of proposed project on scientific development of candidate	N/A	10
Researcher Curriculum	Threshold	Weight
Relevance of researcher experience for oLife FP and host institute(s)	3.5	30
Motivation, eagerness and career ambitions	3.5	20
Achieved results, incl. publications, patents, invited talks, awards, grants and prizes	3.5	20
Complementary skills: creativity, independence, leadership, communication, English proficiency <sup>5</sup>	3.5	20
Extra: previous mobility, teaching or non-academic experience	N/A	10

*Evaluation criteria, thresholds and weighting for Preliminary Proposals*

#	Value	Description
5	Outstanding	All relevant aspects of the criterion are successfully addressed.
4	Excellent	All relevant aspects of the criterion are successfully addressed, with minor shortcomings.
3	Very good	The criterion is very well addressed, although some improvements are possible.
2	Good	The criterion is well addressed; however, some improvements are necessary.
1	Fair	The criterion is broadly addressed, significant weaknesses are detected.
0	Insufficient	The criterion is not sufficiently addressed.

*Scale interpretation of marks*

<sup>4</sup> Other than being the proposed first or second advisor.

<sup>5</sup> Complementary skills weigh 20% in the first round (Preliminary Proposals) and 10% in consecutive rounds.

5. Applicants who have **scored above the threshold** will be invited to submit a full proposal.
6. Applicants who have scored below the threshold *and who have listed a career break or unconventional career path in their application form*, shall **be doubly reviewed by the dedicated Equal Opportunities Coordinator**, prof. Petra Rudolf, to guarantee a merit-based and equitable selection procedure.
7. Rejected applicants will receive a notification by e-mail containing their scores, a short motivation and information on the possibility for redress.

## C. EVALUATION OF FULL PROPOSALS

1. Full Proposals submitted before the deadline will be evaluated according to the following **evaluation criteria**:

WEIGHTING		
Scientific & Technological Quality (60%)	Researcher Curriculum (40%)	
Overall threshold is 3.5		
Scientific & Technological Quality	Threshold	Weight
Quality, originality and innovative nature of proposed project	3.5	35
Integration level with oLife FP and main activities of prospective host institute(s)	3.5	25
Timeliness and relevance of proposed project	3.5	15
Research methodology	3.5	15
Impact of proposed project on scientific development of candidate	N/A	10
Researcher Curriculum	Threshold	Weight
Relevance of researcher experience for oLife FP and host institute(s)	3.5	30
Motivation, eagerness and career ambitions	3.5	20
Achieved results, incl. publications, patents, invited talks, awards, grants and prizes	3.5	20
Complementary skills: creativity, independence, leadership, communication, English proficiency <sup>6</sup>	3.5	10
Reference letters <sup>7</sup>	N/A	10
Extra: previous mobility, teaching or non-academic experience	N/A	10

*Evaluation criteria, thresholds and weighting for Full Proposals and consecutive rounds*

#	Value	Description
5	Outstanding	All relevant aspects of the criterion are successfully addressed.
4	Excellent	All relevant aspects of the criterion are successfully addressed, with minor shortcomings.
3	Very good	The criterion is very well addressed, although some improvements are possible.
2	Good	The criterion is well addressed; however, some improvements are necessary.
1	Fair	The criterion is broadly addressed, significant weaknesses are detected.
0	Insufficient	The criterion is not sufficiently addressed.

*Scale interpretation of marks*

2. Applicants who have scored **above the threshold** will be invited for a web-based interview.
3. Rejected applicants will receive a notification by e-mail containing their scores, a short motivation and information on the possibility for redress.

<sup>6</sup> Complementary skills weigh 20% in the first round (Preliminary Proposals) and 10% in consecutive rounds.

<sup>7</sup> Reference letters are only applicable from the second round onwards (Full Proposals) and weigh 10%.

## D. EVALUATION OF WEB-BASED INTERVIEWS

1. The **web-based interview** will be conducted by at least three members of the Evaluation & Selection Panel (ESP), of which at least one external expert.
2. During the web-based interview, the candidates will discuss with the ESP members:
  - a. Their academic and professional achievements,
  - b. Their research interests,
  - c. Their project proposal, and,
  - d. If applicable, their experience outside academia and how this could add to the oLife FP research.
3. Candidates will be evaluated against the same criteria, thresholds and weights as used in the evaluation of the full proposals.
4. Based on the results of the web-based interviews, the Evaluation & Selection Panel will draft a **longlist**.
5. The **top ranked candidates will be invited for the On Campus Selection Days**.
4. Rejected applicants will receive a notification by e-mail containing their scores, a short motivation and information on the possibility for redress.

## E. ON CAMPUS SELECTION DAYS

*University of Groningen's Faculty of Science and Engineering has excellent experiences with On Campus Selection Days for doctoral Programmes (ITN METARNA 642738, COFUND-2015 ALERT 713482). Firstly, it offers members of the Evaluation & Selection Panel the opportunity to assess candidates in multiple settings, while candidates can get a well-rounded impression of the host institute(s), the respective universities and cities. Secondly, previously held Selection Days have proven to be the first step towards bonding for the selected candidates. This is an important benefit considering the desired collaboration between selected researchers within oLife.*

### 1. Selection Day 1

- a. Each candidate will hold a **public talk** of 20 minutes (per primary host institute, open to interested scientists).
- b. Next, candidates will **visit the prospected host institute(s)** and meet with staff<sup>8</sup>. The aim is to give the candidates an impression of the working environment and research facilities, and the opportunity to discuss other job-related aspects, such as atmosphere and culture at the host institute.
- c. Then, candidates may receive a **tour around campus and the city centre**.
- d. Members of the Evaluation & Selection Panel and candidates will participate in a **joint dinner**.

### 2. Selection Day 2

- a. Members of the Evaluation & Selection Panel shall conduct interviews with all candidates.
- b. Each interview is a **45 minute discussion** with one domain specialist, the prospective advisor(s) and one external expert.
- c. Discussion points are:
  - Motivation, drive and ambition,
  - Educational and theoretical background,
  - Experimental skills,
  - Choice of the host institute,
  - Overall potential to carry out the project successfully,
  - Their pursued future career.
- d. The same criteria, thresholds and weights apply as in the previous round.
- e. The Members of the Evaluation & Selection Panel will draft a final ranking list, with **the top 18 ranked candidates being shortlisted** for one of the available positions.
- f. In case of doubt, a second interview of 15 minutes will be held on the spot.
- g. The final ranking list will be announced at the end of the second Selection Day.
- h. Candidates who have not been shortlisted will automatically be reserve listed.

### 3. Reimbursement for travel and accommodation is foreseen.

### 4. All candidates will receive a **formal notification per e-mail**, including an evaluation summary report and information on the possibility for redress.

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<sup>8</sup> Candidates applying for a position with Leiden University or Eindhoven University of Technology will visit the prospective host institute the day before the Selection Days.

**Visa requirements for attending the Selection Days**

If you require a visa for attending the Selection Days and the visa application procedure is estimated to take more than four weeks, you will be asked to indicate this when submitting the Full Proposal (if you are invited). The Evaluation & Selection Panel may decide to send you a conditional invitation to the Selection Days in advance of the evaluation outcome to ensure you can start the visa application on time. This conditional invitation will under no circumstance entitle you to participation in the Selection Days. Only the official invitation allows you to participate in the Selection Days.



## F. CONTRACTING PROCEDURE

1. Shortlisted candidates will receive a **provisional offer** and are requested to confirm acceptance of the provisional offer within two weeks<sup>9</sup> of sending.
2. In case of refusal or missing formal acceptance within the set timeframe (without prior consent), the position will be awarded to the next candidate on the ranking list.
3. Candidates who have accepted the provisional offer will be contacted by the respective HR department and/or the prospective advisor(s) to negotiate their contract and plan for moving to The Netherlands.
4. oLife fellows receive a **full-time (38 hours) employment contract for 36 months** according to the Collective Employment Agreement (CAO-NU) of the Dutch universities.
5. The contract can only be finalized after **formal approval by the respective Faculty Boards**.
6. Reserve listed candidates will receive a formal rejection letter once all possible positions have been fulfilled.
7. An overview of all appointed researchers will be published on the oLife website.

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<sup>9</sup> Permitting exceptions in individual cases where candidates may be awaiting results of other application procedures.

## POSSIBILITY FOR REDRESS

### 1. (Non-)Eligibility notification and redress procedure

- You will receive a **(non-)eligibility notification by e-mail within 14 days** after the deadline *for submission of the Preliminary Proposal*, with information on the possibility for redress.
- You may submit a redress after notification on your (non-)eligibility. You can submit a redress within 14 days of receipt of the formal notification.
- A redress regarding non-eligibility will be reviewed by a panel consisting of three impartial staff members (European Project Managers, Funding Officers or Scientific Coordinators).
- You will receive a reply no later than one month after the deadline for redress request.

### 2. Evaluation notification and redress procedure

- Rejected applicants will receive a notification by e-mail containing their scores, a short motivation and information on the possibility for redress.
- Applicants can submit a redress within 14 days of receipt of the formal notification.
- A redress regarding the evaluation results will be reviewed by the Steering Committee.
- The redress procedure is not meant to call into question the scientific judgment made by the ESP; it will solely look into procedural shortcomings and/or factual errors and will not itself evaluate the proposal. The Steering Committee may, however, recommend the re-evaluation of the proposal.
- A reply will be sent to the complainants no later than one month after the deadline for redress request.
- Finally, applicants may send a written complaint to the Board of the respective University, if the applicant has clear evidence to support shortcomings in the evaluation process that may have affected the final decision. This procedure will review how the application has been handled during the entire evaluation process. Also, this will not be an automatic re-evaluation and the judgement of appropriately qualified experts will not be called into question.

## 6. TIMELINE

Publication of the Call for Proposals	1 April 2019
<b>Deadline for application</b>	<b>12 May 2019, 23:59 (Dutch local time)</b>
Decision on eligibility (per e-mail)	Late May 2019
Invitation to Full Proposal, or rejection (per e-mail)	Late June 2019
<b>Deadline for submission of Full Proposal</b>	<b>31 July 2019, 23:59 (Dutch local time)</b>
Invitation to Web-based interview, or rejection (per e-mail)	Early September 2019
<b>Web-based interview</b>	<b>Before October 2019</b>
Invitation to Selection Days, or rejection (per e-mail)	Early October 2019
<b>On Campus Selection Days</b>	<b>November 2019</b>
Announcement of selected/rejected candidates	End of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Selection Day
Preliminary Offer (per e-mail)	Within 2 days after the Selection Days
Acceptance of Preliminary Offer	Within 2 weeks of the offer
Contracting procedure	Depending on host institute
<b>Starting date</b>	<b>Between January and April 2020</b>