

HFSP Postdoctoral Fellowship Applications

Frequently Asked Questions 2019

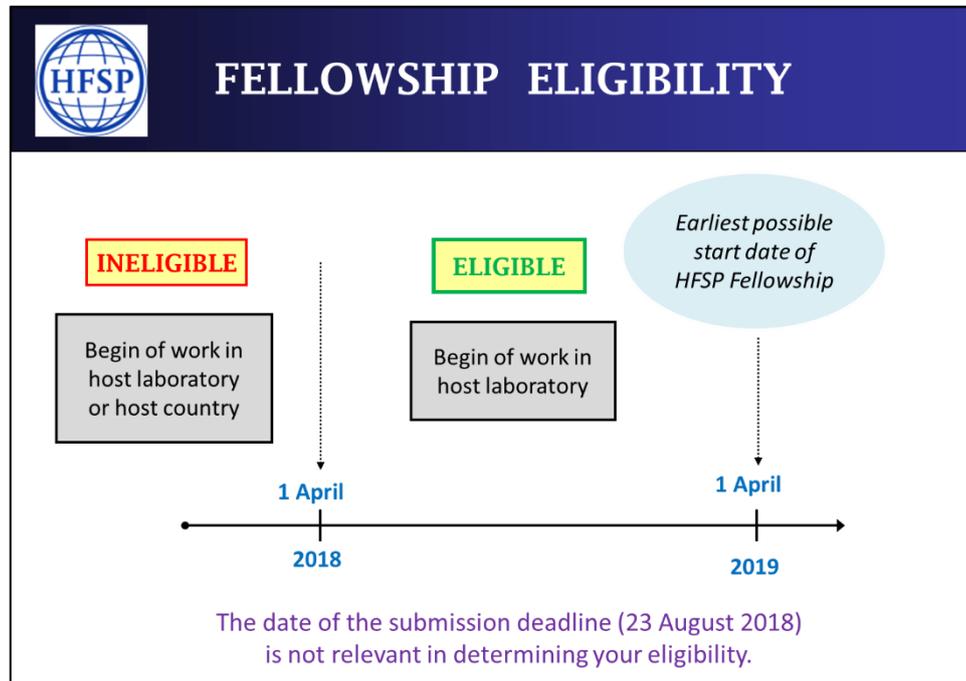
“The exercise of writing a research description with a limited number of characters is good, but difficult”. [From a previous applicant]

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Q. How early can I start working in the host lab and still be eligible to apply?

A. If you have never worked in the host country before and started working in the host laboratory on April 1, 2018 or afterwards, you are eligible to apply.

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Q. I've been working in the host lab for several months but will leave the country this autumn. Am I eligible to apply for a fellowship in the same host laboratory?

A. HFSP does not support scientists who wish to return to work with someone they have done research with before. HFSP's goal is to support scientists to work with someone new, on a project that will broaden their expertise. There are cases where an applicant may have visited the host lab for a short period (i.e. to learn a technique), and in these types of cases HFSP may accept your application depending on the reason of your initial stay. Please contact the HFSP Office prior to submitting an application to make sure you are eligible and to request an exception.

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Q. I am a national of a non-member country of HFSP. Can I still apply?

A. Yes, you may apply however you must hold the fellowship in one of the HFSP member countries.

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Q. I am currently supported by another fellowship. Can I apply for the HFSP fellowship?

A. A candidate can apply for the HFSP fellowship even if he/she has another financial support. If awarded the HFSP fellowship, the other financial support will have to be terminated by the start of the HFSP fellowship.

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Q. Can I apply more than once?

A. There is only one competition per year. Should your application be unsuccessful, you may submit an application in another competition year provided you still meet all the eligibility criteria listed in the guidelines. A candidate can only submit one fellowship application per year.

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Q. Can I submit applications for both a LTF and a CDF in the same competition?

A. No, you must choose the program that best suits your research background and proposed research project. In case of doubt, please contact the Fellowship Office for guidance. A candidate can only submit one fellowship application per year.

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Q. Can my host supervisor endorse another applicant in the same competition?

A. No, your host supervisor can only endorse one application each year, either for a LTF or for a CDF.

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Q. Is it possible to have two host supervisors?

A. Yes, if the project entails collaboration between two laboratories, you may register two host supervisors. Note that only one host institution can be registered in the application form. We recommend that the collaborating laboratories be relatively close together to enable regular visits during the tenure of the fellowship.

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Q. My referee cannot meet the submission deadline. Can this section be submitted late?

A. Unfortunately, it is not possible to submit material after the deadline. You will have to select another referee.

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Q. Is it possible to change a referee or a host supervisor?

A. The online system allows applicants to change a referee or the host supervisor up to the submission deadline.

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Q. What is my “PhD country” if I trained in more than one country?

A. Degrees are awarded by one university, even if the training was done in a multi-institutional or even international context. Indicate the degree-awarding institution in the degrees section. You can add further details about the other training institutions and training periods in the CV section.

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Q. My PhD was awarded in a country I have never worked in. Can I apply to go to this country?

A. Yes. In cases where PhD students do their research in one country and get the degree in another country, they can apply to go to this country provided they have never worked or lived there.

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Q. I plan to return to my current university in the 3rd fellowship year. Should I list my supervisor?

A. No. The supervisor you plan to return to in the 3rd year of the fellowship should not be indicated in the application. Only indicate the supervisor at the proposed host institution. Administrative details for the final year of the fellowship will be arranged at a later stage.

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Q. My only publication is a conference abstract. Am I eligible to apply?

A. No, this does not count as a first author publication. You must have at least one lead author paper in an international, peer-reviewed journal or published on a pre-print server such as bioRxiv to be eligible to apply. However, if the scholarly tradition in your discipline puts more emphasis on publishing in conference proceedings, you may apply and explain this in the “additional comments” section of your application. If you are not sure whether your publication record fits HFSP requirements, please contact the HFSP Fellowship Office at fellow@hfsp.org.

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Q. I have only one publication, which is submitted but not accepted. Am I eligible to apply?

A. No, you must have at least one manuscript accepted for publication to be eligible. Submitted papers are not taken into account.

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Q. Can I submit my application while still finishing my PhD thesis?

A. Yes, but the PhD must have been conferred by the time the fellowship is activated.

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Q. I do not have a PhD or an MD. Can I submit an application?

A. Maybe. Applicants who were conferred a degree in Europe should consult the online database of EURYDICE at http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php to confirm degree equivalency. This is the official database of European Higher Education Degrees, and is used by HFSP. All other applicants should consult the Fellowship Office.

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Q. I have an MD degree. What does “equivalent level of experience in research” mean?

A. Applicants with doctoral degrees in the medical sciences (clinical context) must have an equivalent level of research experience as expected from a research based PhD prior to applying. This should be stated clearly in the online application by listing years of experience in basic research and/or publications in international peer reviewed journals.

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Q. I have a PhD in physics. For which type of fellowship should I apply?

A. The distinction between a Long-Term Fellowship and a Cross-Disciplinary Fellowship is based not only on the discipline of the PhD but also on the nature of your past research and is not dependent on the department/institution where you did your studies. If your research publications show that you worked on a basic problem in physics, you should submit an application for a CDF. If you have worked on biological problems, you should submit an application for a LTF.

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Q. Should I list my parental leave in my application?

A. Yes. It is very important to explain any breaks in the CV section of the application so that the reviewers can take this into consideration when assessing productivity. The review committee will not be biased against applicants who have taken breaks to have and care for children.

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Q. What do you mean by “degree conferred”?

A. A degree is conferred when you receive your diploma for the degree. The “conferral date” is the date on the official PhD document.

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Q. Does unemployment count as an eligible interruption of my scientific career?

A. No, we only take into account career interruptions such as illness, parental leave, providing full time care for an immediate family member, military or civil service when calculating eligibility to apply. You cannot be more than 3 years post-PhD by the submission deadline.

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Q. Does time teaching at a university after my PhD count as an interruption in the three years for eligibility?

A. No. The fact that you worked as a university lecturer did not prevent you from submitting an application to HFSP at the time when you were still eligible to do so. Exemptions can only be claimed because of personal circumstances such as illness, parental leave, providing full time care for an immediate family member, military or civil service, etc.

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Q. I have obtained both a PhD and an MD degree. Until when can I apply for the HFSP fellowship? Three years after I obtained my PhD or three years after I obtained my MD degree?

A. We will take into account your latest degree.

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Q. I received my PhD 6 years ago and my MD last year. Am I eligible to apply?

A. You are eligible because you received your most recent doctoral degree last year.

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Q. I only have an MD. Am I eligible?

A. If it is a research-based MD obtained within the three years prior to the submission deadline and if you have the equivalent research experience as a PhD holder (i.e. you have a publication record in international peer reviewed journals), you are eligible to apply. However, depending on your research experience, your publication record and your change in research direction, the review committee may consider your application less competitive than those of PhD holders. In case of doubt, contact the Secretariat to make sure your application is competitive.

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Q. Is there a competitive advantage to waiting to apply, in order to have more publications?

A. Candidates who have more research experience and publications are not privileged over recent PhDs. The selection process takes career stage into account when evaluating productivity and the scientific merit of the candidate's accomplishments. In the evaluation process, the fellowship review committee may favor proposals that better meet the objective of providing international opportunities to top-notch candidates who are recent doctoral graduates with minimal research experience.

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Q. What exactly do you mean by a “change in research direction”?

A. HFSP believes that broad training is excellent preparation for postdoctoral researchers to establish novel, interdisciplinary research programs. Therefore preference is given to applicants who add new ideas or unique approaches to their research. This may involve learning new methods, changing study system, or exposure to new theory or literature.

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Q. On what grounds were applications ineligible in the past round of awards?

A. In award year 2018, 45 out of 633 submitted applications were ineligible. Most of these were ineligible for formal reasons (see section II of the application guidelines). Others were ineligible because the proposed projects were outside the scientific scope of HFSP:

- clinically oriented research,
- projects with the sole emphasis on searching for new compounds with a potential impact for drug development,
- environmental projects such as monitoring ecosystem/species diversity,
- projects related to disease and/or drug development and projects in agriculture.

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Q. What are some good practices in writing my research proposal?

A: You can increase your chances of success if your proposal has a clear and concise research plan, contains sufficient detail for peer review purposes and demonstrates an obvious fit with the mandate of HFSP. We support innovative, even high-risk research that provides an opportunity for the candidate to branch out in a new research direction. A misalignment with the objectives of the HFSP fellowship program or a poorly written proposal are among the most common reasons why a proposal is not successful. Every year HFSP receives more excellent fellowship applications than the number that can be funded.

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Q. What are my chances of success?

A. In last year's round of awards, 588 applications were reviewed. The overall success rate was 15.5%. Given budget limitations, only applications that clearly reflect the scientific objectives of the HFSP fellowship program and that receive excellent to outstanding marks by the reviewers are funded. Consideration is not given to other factors such as country of origin, gender, etc.

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Q. What criteria are used for selecting fellowship awardees?

A. The proposed fellowship project will be evaluated based on the criteria set out for the program (see section IV of the application guidelines). The research project should contain an original and innovative idea that holds promise to advance knowledge in the field. Successful HFSP awardees are outstanding researchers with a demonstrated record of excellent research and a commitment to exploring new approaches to basic research questions.

While there are many ways to put together a highly competitive application, in the past, successful applications have demonstrated that the candidates have made significant intellectual contributions to the published work (the reference letters should elaborate on this aspect) as well as to the proposed research (the host supervisor letter should mention this).

The most competitive applications propose unique research projects that mark a departure from the applicant's previous research. Projects that expose the applicant to new theory and methodology, that propose a new approach to a research problem and that can potentially make a major contribution to the research field are favored. High risk research is supported.

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Q. Are journal impact factors taken into account in the evaluation?

A. No. Journal impact factors do not play a role in the evaluation or selection process.

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Q. Are publications in open access journals considered good quality?

A. Reviewers do not rely solely on the publication venue to determine the quality or impact of a paper. The quality of the research is assessed, independent of where it was published. Increasingly, researchers are obliged or choose to publish in open access journals. You can find HFSP's Open Access policy [here](#).

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Q. Are there examples of successful HFSP fellowship applications?

A. Abstracts of funded fellowship projects from previous years are available on the HFSP website at <http://www.hfsp.org/awardees>.

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Q. Who reviews the applications?

A. All eligible applications are evaluated by members of the HFSP fellowship review committee, who are listed on the website at <http://www.hfsp.org/funding/postdoctoral-fellowships/review-procedure>.

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Q. My host supervisor/referees did not receive the online access information. What happened?

A. First verify that the email addresses entered in the "Host Supervisor 1" (plus "Host Supervisor 2", if applicable) and "Referees" sections are correct in your online application form. If this information is correct, the email from the HFSP application server may have been sent to a spam filter on the receiving end. Inform your host and referees to check their spam filter for messages with "HFSP" in the subject line.

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Q. Why can't I format text in the online form?

A. The HFSP online interface ensures consistency between applications by automatically formatting information (e.g., bold titles, page breaks). You can download a PDF copy of your application from the HFSP extranet (in the preview section of the online application) to see the formatted version of your application.

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Q. Why can't I attach figures or tables to the application?

A. Figures or tables rarely add significant insight to the proposed project. Outstanding fellowship applications are carefully crafted research proposals in which applicants put their innovative ideas and vision in writing.

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Q. Why should I upload my publication(s)? Nobody will read them anyway...

A. The review committee members rely on these publications to assess the quality of your past research. In addition, the publication of at least one first author/co-author paper is required and the fellowship office looks at your publication(s) to confirm your eligibility.

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Q. Why does HFSP require an ORCID number from applicants?

A. The ORCID number is invaluable in distinguishing between applicants with the same name, which is a frequent issue at HFSP. At this point the ORCID number is only used by HFSP for this purpose, however other functions may be explored when the use of the ORCID number becomes more established with the scientific community (www.orcid.org).

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