

Guide For Evaluators

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DREAM+PLAN

DRIVING CLIMATE POSITIVE FUTURES



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Executive Summary

This document provides guidance for the assessment of eligible applications to the open PhD positions of the DREAM+PLAN Program.

It describes the general principles and procedures that will be used in the evaluation and selection process. This Guide is intended for all members of the Selection Panels (Evaluators) but also for Applicants wishing to perform a self-assessment of their application. This Guide has been prepared following the recommendations of the European Science Foundation Peer Review Guide¹. The DREAM+PLAN recruitment & selection process is in congruence with the general principles and requirements of The European Commission's Code of Conduct for Research Recruitment (Charter & Code).

Disclaimer

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the European Research Executive Agency can be held responsible for them.

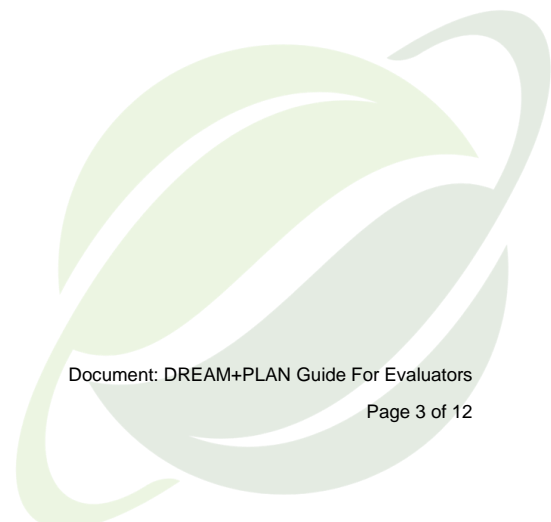
Acknowledgements

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¹ The European Science Foundation Peer Review Guide:
https://www.esf.org/fileadmin/user_upload/esf/European_Peer_Review_Guide_2011.pdf

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1. About DREAM+PLAN

DREAM+PLAN is enabled by a consortium of European Universities, together with a wide ecosystem of Associated Partners, including SMEs, multinationals, unicorns, NGOs, civil society associations, innovation agencies, clusters, and policymakers. This program brings together a community of visionary changemakers, leaders, who dream big and develop tangible pathways for solving local and global climate-related challenges, all united by a mission to create a positive impact, towards a more sustainable, fair, inclusive, and thriving planet for future generations.

As Professor Anne-Laure Mention (DREAM+PLAN Chief Investigator and Academic Lead) explains, “**DREAM+PLAN** will recruit early career researchers who will be united by a mission to create a positive impact towards a more sustainable, fair, inclusive, and thriving planet for future generations. Their research will be driven by resilience (the ability to withstand and recover from disruptions), restoration (the ability to repair or rehabilitate degraded ecosystems) and regeneration (fostering the renewal, revitalisation and replenishment of ecosystems and communities) to address key societal challenges. Each successful candidate will benefit from **DREAM+PLAN**'s cutting-edge training grounded in best-practice, that will include both scientific training as well as the development of transferable skills to open up diverse career pathways”.

DREAM+PLAN is co-funded by the European Union’s Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 101179842.

The DREAM+PLAN network is further complemented by two partners that will employ doctoral candidates fully aligned with the program and with the same conditions, but that are **funded by national governments** (and not by the MSCA program). These positions are the ones at the University of Cambridge (UK) and University of Saint Gallen (Switzerland).

IMPORTANT NOTE: The fellows recruited by University of Cambridge and University of St. Gallen will obtain a single degree (and will not be co-enrolled at RMIT University) but will be able to conduct secondments to RMIT in Australia. The same processes and rules stated in this Guide apply to these positions, except those that mention RMIT University or double-degree status.

2. Evaluation Principles

The process for the selection of the Applicants to DREAM+PLAN open positions will be extensive and transparent, with the aim of attracting the most talented and motivated applicants from around the world. Before starting the evaluation processes, **all Evaluators must sign a letter of commitment**, declaring possible conflicts of interest², agreeing to confidentiality and impartial assessment of all applications.

They will be required to read this Guide for Evaluators, the Guide for Applicants, the Program description on the DREAM+PLAN website (www.dreamplusplan.eu), and watch the briefing session organised by the DREAM+PLAN Team. This is to ensure all are fully equipped with the correct information, and to answer any questions they may have. The DREAM+PLAN Team will oversee the entire evaluation process, liaising with the Panel Chairs and participating in consensus meetings, where Evaluators discuss and determine Applicants' rankings, to ensure requirements are fulfilled.

Evaluators are prohibited from contacting Applicants during the evaluation process, discussing the evaluation outside the Panel, and revealing the identities of the Evaluators.

² There is a conflict of interest if the Evaluator has a direct benefit, a close personal or professional relationship with applicant; any other situation that compromises impartiality or casts doubt, or that could reasonably appear to do so.

3. Role and Appointment of Evaluators

A specific Selection Panel will be established **for each position**, holding the responsibility of evaluating, ranking, and selecting eligible Applicants. Each Selection Panel will be comprised of **at least 4 Evaluators** and will maintain its composition throughout the entire selection process, unless a member is changed due to a conflict of interest arising or force majeure.

Each Panel should appoint a Chair (preferably the external expert), in charge of coordinating the process and reporting on the Panel's decision. Each Selection Panel will comprise:

- **2 academic Evaluators** – ideally lead Supervisors from the Employing Institution and RMIT University;
- **1 inter-sectoral Evaluator** from any Non-Academic Entity relevant to the field of research;
- **At least 1 fully external Evaluator** (not belonging to any DREAM+PLAN Program Partner);
- **A member of the DREAM+PLAN Management Team** will sit on all Panels as Secretary.

The Selection Panels will also fulfil the following criteria:

- Extensive experience in doctoral training and supervision;
- Diverse and relevant expertise in the disciplines involved in the research projects proposed;
- At least 2 nationalities represented;
- Gender balanced;
- Declare no conflict of interest.

4. Overview of the Selection Process

Step	Description	Timeframe (indicative)
1 - Online application	Applicants submit their application through the online portal (SlideRoom)	Before 13th Mar 2025 at 11:59 PM CET
2 - Eligibility check	The Management Team and PhD awarding institution/s will check that the application complies with requirements and meets the eligibility criteria.	Mar 2025
3 - Evaluation of eligible applications and first ranking	For each position, all Evaluators will assess, evaluate and rank the eligible applications, according to the evaluation criteria outlined below. The Selection Panel will shortlist up to 6 Applicants, per open position, for an interview.	Mar - Apr 2025
4 - Interviews	Each Selection Panel will conduct the interview of shortlisted Applicants for a position, and assess, evaluate, and rank the Applicants according to the criteria listed below.	Apr - May 2025 (applicants will be contacted at least 5 days ahead of the interview)
5 - Final ranking and allocation of positions	Each Selection Panel, supported by the DREAM+PLAN Team, will agree on the final ranking, selected and reserve Applicants. The DREAM+PLAN Team will communicate results to the Applicant.	May - Jun 2025
6 - Onboarding of successful Applicants	Selected Applicants will undergo the enrolment process at their research host and PhD awarding university/ies. Once this step has been completed, Applicants will receive offer letters from the Institution/s.	Jul 2025

Table 1: Evaluation timeline for DREAM+PLAN Call.

The relevant steps for Evaluators (from Step 3 to 5) are covered below:

Evaluation of eligible applications (Step 3)

All applications successfully passing the eligibility check (Step 2) will be assessed by a dedicated Selection Panel. Evaluators will assess each application individually against the Evaluation Criteria detailed in Table 2, directly on the designated application platform (SlideRoom). Applicants may select up to 3 positions in their application form, placing them in order of preference. Where Applicants have applied and been assessed as eligible for more than 1 position, the assessments will proceed simultaneously.

Criteria	Score	Weighting (%)
Academic merit: academic transcript, publications, etc.	0–5	30
Research skills and other relevant competences	0–5	25
Research & work experience: 3i dimension, international or industry internships, conferences, etc.	0–5	15
Motivation letter	0–5	10
Recommendation letters	0–5	10
3-minute video recorded research pitch	0-5	5
Outreach (incl. dissemination and communication), capabilities, experience, and potential	0–5	5
Weighted Average	0–5	100
Scoring guide:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 0 – Fail. The application fails in these criteria or cannot be judged due to incomplete information. ✓ 1 – Poor. The application has serious weaknesses or is addressed in an inadequate manner. ✓ 2 – Fair. The application broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses. ✓ 3 – Good. The application addresses the criterion well, although improvements are required. ✓ 4 – Very Good. The application addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible. ✓ 5 – Excellent. The application successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. 		

Table 2: Criteria and weighting for scoring applications to DREAM+PLAN Positions.

After all evaluations have been completed on SlideRoom, a first ranking for each position will be produced based on average scores granted by the evaluators. In case of considerable discrepancy (>25%) the SP may meet via video link to resolve. The Project Manager and Program Committee may also be consulted to help reach consensus or ask an additional Evaluator to review the application.

A first ranking list will be produced from average scores. If Applicants obtain the same score, priority is given to those with highest Academic merit, followed by Research skills. All these being equal, priority will be given to persons from underrepresented groups (e.g. female applicants).

The Selection Panel will set a cut-off score for passing to the next round (3.5 out of 5 per position as a standard) and shortlist top ranked Applicants for an interview (up to 6 Applicants per position). Exceptions on the cut-off score may be discussed, if at least 3 Applicants are not selected, or the Panel decides to ensure the position will be filled.

Summary of Evaluators' Actions in Step 3:

- Review and evaluate each application against the Evaluation Criteria detailed in Table 2.
- Score each application and provide feedback comments on SlideRoom.
- Once all scores have been awarded, Evaluators agree on the shortlist selection for Applicant interviews (3 to 6).

Interview (Step 4)

Interviews of the shortlisted Applicants will be organised by videoconferencing. Applicants shortlisted will be informed at least 5 days before the interview and provided multiple options for interview. Interviews will be conducted by all Evaluators of the Selection Panel who will assess the Applicants against the Evaluation Criteria detailed in Table 3. The interviews will be composed of:

- A 10-min presentation by the Applicant (background and research project). The presentation can be supported by visuals (e.g. PowerPoint – 5 slides maximum).
- A 30-min question-and-answer session.
- 5-min for the Applicant's questions to the Selection Panel.

Criteria	Score	Weighting (%)
Scientific and investigative aptitude and motivation	0–5	30
Research Project: conceptual understanding and suitability	0–5	30
Professional skills: planning, problem solving, IT, data management,	0–5	20
Interpersonal skills: communication, teamwork, initiative, English level	0–5	20
Weighted Average	0–5	100

Table 3: Criteria and weighting for scoring interviews.

Summary of Evaluators' Actions in Step 4:

- Ensure interview participation will be conducted in a quiet space with high-speed broadband.
- Prepare the interviews, jointly decide on questions to be asked by each Evaluator.
- During the interview, individually evaluate each candidate against the Interview Criteria listed in Table 3.
- Immediately after each interview, the Evaluators deliberate the scores and agree feedback comments, including any dissenting views, to be sent to the Applicant.
- Score each criterion and provide feedback comments.

Final ranking and allocation of doctoral positions (Step 5)

A final score for each position will be produced by combining the interview score (weighted at 60%) and the first evaluation (40%). A consensus meeting will be organised where the Selection Panel will agree on a final ranking, the preferred Applicant and the reserve list.

Summary of Evaluators' Actions in Step 5:

- The DREAM+PLAN Team produces the final ranking score, based on the average scores granted by the Evaluators at Steps 3 (evaluation) and 4 (interview).
- Each Selection Panel then decides on the final ranking of Applicants based on the final scores and rankings, during the consensus meeting.
- The DREAM+PLAN Team sends a conditional offer to the preferred Applicant. In case the preferred Applicant does not accept the position, the first reserve candidate will be given the conditional offer under the same conditions.

5. Diversity and Inclusion

DREAM+PLAN selection procedures are designed to be clear, transparent, and accessible to all candidates. RMIT EU, the Coordinating Partner, adheres to RMIT's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access Policies, and guided by EU Policy, including: Article 21 'Non-discrimination' of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

DREAM+PLAN ensures adherence to The Diversity and Inclusion Framework³ and related Action Plans, that outline RMIT's key priorities and objectives for creating a more **diverse and inclusive** community through:

1. Inclusive access to education;
2. Gender equality;
3. Diverse genders, sexes, and sexualities (DGSS);
4. Cultural inclusion;
5. Eliminating sexual harm and fostering respect;
6. Accessibility for disabled persons;
7. Governance and reporting.

DREAM+PLAN plans to attract the best people who are not limited by gender stereotypes, gender roles, or prejudices.

Despite progress in closing the gender gap in education, women remain underrepresented in Research and Innovation (R&I). RMIT's 2022-2025 Gender Equality Action Plan⁴ underscores its commitment to attracting and retaining talent without gender-based limitations. DREAM+PLAN aligns with this commitment by providing equal opportunities (EO) for all applicants, removing biases, and ensuring fair evaluation through trained panel members.

Recruitment and selection (R&S) processes reflect RMIT's principles, including diverse and open recruitment, bias elimination, balanced selection panels, and inclusive practices. The program incorporates RMIT's social inclusion principles and MSCA guidelines for supporting researchers at risk. Partner organizations' EO policies will complement these efforts, with the Charter & Code principles taking precedence when needed, ensuring rigorous and inclusive practices across the network.

Furthermore, DREAM+PLAN adheres to the principles of the European Commission's Strategy on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and promotes genuine equal access opportunities between all applicants. Researchers at risk⁵, from different genders, backgrounds and origin are encouraged to apply. Researchers requiring extra support might be eligible for a Special Needs Allowance.

Evaluators are required to understand and comply with these guidelines throughout the entire evaluation process.

³ www.rmit.edu.au/about/our-values/diversity-and-inclusion

⁴ <https://www.rmit.edu.au/about/our-values/diversity-and-inclusion/gender-equality/gender-equality-action-plan>

⁵ Researchers, scholars and scientists who are experiencing threats to their life, liberty or research career, or who are forced to flee or have been displaced because of such threats, see Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions webpage: <https://marie-sklodowska-curieactions.ec.europa.eu/about-msca/guidelines-for-inclusion-of-researchers-at-risk>

6. Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality

All Evaluators must sign the **commitment letter**, declaring **no conflicts of interest** with the evaluated position. Should a conflict arise at any time in the process, Evaluators must immediately inform the DREAM+PLAN Team, who will arrange for a suitable substitute to the conflicted Evaluator.

The signed commitment letter also declares that Evaluators will maintain confidentiality of all Applicants' personal information and relevant information provided. All Evaluators must respect the confidentiality of the information disclosed in the evaluation process, both in documentation and verbally.

7. Contact

For any inquiries or information that cannot be found in the Guide for Evaluators, the Guide for Applicants or on the official DREAM+PLAN website (www.dreamplusplan.eu), contact DREAM+PLAN Helpdesk (info@dreamplusplan.eu).