

## Guidebook

# Kootstra Talent Fellowship (KTF) applications for postdocs



July 2021

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*Please consult the call for proposal text and application form  
first.*

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## How to use this guidebook

This guidebook is set up to help you draft your Kootstra Talent Fellowship (KTF) applications for postdocs.

This guidebook provides information on what is expected and advisable for the KTF proposal and will be updated regularly, where needed.

In some cases, an example text or general information is provided (*in italic*). Please use this information as inspiration for your own story and do not simply copy-paste it.

Please examine the Call for proposals and this guidebook carefully before preparing your proposal. It will help to present important aspects in such a way that will enable the evaluators to make an effective assessment of your proposal against the evaluation criteria.

This guidebook focuses on writing your KTF application. For advice on writing the application, please contact your funding advisor.

## The assessment procedure

The assessment of the KTF application is split up into several steps, and the members of the Maastricht UMC+ Research Committee (WMUMC+) with backgrounds less tailored to your proposal are involved. For more info about the committee members see:

<https://researchoffice.mumc.maastrichtuniversity.nl/maastricht-umc-research-committee>):

### The first step is the eligibility check.

After you submit your proposal, an eligibility check will be performed to see whether your proposal meets all formal criteria for submission (e.g. word count) and whether it is complete (e.g. including requested letters). If your proposal does not meet all eligibility criteria, you MAY be given the opportunity to adapt that specific part of your proposal. However, do not count on this, and make sure you carefully check your final proposal against the eligibility and assessment criteria before submitting.

If your application is eligible, it will be send to 3-4 members of the WMUMC+.

### The second step is a preselection step.

The WMUMC+ members assesses all eligible proposals using the three criteria and their weight, resulting in a mean score for each of the three evaluation criteria (see Appendix 1. for more detailed information):

1. Quality, innovative character and academic impact of the proposed research (40%),
2. Personal vision and motivation (20%), and
3. Quality of the researcher (40%).

All proposals will be ranked according to likelihood of funding. The candidates with the highest ranking will be invited for an interview with the WMUMC+.

The invitation will include the date, time and information about the presentation requirements and the interview. Moreover, the candidates will also receive the anonymised reviewer reports. These reports can help them in preparing for the interview. In this phase of the evaluation procedure, the scores from the reports are removed. Due to the diverse background and expertise of the members of the WMUMC+, the feedback in these reports may diverge. There can be no conclusions whatsoever relating to a favourable decision in the fact that you are invited to an interview.

### The third and final step is the interview.

The members of the WMUMC+ will be present at the interview. The interview will take up to 23 minutes. The first 8 minutes of the interview are reserved for a short presentation in Dutch or English. You may use PowerPoint or pdf for your slide show.

The following topics need to be included in your short presentation (8 minutes):

- explanation of the essence of your research proposal,
- your vision,
- how a possible Kootstra Talent Fellowship will contribute to this.

In the remaining 15 minutes the committee members will ask questions on the application, about the research plan and the candidate's research vision.

During the interview, there is the opportunity to explain the KTF proposal, vision and motivation. All WMUMC+ members will score the interview on the following criteria resulting in a final score:

1. the quality, innovative character and academic impact of the proposed research (30%),
2. your responses to questions and discussion with the committee (50%), and
3. the content and delivery of the presentation itself (20%).

Based on the interviews, the final selection will be made of which proposal will be funded. The interview is a crucial step in the procedure and a well-balanced presentation will help them to get the right impression.

The Board of Directors decides which applicants will be awarded the KTF. The WMUMC+ acts as an advisory board in the review process. The evaluation procedure will be completed within three months of the deadline.

Please note: Member(s) of the WMUMC+ with a conflict of interest regarding a specific KTF proposal for funding will be excluded from the assessment and the interview. A conflict of interest occurs when the member involved in the assessment has a personal, professional (e.g. supervisor) or organisational relationship with the applicant(s), affecting their ability to undertake their role in an objective and unbiased way.

### General advice on your application

- Plan your proposal writing process, start on time! Make a schedule and reserve time for feedback, while also taking any holidays (yours and your supervisor's) into account.
- You cannot apply without the commitment of your School and a recommendation letter of your supervisor. Each applicant needs to submit the support letter from the scientific director of the School/Institute (which indicates the School/Institute's commitment to give you a contract for the duration of the KTF project, and matching 50% of the project costs. Without this support letter and the recommendation letter of your supervisor, your application will not be accepted and evaluated.  
This means that you should start talking with your supervisor and to your School/Institute about your plans to submit a KTF proposal, as they will need time to decide whether they can indeed provide you with such a guarantee.
- The Schools/Institutes of FHML each have an internal selection process. You are encouraged to inquire about this procedure in your own School/Institute. It is possible that your School/Institute has an internal deadline prior to the KTF closing date.
- Read the Call for proposals thoroughly, and use the structure provided in the format and keep it in front of you when writing. This is the foundation of your proposal. After you have written a version, check again with the Call to see whether your ideas and plans still fit with the aims and rules of the funding instrument.
- Treat the criteria mentioned in the Call for proposals (appendix) as examination questions. Answer these and you will have addressed all items that will be evaluated. This also means that you should stick to the provided structure, even if you think you have answered the questions already somewhere else.
- Proposals not meeting the eligibility criteria, will not be evaluated either.
- Brainstorm each section and focus on one section at a time.
- Think about the way you write. Assume less expert knowledge of the WMUMC+ members and phrase everything in a simple way. Use easy to read language and explain discipline specific jargon.
- Use clear and concise wording.
- Avoid long sentences. A good rule of thumb: a sentences using two lines, is long enough!
- Provide clear and concrete objectives of your project. Do not just say your aim is to 'investigate', 'assess' or 'explore'. Give the reviewers a clear idea of what they can expect.

- Provide the evaluators with the evidence they need. Just by saying something is innovative, does not mean it is innovative. Make it tangible and concrete. Give examples and state what has already been done and how you are going to make a difference. Examples should show knowledge of the 'state of the art' and understanding.
  - Check with your supervisors or others whether they are convinced of the innovation of your project.
  - Contact for advice and support your supervisors, colleagues in your field and also colleagues from other fields, who are not an expert in your field.
- You can also ask the funding advisors of your School/Institute to provide feedback:
- Marco Berndes – m.berndes@maastrichtuniversity.nl – MHeNS, SHE*  
*Vivian Braeken – v.braeken@maastrichtuniversity.nl – CAPHRI*  
*Anne Gilsing – anne.gilsing@maastrichtuniversity.nl – NUTRIM*  
*Willem Wolters – w.wolters@maastrichtuniversity.nl – M4I, CARIM*  
*Pan Xu – pan.xu@maastrichtuniversity.nl – GROW, MERLN*

### Your application

Applications can be submitted by email to the secretariat of the Board of the Faculty of Health Medicine and Life (FHML) (s.bastiaanssen@maastrichtuniversity.nl).

Please arrange to have the scientific director of the School/Institute confirm her/his willingness and ability to provide the 50% matching in a supporting letter.

Your actual application consists of the following sections:

- Administrative details.
- Information on KTF in previous rounds.
- Project title.
- Description of the proposed research.
- Research plan for the KTF.
- Knowledge utilization.
- Letter of recommendation from supervisor.
- Literature references
- Budget
- Appendix:
  - Curriculum vitae of the applicant (see KTF CV format).
  - Signed letter of recommendation from supervisor.
  - Signed support letter c.q. matching agreement School/Institute

The format details all the elements that need to be addressed in your proposal. Use these as a structure, so you make sure you address all elements. E.g. use the required elements as subheaders in your proposal, to help you to address all of them and making it easy for the reviewers to look things up.

Some general guidelines on the proposal:

The Kootstra Talent Fellowship offers individual grants. The proposal can be written in first person ("I will ..." etc.).

You cannot write any MORE words than the numbers given.

Be as specific as possible! Provide names, numbers, examples.... This will allow the reader to appreciate that what you plan to do is appropriate and feasible.

The different elements of the proposal will be addressed in the following chapters of this handbook, with an indication on the 'ideal' content, based e.g. on feedback received on proposals in the past. However, please use these for inspiration only.

This will give you an idea of what is expected.

## Application form

### 1 Applicant

Provide information about you, your Master's degree and your PhD.

If you have more than one Master degree, just add the same info again on your second Master.

### 2 Supervisor

Provide information about your proposed KTF supervisor.

### 3 KTF application details

*For this part, you can use up to 200 words.*

Provide information about the anticipated start date of your KTF project, duration of the project, the amount of fte working on your project and whether you already have another (fixed term or permanent) contract for (part of) the duration of the fellowship.

The minimum duration of the KTF is 12 months. The maximal duration is 24 months, or (if earlier) until the date that a (personal) grant awarded by an external funding agency can take effect. Part-time employment (limited to 0.7 FTE) is possible. The duration of the fellowship can be extended pro-rata. The fellowship must commence within six months of the grant award, or on the day of written approval of the PhD thesis (in case the award precedes thesis approval).

### 4 Previous submission.

*For this part, you can use up to 100 words.*

Indicate whether you submitted a KTF in a previous round. If so, describe briefly the changes you have made since last submission. Advise: address the previous feedback from the WMUMC+, where applicable.

### 5 Title of research proposal

Your title indicates the most important outcome of the research. It should also entice the evaluators to keep on reading. Don't forget however that your title should be feasible: you should be able to meet this in your proposal.

### 6 Description of the proposed research.

*For this part of your proposal you can use up to 1000 words, including text in figures and tables.*

The following topics need to be addressed in this section:

1. research aim;
2. scientific relevance and challenges;
3. originality and innovative character;
4. methods and techniques.

#### 6.1 Research aim

This paragraph sets the stage of your research. Describe the general topic and problem that you will be addressing. Indicate your research aim(s) and/or hypothesis.

Be clear and succinct in defining the research problem and what it is you are proposing to research. Be sure that what you propose is doable.

#### 6.2 Scientific relevance and challenges

Mention the state of art in this problem area and gaps in knowledge.

Indicate what is and what is not possible.

What will your research contribute to help tackle the problem?

What is your general approach or strategy?

### **6.3 Originality and innovative character**

Explain why this project is innovative.

Which knowledge gaps will be filled by this project?

Why was this not tried or accomplished before?

What is the advantage of this new approach?

Demonstrate what others are doing in the field, and how this project relates to and goes beyond what is currently done.

What are the specific new elements? Has this been an open question for a long time and does this project address it in a new way?

### **6.4 Methods and techniques**

Indicate more specifically how you will answer your research question(s). Describe the methodology, and analyses to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project. You need also to describe how the data will be collected, analysed, and interpreted. Provide sufficient details (f.e. *interviews with 10 stakeholders, to gather information on....*). Also, indicate why you chose these methods, chosen case studies etc. and do not forget to include a sample size calculation (if applicable). Furthermore, discuss potential problems or risks (if applicable) and how to deal with it. What are your alternative strategies to achieve the aims?

## **7 Research plan for the KTF.**

*For this part of your proposal you can use up to 800 words, including text in figures and tables; excluding timeline.*

In this section, you need to describe your planned activities (work plan). You break down your research into small steps, achievable tasks and identify the things you want to accomplish.

The following topics need to be addressed in this section:

1. Description of the planned activities;
2. local national and international collaboration;
3. grant acquisition plan;
4. timeline;
5. period abroad.

### **7.1 Description of the planned activities (work plan)**

Describe the steps of your research and scientific career and set up a timeline to indicate what you will do when. Think about how these steps connect or build on each other.

### **7.2 Local, national and international collaboration**

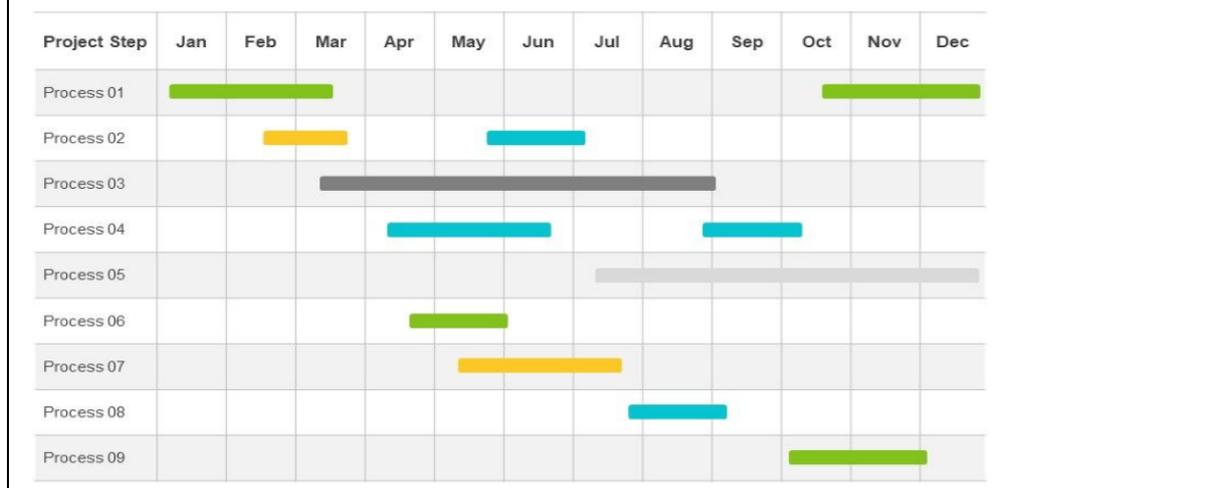
Think about what collaborations you need to do your research, but also which collaborations could follow from this. What network do you already have? What new collaborations will you set up. Make sure to contact these people beforehand.

### **7.3 Grant acquisition plan**

Describe your grant strategy, which involves identifying the funders you want to pursue during and/or after the KTF project. The activities can also be included in the timeline (7.4).

### **7.4 Timeline**

Use a timetable to indicate that your research is feasible considering the timeframe and the personnel input.

**Example of a timeline (Gantt chart):****7.5 Period abroad**

If a period abroad is included in the fellowship, please specify the rational and learning objectives. A candidate can spend up to 50% of the duration of the fellowship abroad.

**8 Knowledge utilisation**

*This part of your proposal can be no longer than 500 words including text in figures and tables.*

Describe the specific end-results and products (e.g. reports, blueprints, and device) of your project. Also, think about things such as the use of the data you collected. Where possible, link your contributions to the stakeholders and indicate what will change because of these contributions.

Give an overview of the stakeholders affected or interested in the results and products of your research. Who are they? How can you effectively communicate with them and/or involve them in your research? Due to the different characteristics of the stakeholders, you will need to adjust your communication and dissemination to each stakeholder. Set up a plan to address them effectively. Think beyond the standard publications and presentations. In case of publications, remember to use Open Access. Think of modern/social media where relevant, such as apps and podcasts.

**Examples of some sentences related to knowledge utilisation (from a successful veni application):**

*Results generated in this project can be the next big step in the identification of novel drug targets against [..].*

*As a result, findings can be used to develop an intervention based on [...].*

*After the first publication, I will start a broad dissemination to the public through publication in the [..] newsletter, general news websites and social media.*

*Also [...] companies will be informed about the findings in order to [..].*

## 9 Literature references

There are no specific guidelines on the number of references. Include only relevant literature and keep in mind that this is a project proposal, and not a scientific lecture/article.

## 10 Budget

Indicate the fte-factor you will be working on the project for each year of your project. You should have a significant role in the project. In general, for KTF this should not be any less than 0,7fte.

The minimum duration of the KTF is 12 months. The maximal duration is 24 months, or (if earlier) until the date that a (personal) grant awarded by an external funding agency can take effect. Part-time employment (limited to 0.7 FTE) is possible. The duration of the fellowship can be extended pro-rata.

Make sure that what you state here, is in line with your project setup.

The KTF will match half (50%) of each of the following costs, the remaining 50% should be matched by the candidate's School/Institute:

- Salary costs – VSNU Scale 10.4 during the in the first year of the fellowship and if applicable, VSNU scale 10.5 during the second year (or part thereof);
- Exploitation costs: max. €6.000 per year.

Please contact your financial director ('beheerder') of your School/Institute for advice and support in drawing up the budget.

## 11 KTF appendix

1. Curriculum vitae of the applicant (see KTF CV format).
2. Signed letter of recommendation from your supervisor (max. 500 words).
3. Signed support letter c.q. matching agreement School/Institute.

### 11.1 Curriculum vitae

#### 11.1.1 Academic profile (min. 400 words - max. 700 words)

*The word count includes all text used in this section, including – but not limited to - references, footnotes, text in figures, figure captions and tables.*

*The use of hyperlinks is prohibited.*

Provide a comprehensive description of your academic profile in narrative form. You may focus on achievements (other than output) and address your research focus, research agenda and vision. You can describe your position in the (inter)national academic field, your motivation for conducting research and for this project in particular, and the academic and societal potential of your work. Describe the link between your previous and current work to the proposed research plan.

The relevant elements in the description of your academic achievements depend on the particular field and on your personal situation.

Examples of topics you may address are listed below and are meant as inspiration. You do not need to address all these topics and may choose to include others. For any achievement, please provide relevant context.

Topics:

- Theoretical and/or methodological contributions;
- Collaborations, roles in teams, and networking capabilities;
- International orientation and activities;

- Conference participation and organisation;
- Educational activities, e.g. the connection of research and education;
- Mentorship or supervision of students, academic and non-academic staff;
- Relevance of research results and their position relative to societal topics;
- Knowledge utilisation, outreach and popularisation;
- Membership of scientific boards, editorial boards, and committees;
- Invited lectures;
- Prizes, awards and grants, and how the opportunities offered by grant(s) were used\*;
- Interdisciplinary activities;
- Administrative and managerial tasks;
- Contributions to open data and open science;
- Alignment of the academic profile with the research project, or vision of how this alignment will be achieved;
- Motivation for doing research in general and this project in particular.

Do not refer to any additional output, output metrics, or expected/future output and do not mention total numbers of output.

*\* You may not mention lists or total numbers of grants or prizes, nor the total acquired sum. In case you mention specific prizes or grants, you must provide context, e.g. by describing how the opportunities offered by the grant or prize were used. In case you mention specific prizes or grants, you must provide context, e.g. by describing how the opportunities offered by the grant or prize were used.*

#### 11.1.2 Key output (min. 400 words – max. 700 words)

Indicate what is ‘normal’ output for your specific field.

Provide the references to your key output (max. 10) and add a motivation for the selection of each of these output items: how does this output show your abilities/qualities as a researcher and/or how is it related to the Kootstra project.

Per output item, provide one reference. The motivation may not include mention of other publications by the applicant.

The word count includes all text used in section 2, except the output titles and references to the output items.

Do not mention h-indexes, impact factors, or any type of metric that refers to the journal, publisher, or publication platform, rather than to the individual output item. References to journal or publisher reputation (e.g. terms such as ‘top journal’) are not allowed either; the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published. You may consider a broad range of impact measures directly related to the output item, including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice. You are encouraged to provide context for each motivation to support the assessment.

The use of hyperlinks is allowed in this section only. In the ‘Key output’ you may use only one hyperlink per output item, on the condition that it links directly to the output item. This hyperlink should preferably be in the form of a persistent identifier (e.g. a DOI).”

The maximum amount of output items is ten. Note that this does not mean that you are required to mention ten items. The Kootstra CV form is designed to accommodate all scientific disciplines. What is customary in numbers and types of output varies greatly between disciplines. The committee will be asked to assess each candidate’s selection of output in light of the culture and

customs of the scientific field and in light of the candidate's effective research time. You are encouraged to include relevant information on the culture and customs of the scientific field in your narrative.

Motivate your selection of key output. You may shortly describe the research, its impact and your individual contribution to the research/output. You are encouraged to explain, in your own words, why a particular output item is directly relevant to your academic profile and/or important to your scientific field and/or to other fields in or beyond science and/or to the research idea.

**Example of sentences of veni proposals:**

*These first publications that resulted from the large international consortium project were published in [...]. In the first-authored paper, I showed that [...].*

*This paper showed that [..]. This has important implications for the use of [..] in clinical practice.*

*In this study I learned this novel [name of technique] which is of special interest for my VENI application as I will study [..].*

*This paper is an example of my contribution to two international consortium projects ....*

*In collaboration with [..] and [..], I have analysed [..]*

*I disseminated the results to the patients through newsletters, websites such as [..] and magazines including [..].*

*My Veni research will build on the existing collaboration with [..]*

Output may include, but is not limited to refereed articles, non-refereed articles, letters (to editors), books, book chapters, pre-prints, patents, working papers, proceedings, conference reports, software, code and open access databases. You may mention all types of output that occur in your field. The status of your output must be clearly indicated.

For journal publications, book publications, and where possible all other output, provide the following information: the author(s) in the order as published, date, title of the publication, journal or series in which the publication appeared, volume, page numbers, and (if applicable) publisher and place. Do not use "et al.", so committee members and referees can see your position in the author list.

If you mention a URL it may only refer to the individual output item. The URL should preferably be in the form of a persistent identifier (e.g. DOI).

Mark open access publications and open access databases with "O".

**11.2 Signed letter of recommendation from your supervisor**

Include a signed letter of recommendation from your KTF supervisor (max. 500 words). Without this signed letter your application is not eligible.

**11.3 Signed support letter c.q. matching agreement School/Institute**

Please arrange to have the scientific director of the School/Institute confirm her/his willingness and ability to provide the 50% matching in a support letter. Without this signed letter your application is not eligible.

## Appendix 1 KTF assessment criteria

All KTF proposals will be assessed according to the following criteria:

### A. Quality, innovative character and academic impact of the proposed research (40%):

- Independent research ideas
- Challenging content;
- Originality of the topic;
- Innovative elements for Maastricht UMC+/School;
- Effectiveness of the proposed methodology;
- Knowledge utilization (scientific, societal and economic).

### B. Personal vision and motivation (20%):

- Clear vision of the researcher about his/her place in science;
- Clear link between proposed research and career vision;
- Appropriateness of short term (KTF) and long term (follow-up trajectory) career planning on vision for the future;
- Contagious fascination for research;
- Persuasiveness.

### C. Quality of the researcher (40%):

Belonging in the top 25% of his/her international peer group.

Clear indications of an outstanding talent for academic research:

- *Education.*  
For example: supervision, teaching roles, mentoring, assessments, contributions to content or coordination of education/programs/modules, quality of education (e.g. student evaluations).
- *Research.*  
For example: research output (including peer reviewed publications), productivity (e.g. output i.r.t. work experience and actual time spent on research), recognition for work (e.g. prizes, grants and awards, invited presentations), Contributions to research field (theoretical, methodological, clinical).
- *Impact.*  
For example: knowledge dissemination activities (including conference participation, public outreach) and layman publications.  
Please note that these are not necessarily related to research.
- *Leadership.*  
For example: research vision, collaborations and networking, international and/or interdisciplinary research activities, membership of boards/committees, organisation of e.g. conferences, workshops, involvement in organization of meetings, other (non-research) activities in group /institute, growth/potential towards independence.