

**Notice of the Call**  
**PhD Studentships**  
**EBM\_2024\_01**

The Mértola Biological Station Association (EBM) is opening a Call for 4 (four) PhD studentship grants in the areas of Biological Sciences, Veterinary Sciences, Forest Engineering and Agronomy or related areas, complying with the provisions of the FCT Regulation for Studentships and Fellowships (RBI) and the Research Fellowship Holder Statute (EBI).

The scholarship will be funded by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P. (FCT) under the Financing Collaboration Protocol of the Multiannual Plan for Research Scholarships for PhD Students, signed between FCT and the R&D Unit, Mértola Biological Station Ass, N.º 14442

### **1. APPLICATION**

The Call is open from February 16 to May 15, 2024, until 24:00.

Applications, and all the supporting documents described in this Notice, must be submitted online using the application form available at <https://biodiv.pt/en/events/4-phd-grants-biological-station-of-mertola-applications-2024/>

Each candidate may submit only one application and may specify up to two (2) topics in order of preference.

False declarations or acts of plagiarism by applicants will lead to the exclusion of the application without prejudice of other corrective and punitive disciplinary measures.

### **2. TYPE AND DURATION OF STUDENTSHIPS**

Aiming to support advanced training, PhD studentships will be granted to applicants fulfilling all the requirements necessary to integrate a study cycle that allows to obtain a PhD degree in Portugal, and that wish to develop research work that allows obtaining that degree.

The research activities will be developed in Mértola Biological Station Ass, which will be the host institutions of the grantee, without prejudice to the work that may be carried out in collaboration with other institutions.

The research activities leading to a doctoral degree for the selected scholarship holders must be part of the activity plan and strategy of the *Associação Estação Biológica de Mértola* (<https://ebmertola.pt/>), and must be developed under the scope of the Doctoral Programs of Portuguese Universities.

The work plan can take place in full or in part at a national institution (mixed grant). Being a mixed grant, the time spent in the foreign institution cannot exceed 24 months.

As a rule, the duration of PhD studentships is annual, renewable up to 48 months.

### 3. RECIPIENTS

The PhD Studentships are aimed at candidates enrolled in, or who meet the conditions for enrolling in, a PhD Program at Portuguese Universities and who wish to carry out research at Associação Estação Biológica de Mértola or others associated institutions.

### 4. ADMISSIBILITY

#### 4.1 Applicants' admissibility requirements

The following citizens may apply to this call:

- National citizens or citizens from other member-states of the European Union;
- Third-party state citizens;
- Stateless individuals;
- Citizens holding a political refugee status.

To apply for the PhD studentship it is necessary:

- To hold a Bachelor's or Master's degree in Biological Sciences, Veterinary Sciences, Agronomy, Forestry Engineering or related areas;
- To be resident in Portugal at the start of the work plan, if the proposed work plan for the scholarship includes a period in foreign institutions (mixed grant), which is mandatory for Portuguese national citizens and for foreign citizens.
- Not to have benefited from a PhD or a PhD in industry studentship directly funded by FCT, regardless of its duration.
- Not to hold a PhD degree.

#### 4.2 Application's admissibility requirements

It is mandatory, under penalty of non-admissibility, to include the following in the application:

1. Information about ID card/ passport;
2. *Curriculum Vitae* (CV);
3. Academic degree certificates, indicating the final grade and, if possible, the final classification of the disciplines completed or, alternatively, a declaration of honour from the candidate stating that concludes the degree of bachelor or master by the end of the application deadline;
4. For foreign academic degrees it is mandatory to submit the recognition of such degrees and the conversion of the respective final grade to the Portuguese grading scale, or, alternatively, a declaration of honour from the candidate stating that concludes the degree recognition by the end of the application deadline;
5. Recommendation letters (two)
6. Motivation letter expressing interest in developing the thesis on the selected topic(s);

7. Two-page summary (for each topic selected) stating: main lines of research, framework, objectives, tasks, doctoral program where you intend to obtain the degree, partner institutions, potential mentoring team, type of studentship (in-country or mixed), source of funding for the work program (if any).
8. To present/prepare and submit the application and all related documents, including the recommendation letters and the most representative document of the applicant's scientific/professional path in English.

Regarding the admissibility criteria described above, note that:

- In the case of academic degrees awarded by foreign higher education institutions, and in order to guarantee the application of the principle of equal treatment to applicants holding foreign and national academic degrees, it is mandatory to recognize those degrees and to convert the respective final classification into the Portuguese classification scale.

The recognition of foreign degrees and diplomas as well as the conversion of the final classification into the Portuguese classification scale may be requested at any public higher education institution, or at the Direção Geral do Ensino superior (DGES, only in the case of automatic recognition). Regarding this matter, we suggest that you consult the DGES portal at the following address: <http://www.dges.gov.pt>.

- Only candidates who have completed the cycle of studies leading to a Bachelor's or Master's degree by the application deadline will be admitted. In case candidates do not yet have the certificate of degree completion, a declaration of honor from the candidates that they have completed the necessary qualifications for the competition by the application deadline will be accepted. The awarding of the scholarship is subject to the presentation, at the contracting stage, of the proof of academic qualifications.

## 5. WORK PLAN AND SCIENTIFIC SUPERVISION

The following topics are in the call:

- A. Biodiversity and Conservation in the Mediterranean Ecosystems
- B. Ecological Restoration in semi-arid Mediterranean ecosystems
- C. Ecology and Management of game Species
- D. Evaluation of global change impact on biodiversity of Mediterranean freshwater ecosystems

The detailed work plan will be defined later with the supervising team and will start in 2024.

## 6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

The evaluation takes into account the merit of the candidate and his/her scientific background.

Applications considered admissible will be scored on a scale from 0 to 100 in each of the following evaluation criteria:

**Criterion A** - Academic background (which reflects the classifications of academic degrees and the academic curriculum), with a weight of 40%;

**Criterion B** - Scientific and Professional Career (reflecting scientific production, professional experience,

participation in research projects and communications) with a weight of 30%;

**Criterion C** - Motivation letter (presenting and clearly stating the reasons and interest in the selected topic(s), with a weight of 20%;

**Criterion D** - Interview of the first three (3) applicants selected for each topic, based on criteria A, B and C, with a weight of 10%.

For the purposes of deciding on conceding the scholarship, candidates will be ranked according to the weighted average of the classification obtained in each of the four criteria, translated by the following formula:

$$\text{Final Classification} = (0,4 \times A) + (0,3 \times B) + (0,2 \times C) + (0,1 \times D)$$

For the purposes of breaking the tie, candidates will be ranked based on the classifications given to each of the evaluation criteria in the following order of precedence: criterion B, criterion A and criterion C.

**Important warning for candidates with degrees issued by foreign higher education institutions:**

- Candidates with diplomas issued by foreign higher education institutions may apply and will be evaluated using the same criteria as candidates with diplomas issued by Portuguese institutions, provided that they present, in their application, proof of recognition of academic degrees and conversion of final classification for the Portuguese classification scale under the terms of the applicable legislation.
- Candidates with recognized foreign diplomas who do not present proof of conversion from the final classification to the Portuguese classification scale will be evaluated with the minimum classification (50 out of 100 points) in criterion (A1).
- In any case, scholarship agreements with candidates with diplomas issued by foreign institutions will only be concluded upon presentation of proof of recognition of academic degrees and conversion of the final classification, as indicated above.

Candidates whose application is evaluated with a final score of less than 60 are not eligible for a scholarship.

## 7. EVALUATION

Composition of the Evaluation Panel:

- Coordinator: Paulo Célio Alves, Professor Associado c/Agregação da Universidade do Porto e Presidente da Associação Biológica de Mértola;
- 1<sup>st</sup> Member: Professora Helena Margarida Nunes Pereira, Professora Catedrática do Departamento dos Recursos Naturais, Ambiente e Território do Instituto Superior de Agronomia;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Member: Professor António Mira, Professor Catedrático no Departamento de Biologia da Universidade de Évora;

- 1<sup>st</sup> Substitute Member: Francisco Moreira, Investigador Coordenador do Centro de Investigação em Biodiversidade e Recursos Genéticos da Universidade do Porto (CIBIO-InBIO) da Associação BIOPOLIS e Membro da Associação da Estação Biológica de Mértola;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Substitute Member: Professor Jeremy Searle, Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, Cornell University, USA.

The evaluation panel will analyse applications considering the evaluation criteria disclosed in the Notice of the Call, considering all the appreciation elements.

All panel members, including the coordinator, make a commitment to respect a set of responsibilities essential to the evaluation process, such as the duties of impartiality, declaration of any potential conflict of interest, and confidentiality.

During all moments of the evaluation process, confidentiality is fully protected and ensured in order to guarantee the independence of all statements.

Panel members, including the coordinator, cannot be supervisors or co-supervisors of candidates with applications submitted to the call.

For each application, a final evaluation form will be produced by the panel, in which the arguments that led to the ratings attributed to each of the evaluation criteria will be present in a clear, coherent and consistent manner.

The minutes of the meeting are the responsibility of the of all evaluation panel and must include the following information:

- Name and affiliation of all members of the evaluation panel;
- Identification of all excluded applications and respective grounds, if applicable;
- Methodology adopted by the panel for each particular cases, if applicable;
- Final Evaluation Sheets for each candidate;
- Provisional list of classification and ranking of candidates, in descending order of the final classification, of all applications evaluated by the panel;
- Conflict of interest statements by all panel members
- Possible delegations of votes and powers due to justified absence, if applicable.

## **8. RESULTS DISCLOSURE**

The results of the evaluation are communicated via e-mail to the e-mail address indicated in the application form.

## **9. DEADLINES AND PROCEDURES FOR PRELIMINARY HEARING, CLAIMS AND APPEALS**

Once the provisional ranked list of the evaluation results has been communicated, applicants who have an unfavorable provisional decision may use their rights to dispute it during the preliminary hearing phase,

which takes place within 10 working days, according to Articles no. 121 and following of the Administrative Procedure Code (CPA). The final decision will be disclosed after the analysis of applicants' arguments presented in the preliminary hearing. Final decision can be claimed within 15 working days or, alternatively, appealed within 30 working days, after the communication of the final results, respectively.

## 10. REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDENTSHIP GRANTING

Research grant contracts are signed directly with the FCT. The following documents must be submitted when the grant is awarded, for the purposes of the contract:

- a) Copy of the documents of personal identification, tax number and, if applicable, social security;
- b) Copy of the academic degree certificates;
- c) In case of foreign academic degree it is mandatory to submit the recognition of master degree and the conversion of the respective final grade to the Portuguese grading scale;
- d) Work plan;
- e) Document proving the acceptance and registration in the PhD programme at a Portuguese University;
- f) Supervisor(s) statement declaring willingness to coordinate the work plan, as established in Article no. 5-A of the Statute for Research Fellowships (template will be made available by FCT);
- g) Institutional document supporting the applicant, issued by the institution(s) where the work plan will be carried out, guaranteeing the necessary conditions to its successful development, as well as the fulfillment of the duties established in Article no. 13 of the Research Fellowship Holder Statute (template will be made available by FCT);
- h) Updated document proving compliance with the regime of exclusive dedication (draft of declaration to be made available by FCT)

The studentship granting is still dependent on:

- The fulfillment of all the requirements listed in this Notice of the Call;
- The results of scientific evaluation;
- The absence of unjustified non-compliance of the fellowship holder during previous directly or indirectly FCT funded fellowships;
- FCT available budget.

The lack of any of the necessary documents to complete the contracting procedure implies the expiration of the studentship granting and the conclusion of the process; applicants have up to 6 months after the disclosure of the provisional granting to present all of the listed documents.

## 11. FUNDING

Studentship payment will start after returning the signed contract to FCT, which should happen within 15 working days after its delivery. The studentships granted in this call will be financed by FCT using the State Budget fund and, whenever eligible, using the European Social Fund (ESF), under the PORTUGAL2020

programme, in particular, under Programa Operacional Regional do Norte (NORTE 2020), Programa Operacional Regional do Centro (Centro 2020) and Programa Operacional Regional do Alentejo (Alentejo 2020), or any other funding schemes that might be approved, according to the respective requirements.

## 12. STUDENTSHIP ALLOWANCE

A monthly maintenance allowance is granted, in accordance with the table in Annex I of the RBI ([https://www.fct.pt/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Tabela-de-Valores-SMM\\_atualizacao-2024.pdf](https://www.fct.pt/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Tabela-de-Valores-SMM_atualizacao-2024.pdf)).

The studentship may also include additional allowances, according to RBI's Article no. 18 and the values indicated in its Annex II.

All the studentship holders have personal accident insurance related to the research activities, which FCT will support.

All studentship holders who are not beneficiaries of any social protection regime can use the right to social security through the voluntary social insurance regime, under the terms of the Contributory Scheme of the Social Security System. FCT will ensure the charges resulting from contributions under the terms and with the limits provided in Article no. 10 of the EBI.

## 13. PAYMENT OF STUDENTSHIP ALLOWANCE

Payments due to the studentship holder are made by bank transfer to the respective indicated account. The monthly maintenance allowance is paid on the first working day of each month. Registration, enrolment or tuition fees components are pay by FCT directly to the institution.

## 14. TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF PHD STUDENTSHIP RENEWAL

The renewal of the studentship always depends on applicant's submission, within 60 working days prior to the renewal start date, of the following documents:

- a) Declaration issued by the supervisor(s) and by the host institution(s) attesting the work plan development and the evaluation of the respective activities;
- b) Document proving compliance with the exclusive dedication regime;
- c) Declaration demonstrating the enrolment renewal in the study cycle leading to the doctoral degree.

## 15. INFORMATION AND PUBLICITY OF THE GRANTED FUNDING

All the R&D activities carried out by the grantee, directly or indirectly financed by the studentship, namely communications, publications and scientific creations, as well as thesis, must include the reference to FCT and European Social Fund (ESF) financing by the operational programme: *"Programa Demografia, Qualificações e Inclusão"* (PDQI).

Insignia of FCT, MCTES, ESF and EU must therefore be included in the documents referring to these actions, according to the graphic rules of each operational programme. The disclosure of research results funded according to the RBI provisions must comply with the open access guidelines, publications and other research

results in accordance with FCT rules. For all the studentships, in particular in case of European funded actions, namely the ESF, may be performed monitoring and controlling actions by national or European entities according to the applicable legislation. Grantees must therefore collaborate and provide all the required information, including answering to surveys and evaluation studies in this area, even though the studentship might have already ceased.

#### **16. NON-DISCRIMINATION AND EQUAL ACCESS POLICY**

FCT promotes a policy of non-discrimination and equal access, thus no applicant may be privileged, benefited, damaged, or deprived of any right or exempted from any duty. This includes ancestry, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family situation, economic situation, education, origin or social condition, genetic heritage, reduced work capacity, disability, chronic disease, nationality, ethnicity or race, land of origin, language, religion, political or ideological beliefs or trade union affiliation.

#### **17. APPLICABLE LEGISLATION AND REGULATION**

The present call is governed by this Notice of the Call, the FCT Regulation of Research Fellowships, approved by the Regulation no. 950/2019, published in the Series II of the DR, of 16th December, by the Research Fellowship Holder Statute, approved by the Law no. 40/2004, of 18th of August, in its current version, and by other applicable national and European legislation.