INSPIRE Fellowship Programme

2023 Call 2 Guide for Applicants

Call 2 Important Dates

Call opens	30th August 2023
Application deadline	22nd November 2023 13:00 (**GMT)**
Eligibility check and Ethics check	23rd November – 7th Dec 2023
Remote Peer Review	Dec – Jan 2024
Interviews for shortlisted candidates*	Feb/March 2024
Successful applicants informed *	March 2024
Applicants on reserve lists informed of outcome *	March 2024
Anticipated start date for successful applicants *	April- May 2024

* Please note these dates are indicative and subject to change

Table of Contents

1   Purpose of the guide for applicants

This guide provides instructions and practical information to potential applicants to assist in preparing and submitting an application for an INSPIRE fellowship. In addition, it provides a general overview of the scheme and the assessment process.

Applicants should also review the Terms and Conditions document, FAQs document and information published on the INSPIRE website. https://www.ucc.ie/en/inspire/

2   The INSPIRE programme.

2.1   About the programme

INSPIRE (**IN**novative **S**ustainable Development Interdisci**Pl**inary Post-Doctoral **R**esearch **E**xcellence) will provide experienced researchers with the opportunity to design intersectoral microbiome research projects in the interconnected areas of food systems or health. The purpose is to develop an intersectoral training, career development and mobility fellowship based at the APC (UCC) that will address real global challenges.

Microbiome science is relatively young, but it has evolved rapidly over the past decades. Still, only 1% of microbiomes have been studied so far. The INSPIRE project aims to lift the next generation of scientific leaders to the forefront of leading microbiome research. It will forge cross-sectoral partnerships to bring together researchers and practitioners. It will also aim to develop resources and future proof fellows' careers.

INSPIRE aims to cultivate the next generation of scientific leaders who are adaptable, systems thinkers at the forefront of leading microbiome research. The programme will support experienced researchers to take the next step in their careers by providing the opportunity to design intersectoral microbiome research projects. INSPIRE welcomes proposals in the interconnected areas of food systems or health that address pressing global challenges outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that align with APC's research expertise. (Global challenges such as Anti-microbial Resistance (AMR), Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) to Food Systems).

A particular strength of the APC is its significant intersectoral and interdisciplinary partnerships with global industry, non-profits, regulators, policy decision makers and SMEs. Credible scientific solutions are increasingly needed for global challenges. INSPIRE aims to forge cross-sectoral partnerships by exposing researchers to practitioners, international networking, career development and leadership training. Research projects are ground up and fellows can freely select the research project, supervisor, and Irish academic host institution. Fellows will benefit from access to excellent researcher supervisors and cutting-edge infrastructure.

INSPIRE will provide fellows with personalised professional career development, mentoring and support to facilitate fellows to future proof careers and allow some of the brightest minds to achieve their career aspirations.

2.2   About APC Microbiome Ireland

The APC Microbiome Ireland (APC) is a Science Foundation Ireland research centre coordinated by University College Cork (UCC). APC investigates the role of gut microbiota on the interface between human health and disease. APC's mission is to 'link Irish science with industry and society through excellence in research, education and outreach in gastrointestinal health' and it has been funded to the value of over €100 million since its foundation by competitively won grants and industry collaborations. A particular strength of the APC is its significant intersectoral partnerships securing more than €30 million from industry collaborations since 2003. The APC wants to break down silos between policy makers, scientists and business and has decided to align how it communicates its work with the Sustainable Development Goals, Non-Communicable Diseases and Anti-microbial resistance which are all big societal challenges with economic implications that already relate to the excellent science research being undertaken. The 320+ researchers of the APC focus on active international research collaborations across the boundaries of traditional research sectors, fostering a lively transdisciplinary environment with clinicians, clinician-scientists and basic scientists from diverse backgrounds working in teams, sharing ideas and resources. The scale and scope of APC's research on the microbiome is of relevance to all branches of human medicine and veterinary science, is very important to the economic welfare and health of society and is one of the hottest topics in biology. APC currently comprises 4 academic partners: UCC and its associated teaching hospitals Cork University Hospital and the Mercy University Hospital, Teagasc (a government funded agri-food research organisation), the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) and Munster Technological College (MTU). The Institute is further amplified by over 25 research collaborations with industry partners across the food, pharma, biotech, animal and diagnostics sectors. Research carried out at the APC aligns closely with the Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy, RIS3, particularly in the priority areas of diagnostics, food for health, sustainable and food production and processing.

2.3   APC themes

APC research falls into four broad multidisciplinary thematic areas: The proposal topic must be aligned with one of the APC research themes as outlined here.

Microbes to Molecules. Pharmabiotics are any biological entity 'mined' from the gastrointestinal microbiota, including probiotics, bacteriocins, bacteriophages and bioactive molecules. Pharmabiotics will make significant impacts in the pharmaceutical, medical food and functional food sectors. For example, the current threat posed by multi-drug resistant bacteria is a major challenge. The APC Microbiome Institute has discovered, patented and licenced a narrow spectrum antimicrobial highly active against *Clostridium difficile* and patented antimicrobial technologies for the animal husbandry sector against Salmonella and mastitis.

Diet and Microbes. The interaction between diet, the microbiota and health at the extremes of life – infants and older people – is the main topic of this research theme, with a unifying emphasis on nutrition, cognition and inflammatory disease.

Gut-Brain Microbe Axis: communication between the brain and gut and how it can be influenced by the gastrointestinal microbiota. Microorganisms, or microbial components, have

a role in either causing or preventing these conditions. A better understanding of the role of this axis in the stress response, and its links with other debilitating conditions, such as anxiety, stress, depression, autism spectrum disorders, obesity and IBS. This thematic area will provide new treatment and management strategies for NCDs and represents opportunities for both food ingredients business and the pharmaceutical industry.

Host–Microbe Dialogue: explores the network of signalling interactions among the microbiota, host immune-inflammatory responses and metabolism and the impact of diet on each component of this triad. The gut microbiota influences human health and susceptibility to most common diseases – particularly NCDs. Each of these chronic disorders has an immune or inflammatory component. This low-grade inflammation, and the diseases associated with it, is a significant healthcare burden in developed countries, and represents a multi-billion-euro opportunity for companies in the food, pharmaceutical and diagnostic sectors.

2.4 Interdisciplinary policy element of the INSPIRE programme.

Post-doctoral fellows will be encouraged to align their project with tackling a big societal challenge (choice of the following) that align with the APC's research thematic focus:

Sustainable development. In 2015, the United Nations members adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which highlighted interconnectedness between people and planet, now and into the future. Sustainable Development is increasingly becoming a priority consideration for policy makers and business leaders, but numerous reports show that there is disconnect between market demand and availability qualified applicants. This topic is cross cutting across all four of APCs research thematic areas.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), also known as chronic diseases, tend to be of long duration and are the result of a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental and behaviours factors. According to the World Health Organisation (2018), NCDs are the leading cause of death in the world, representing 71% of all deaths globally (killing 41 million people each year). APC's research looks at how gut bacteria interacts with the four main types of non-communicable diseases, which are cardiovascular diseases (like heart attacks and stroke), cancer, chronic respiratory diseases (such as chronic obstructed pulmonary disease and asthma) and diabetes. This also aligns with SDG target 3.4, which aims to reduce by one-third premature mortality from NCDs through prevention and treatment. This topic is cross cutting across all four of APCs research thematic research focus.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has been identified as one of the most pressing human health concerns worldwide. Public health organizations uniformly agree that tracking its emergence and prevalence is critical to minimize the threat to human health. Indiscriminate use of antibiotics in the last few decades in humans and animals has led the World Health Organization to warn of a "post-anti-biotic era" as treatments become ineffective and infections persist in the body. It is estimated that AMR is responsible for 33,000 deaths per year in the EU and globally 10 million deaths per year are projected between 2015 and 2050 if current infection and resistance trends are not reversed.

Sustainable food system (SFS) is a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised. This means that it is profitable throughout (economic sustainability), it has broad-based benefits for society (social

sustainability) and it has a positive or neutral impact on the natural environment (environmental sustainability). This SDG spans 5 areas: 1) Putting data within reach to support the transition to sustainable food systems; 2) Promoting evidence-based policy making and policy alignment; 3) Bolstering public-private collaboration in sustainable food systems development; 4) Facilitating local knowledge-building and knowledge-sharing and 5) Supporting countries in preventing and mitigating risks.

2.5   About Marie Curie

Named after the double Nobel Prize winning Polish-French scientist famed for her work on radioactivity, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA) support researchers at all stages of their careers, irrespective of nationality. Researchers working across all disciplines, from life-saving healthcare to 'blue-sky' science, are eligible for funding. The MSCA also support industrial doctorates, combining academic research study with work in companies, and other innovative training that enhances employability and career development. In addition to generous research funding, scientists have the opportunity to gain experience abroad and in the private sector, and to complete their training with competences or disciplines useful for their careers. Internationally respected in industry and academia, a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship is a recognised mark of research excellence.

3   Fellowship details

The INSPIRE programme will offer 20 prestigious two-year fellowships for incoming mobility across two calls over the 60 months duration of the programme. Fellowships are for experienced researchers (ERs) of any nationality and residing worldwide. All fellows will be hosted in the APC, UCC or an APC academic host organisation (NUIG, Teagasc Moorepark, and TCD). Fellows will be required to complete a mandatory secondment in a non-academic organisation and encouraged (optional) to engage with United Nations international processes related to their global societal challenge (AMR, NCDs, SDGs, SFS).

Fellowships will be offered in the four core APC research areas of 'Microbes to Molecules', 'Diet and Microbes, 'Gut-Brain Microbe Axis and 'Host-Microbe Dialogue' with a link to one of the four global societal challenges. INSPIRE applicants will have the freedom to choose their research topic (within the remit of the APC), their supervisor and their secondment organisation.

The purpose of the fellowship programme is to develop an intersectoral training, career development and mobility fellowship that will address real global challenges.

3.1   Duration of the fellowship

The total duration of each fellowship is two years.

3.2   INSPIRE research themes

Adhering to the COFUND principle of 'individual-driven mobility', INSPIRE applicants will have the freedom to choose their research topic (within the remit of the APC), their supervisor and their secondment organisation.

Applicants will design intersectoral microbiome research projects in the interconnected areas of food systems or health. Proposals must align with APC's strategic vision and core research themes and tackle societal challenges outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR), Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) to Sustainable Food Systems (SFS).

The four core APC research areas are:

- Microbes to Molecules,

- Diet and Microbes,

- Gut-Brain Microbe Axis and

- Host-Microbe Dialogue

3.3   INSPIRE academic supervisors.
Prior to creating an application, the applicant must contact an INSPIRE supervisor to discuss their proposal and to gain support for their application. Whilst the applicant can choose their individual research project, the topic must be aligned with APC's strategic vision and core research themes and tackle societal challenges outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals. The proposal must also align with the research interests of the applicant's prospective supervisor. Please see website for list of participating academic supervisors https://www.ucc.ie/en/inspire/supervisors/

3.4   Mandatory secondment.
All INSPIRE fellows must go on a 3–6-month mandatory intersectoral secondment to a **non-academic organisation** that must be relevant to the fellow's research project and to his/her own career development. This will be as outlined in the fellow's personal Professional Development Plan (PDP; an integral element of the INSPIRE training and development programme). See eligibility criteria secondments. https://www.ucc.ie/en/inspire/eligibility/

Applicants should discuss potential relevant and realistic secondments with their supervisor and include them in their research proposal. The applicant should also include a letter of support with the proposal. If an applicant is unable to confirm the secondment host in their application, the applicant must name a company or an area of industry that they could target for a secondment, the intended duration and research objectives at which the applicant would intend to carry out the secondment should the applicant be successful in securing a fellowship.

If it is the case where the applicant has been unable to confirm the secondment host at the time of application submission, a letter of support will be required after 6 months from the fellowship start date.

4   Eligibility criteria.
To be considered eligible, applicants must fulfil the following eligibility criteria:
1. Applicant eligibility
2. Project eligibility
3. Secondment eligibility
4. Supervisor eligibility

4.1   Applicant eligibility

Applicants may be of any nationality and must agree to the T&Cs of the programme. Applicants must be experienced researchers (ER) and at call deadline, be in possession of doctoral degree or have at least 4 years full-time equivalent (FTE) research experience. FTE research experience is measured from the date when a researcher obtained his/her degree that would entitle him/her to embark on doctorate, either in the country that the degree was obtained or the country in which the researcher is recruited, irrespective of whether doctorate is/ was ever envisaged. Applicants must comply with relevant INSPIRE Mobility Rules (see Table 1). Separate selection panels will not exist for 'Career Restart' or 'Reintegration' fellows, but a relaxed mobility rule will apply. Compulsory national service and/or short stays such as holidays are not taken into account.

Table 1. Specific Mobility / Experience Requirements of Incoming Fellows in INSPIRE Programme

Fellowship Status	Additional Eligibility Considerations	Mobility Requirement
Standard	-----	Applicants may not have resided or carried out main activity in Ireland for more than 12 months in the 3 years prior to call deadline
Career Restart	Applicant must have undertaken a career break in research (i.e., must not have been active in research for at least 12 months immediately prior to the call deadline).	Applicants may not have resided or carried out their main activity in the Republic of Ireland for more than 3 years in the 5 years immediately prior to the call deadline
Reintegration	Applicant must be a national or long-term resident of a MS or AC and must move or have moved from a TC directly to Ireland.	

4.2   Project eligibility

Proposals must describe a research project to be implemented during a two-year period, adhere to the ethical standards as stated in the programme documentation and include a secondment in the non-academic sector. The research topic must be relevant to one of APC's thematic research expertise areas. The proposal must also address a global societal challenge such as Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), Anti-microbial resistance (AMR) Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) or Sustainable Development. After the application deadline all submitted proposals will undergo an eligibility check to determine if the projects align with one of APC's thematic research areas. Any proposal that does not align with an APC research theme will be deemed ineligible.

4.3   Secondment eligibility

All INSPIRE applications must include a proposed intersectoral secondment of three to six months duration to anywhere in the world, including Ireland. Secondments can be a single period or split into short stays. Eligible secondment hosts are non-academic organisations

located anywhere in the world that are working on either research relevant to the APC research themes or undertaking practical work related to Sustainable Development, Anti-microbial resistance, Sustainable Food Systems or Non-Communicable Diseases.

Additional short technical/interdisciplinary visits to international/national collaborators (of less than 1 month) may be included in INSPIRE proposals where they fit the justified development needs of the ER and the research (e.g., learn / use specialised equipment or specific technique). Secondments to multiple organisations are eligible provided they fit the developmental needs of the ER and the research (maintaining an overall maximum duration of 6 months).

The applicant should identify the specific organisation(s) or type of organisation(s) they wish to second to in their application, but this can be changed following consultation with their academic host supervisors along with the INSPIRE programme manager. Secondments must be relevant to the fellow's project and career development.

Applicants are free to suggest the secondment host provided they fit with the developmental needs of the researcher and the research project or work with their supervisor to find a suitable host. Firm commitment is not required at application submission stage, however a letter of commitment from the secondment host must be obtained within 6 months of starting his/her fellowship.

Important note: It is important for the applicants to clearly distinguish "secondments" from short visits (for example for field work) since they have a different nature and pursue different objectives. A short visit is not a "secondment" and therefore if an applicant wishes, for example, as part of their fellowship to undertake field work for a short period of time in another organisation either in Ireland or another European country, this should not be included in the proposal as a secondment. Secondments are mandatory on the INSPIRE programme. Secondments must be relevant to the fellow's project and career development.

4.4   Supervisor eligibility

Fellows will have two supervisors: a main academic supervisor and a secondment supervisor (non-academic sector). All supervisors must align with the principles and requirements of the European "Charter and Code" for researchers and have proven expertise in their field. Any supervisor with less than five years' experience in the supervision of staff will be required to complete mentoring training (Vitae or similar) prior to appointment of the post-doctoral fellow.

5   Ethical issues.

INSPIRE will comply fully with the H2020 ethics policy, including those in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and the European Convention on Human Rights and its supplementary protocols. INSPIRE will not fund 1) research activities aiming at human cloning for reproductive purposes, 2) research activity intended to modify the genetics of human beings that could make such changes heritable (except for research relating to cancer treatment of the gonads), 3) research activities intended to create human embryos solely for the purpose of research or for the purpose of stem cell procurement, including by means of somatic cell nuclear transfer. Applicants must complete an Ethics Issues Table (Part C). If ethical issues arise, the applicant needs to complete and submit the 'Ethics Self-assessment' document. Part D. Applicants should refer to the H2020 guidance on Ethics Self-assessment. http://apc.ucc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/h2020_hi_ethics-self-assess_en.pdf. Applicants must provide any documentation available at the time of proposal submission. For documents that are not yet available, applicants must explain how they will obtain these documents and

provide an approximate timeline for submission. All applications for which ethical issues are flagged will be reviewed by the Programme Ethical Review Committee (PERC), who will check whether ethical issues apply to the proposed project, and whether the issues have been adequately addressed by the applicant. The PERC may declare the proposal ineligible, eligible as presented or may ask for additional information and then take a decision.

6   Application process

6.1   Publication of the fellowship call
The application process as depicted below starts with the publication of the INSPIRE Call, along with this document and associated application templates. Call 2 opens August 30th, 2023. All application templates can be found on the INSPIRE website once the call is open.

Each applicant may submit one application per call. Applicants must prepare the proposal in liaison with their proposed academic supervisor.

Application Process
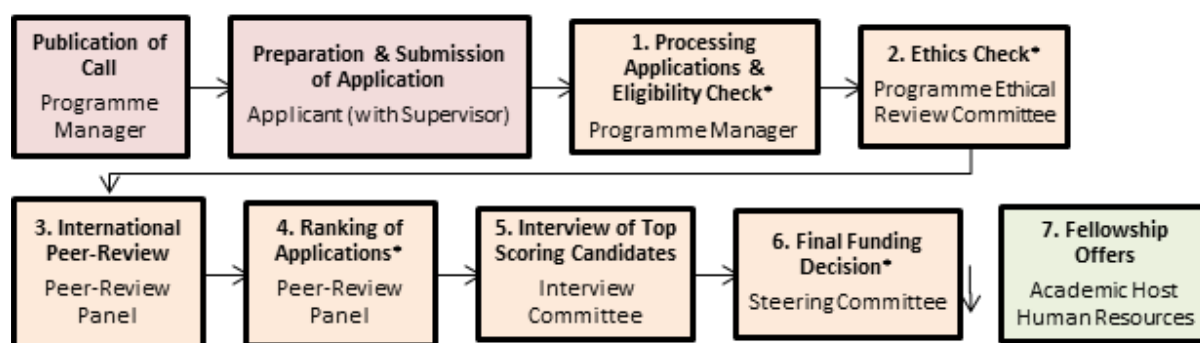
6.2   Preparation of the application
Applicants are encouraged to start preparing their application as early as possible. Please review all relevant documentation which include this guide, T&Cs and consult the FAQs if you seek clarification on any items.

The following **steps** should be followed:

- Check your Eligibility
- Complete an expression of interest form (Expression of Interest) within which you must give a brief description of the research project you are interested in undertaking and how your research proposal could align with the supervisors research area.
- Contact your preferred academic supervisor(s) from our list of Supervisors. You must have the support of an INSPIRE supervisor. You must contact an INSPIRE supervisor whose research interest is aligned with your research proposal before applying and have the supervisor's agreement to support your application. When you contact the supervisor with your project idea include an updated CV in your email. The supervisor will confirm whether they are happy to work with you on your chosen topic and may offer guidance on developing the research project. Include the INSPIRE programme manager in your

correspondence. If the supervisor is unable to support your application, contact INSPIRE@UCC.ie and the programme manager will see if other supervisors can be found.

- Start preparing your proposal. Do not leave it to the last minute.
- Contact and obtain the support of a non-academic secondment host. During the application stage, the INSPIRE host supervisor will help the applicant to identify an appropriate secondment organisation and non-academic supervisor.
- Obtain a letter of support from your proposed academic supervisor.
- Prepare your application.
- Submit all required documents **on or before the Call deadline**. Applications after the call deadline are not eligible.

6.3   Application documents required.

A complete application consists of the following: Parts A, B and C which are outlined below. The application templates are available for download on the INSPIRE website once the call is open. All applicants must complete the Ethics Issues Table in Part C. An Ethics self-assessment is only required for applicants who have indicated potential ethical issues. Templates must be followed. These are based on the MSCA Individual Fellowships (IF) template. Instructions are included in each of the templates to assist you when writing your proposal to make sure you include all the necessary information required in the programme.

Part A – Administrative information on the applicant, project and academic supervisor. Applicants must tick a box to (a) confirm they have considered all ethical issues listed in the ethics issues table and (b) agree to the programme T&Cs. Applicants must indicate a project thematic area, up to five keywords and a 2000-character proposal abstract/summary. A letter or scanned e-mail of support from the academic supervisor is to be included in Part A.

Part B – Project proposal. The page limit for this section is a maximum of 10 pages. Any text that exceeds the 10-page limit will not be evaluated. The Gannt chart is not included in the 10-page limit.

Part C - **CV** (max. 5 pages) and the **Ethics Issues Table.**

Ethics Self-Assessment

Applicants, who indicate that ethical issues are associated with their research, are required to provide additional information and documentation. Applicants must present an explanation based on H2020 self-assessment guide and provide all pertinent documentation. If documentation is not ready to be presented, the applicant should explain how and when it will be obtained. Please refer to Horizon 2020 Guidance on Ethic Self-Assessment.

- http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/ethics/h2020_hi_ethics-self-assess_en.pdf

Other documents required:

- Letters of commitment (may be a scanned email) from the academic supervisor to be included in Part A
- Letter of commitment from the secondment host. If unable to secure a letter of commitment from the secondment host, this letter must be obtained within 6 months of starting his/her fellowship.

Please note that proposals must respect the following minimum standards:

o a minimum font size of 11 points, except for the Gantt chart and tables where the minimum font size is 8 points.
o single line spacing.
o A4 page size.
o margins (top, bottom, left, right) of at least 15 mm (not including any footers or headers).
o a clearly readable font (e.g., Arial or Times New Roman). Literature references should be placed as footnotes at the bottom of the page in which they are mentioned, in font 8 or 9. They also count toward the page limit.

6.4   Submission of application

Applications must be submitted in **PDF format,** to the INSPIRE email address INSPIRE@ucc.ie with the **subject heading Call 2** on or before the **deadline November 22nd**, 2023. The application system will close at 13:00 (GMT). Applications cannot be accepted after this time.

Applicants will receive acknowledgement of-receipt of the submitted proposal, however, this is no guarantee of eligibility of their proposal. Applications by post are accepted for researchers at risk.

• All applications must be complete and in English.
• All applications must have confirmed support of the proposed academic supervisor.
• One application per call may be submitted. However, unsuccessful applications will be encouraged for resubmission at future calls.
• The INSPIRE application templates must be used.
• Researchers at risk, who might not be able to submit an application in the aforementioned manner, should contact the INSPIRE programme manager INSPIRE@ucc.ie to discuss an alternative submission arrangement.
• Only applications that are complete and submitted before or on the call deadline will be included in the selection process.

UCC encourages the submission of applications well in advance of the closing date for the competition.

7   Researchers at risk

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA) enable displaced researchers moving to Europe to continue their careers through the provision of funding and support. As a MSCA programme, INSPIRE will support applications from researchers who are at risk or who are displaced by conflict, or whose situation makes it difficult for them to pursue their research careers. Support will be provided on a case-by-case basis, both during the application process and during the fellowship programme.

Available support may include:

• Application submission by post where online application requirements may discriminate against the researcher's circumstances.

- Application of the eligibility criteria appropriately to ensure researchers who have suspended their activities whilst seeking refugee status are not disadvantaged.

For applicants who applied for or who are applying for refugee status in Ireland, the time spent in that process will not count as time resident in Ireland.

8   Overview of the selection process.

The selection process will follow open, transparent and merit-based procedures in order to ensure that applications are evaluated in a competent and impartial manner. Standard evaluation criteria and scoring system will be employed by all reviewers and by all interview panels.

8.1   Evaluation and scoring system.

Three evaluation criteria will be used: Excellence, Impact and Implementation. Such criteria will be employed both during the international peer review and during the interview stages. The evaluation criteria along with their respective sub-criteria are set out in Table 2.

8.2   Selection process stages

The selection process will be comprised of the following stages, including an international peer review and an interview stage.

8.2.1   Stage 1: An eligibility check

After the closing date of the call, all applications will be checked for completeness and eligibility. Where an application is found to be ineligible, the candidate will receive an explanation for its ineligibility. Note that documentary evidence of eligibility will only be requested should the application be reviewed successfully and selected for award.

8.2.2   Stage 2: Ethics check

All applications for which ethical issues are flagged will be reviewed by the Programme Ethical Review Committee (PERC) who will check whether ethical issues apply to the proposed project, and whether the issues have been adequately addressed by the applicant. The ethics committee may declare the proposal ineligible, eligible as presented or may ask for additional information and then take a decision. Proposals with ethical clearance will proceed to the next stage of the evaluation process. Proposals without ethical clearance will be declared ineligible. All applicants will be informed on the eligibility status of themselves and/or their proposal following the completion of stage 1 and 2.

8.2.3   Stage 3: International peer review

All eligible applications will be reviewed remotely by three members of the International Peer Review Panel. Each reviewer will review the proposal and score it against the evaluation criteria (Table 2) which is based on the MSCA Individual Fellowship programme criteria. When assessing a proposal, reviewers will be instructed to assess all elements of the application based on what is written in the proposal (not on assumptions). Reviewers will be asked to focus

on the quality of the project based on the applicant's research experience and the merits of the applicant on career level. Reviewers will take into account any candidate breaks from research, which may affect, for example, publications.

Table 2: Evaluation criteria for the **INSPIRE** fellowship programme.

Excellence	Impact	Implementation
Quality, innovative aspects and credibility of the research (including inter/multidisciplinary, gender aspects)	Enhancing research- and innovation-related human resources, skills and working conditions to realise the potential of individuals and to provide new career perspectives across the multidisciplinary areas of APC research strengths and interests	Overall coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources
Clarity and quality of transfer of knowledge/training for the development of the researcher in light of the research objectives and planned secondments	Effectiveness of the proposed measures for communication and results dissemination to APC stakeholders, including academic and industry collaborators and communities, the general public, patient groups etc.	Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, including quality management and risk management
Quality of the supervision, hosting and intersectoral arrangements		Appropriateness of the institutional environment (infrastructure)
Capacity of the researcher to reach or reinforce a position of professional maturity in research	Increasing the number of young researchers with skills, including innovative research, transferable and entrepreneurial skills, and mobility experience to be the scientific leaders of tomorrow in microbiome research	Competencies, experience and complementarity of the secondment host and its commitment

Reviewers will be requested to provide a score between 0 and 5 for each of the three-evaluation criterion. (Table 3). The PM will apply a set of weightings to the score awarded by the reviewers following the review and scoring (table 4).

Table 3 Scoring system that will be applied to the INSPIRE evaluation criterion.

Score	Description
0	Very poor. Proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed owing to missing or incomplete information.
1	Poor. The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2	Fair. Proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.

3	Good. Proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
4	Very good. Proposal addresses the criterion well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
5	Excellent. Proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

Table 4 INSPIRE fellowship scores and priority weighting.

	Excellence	**Impact**	**Implementation**
Weighting of scores	50%	30%	20%
Priority in case of *ex aequo*	1	2	3
Overall threshold of 70% applied to total weighted score			

An overall threshold of 70% will be applied to the final weighted score, hence proposals with a score lower than 3.5 will not proceed to the interview stage of the selection process.

Reviewers will indicate their scores together with comments of the application for each evaluation criterion.

8.2.4   Stage 4: Ranking of applications.
The ranking list will include all eligible proposals with ethical clearance, in descending order of scores. A set of weightings (Table 3) will be applied to the score awarded by the reviewers following their remote consensus meeting. The final weighted score will be used to rank the applications. Applicants will be informed if they have progressed to the interview stage. Application that did not score above the threshold will not be invited for interview. Feedback on their application will be offered.

8.2.5   Stage 5: Interview
The top scoring candidates will be invited to the next phase, a competency interview by an interview panel. Each invited candidate will be interviewed by an interview panel. All interviews will be conducted in English and may last up to 30 minutes. Applicants will be asked to prepare a short 10-minute (power point) presentation on his/her proposal. The presentation will address the following topics.
- an overview of the scientific project
- career development plan
- training objectives
- project impact

The presentation will be followed by questions from the interview panel. Applicants may be interviewed on any aspect relating to Excellence, Impact or Implementation of the fellowship. In addition, the interview panel will focus on the match between the applicant, the project and the host and on the applicant's motivation. Interviews may be held face-to-face or through teleconferencing. (It is the candidate's responsibility to avail of a PC with video conferencing facilities). In exceptional circumstances over the phone. The score will be based on 20% for the presentation and 80% for questions.

8.2.6   Stage 6: Final funding decision

Following the interview, the interview panel will reach consensus on a score between 0 (very poor) and 5 (excellent) for all aspects of the interview using the same evaluation criteria, scoring and threshold as the international peer review (Tables 2 & 3). Post interview, the average, weighted score for the peer review process and the consensus score from the interview will be added up. The final mark for the applicant will therefore be composed equally from the evaluation of the written proposal (50%) and the interview (50%).

The top 10 scoring candidates will be presented to the INSPIRE Steering Committee who will endorse the final funding decision based on International Peer Review Panel and Interview Panel recommendations. The next 5 applicants will be placed on a reserve list.

All applicants will feedback at this stage. All feedback will be by email. Applicants on the reserve list will be informed that they have been placed on this list. If an applicant declines their offer, an applicant on the reserve list may be informed that their proposal will be funded. All offers of fellowship will be subject to reference checks.

8.3   Offer of fellowship

Applicants will be offered an employment contract by one of the APC hosting institutions in the INSPIRE programme. This offer will be subject to reference checks. The applicant will be required to accept the offer in writing, within 7 days.
It is expected that successful Fellows will start the Fellowship April/May 2024.

8.4   Redress Procedure

All candidates have a right to a redress procedure. Applicants wishing to start the redress procedure should contact the programme manager within 30 days of receipt of the evaluation results for procedure information. Redress requests can only be made about procedural issues or perceived incorrect application of eligibility criteria, and not with regard to the scientific judgements of the reviewers and interview panel members. The requests must be sent by email to INSPIRE@UCC.ie. Redress requests will be examined by a redress committee who will either reject or accept the request; in the latter case, a new remote peer review with ethics check and/interview will be arranged. Applicants will be informed of the results of redress within 30 days from their request. Decisions from the redress committee are binding.

9   Ethical issues

The INSPIRE programme is committed to ensure that all research is conducted according to best ethical practice and thus maintain the good name of research in Ireland and Europe. Applicants must always consider and address any of the following ethics issues, if they arise, in their proposals:
● Humans
● Human cells/tissues
● Personal data
● Animals
● Third countries

- Environment & Health and Safety
- Dual use
- Misuse
- Other ethical issues

Research areas excluded from funding include:
- Research activities aiming at human cloning for reproductive purposes
- Research activities intended to modify the genetic heritages or human beings which could make such changes heritable
- Research activities intended to create human embryos solely for the purposes of research or for the purpose of stem cell procurement, including by means of somatic cell nuclear transfer
- Research activities involving human embryonic stem cells

All applicants to the Fellowship Programme are required to complete an Ethics Issues Table which is found in the Application document Part C. This table must be submitted as part of the application. If applicants answer yes to any of the questions in the Ethics Issues table, they are then asked to complete the document 'Part D- Ethics Self-Assessment' and provide additional information and documentation as required by the H2020 Guidance on Ethics Self-assessment (Version 6.1 or later) as part of their submission. A Programme Ethical Review Committee (PERC) will be set up to review all proposals for which ethical issues are flagged.

These partially address the above list of ethics issues. The following questions are asked:
- Does your research involve Human Embryonic Stem Cells (hESCs)?
- Does your research involve the use of human embryos?
- Does your research involve the use of human foetal tissues / cells?
- Does your research involve human participants?
- Does your research involve physical interventions on the study participants?
- Does your research involve human cells or tissues (other than from Human Embryos/ Foetuses as covered above)?
- Does your research involve personal data collection and/or processing?
- Does it involve the collection and/or processing of sensitive personal data (e.g.: health, sexual lifestyle, ethnicity, political opinion, religious or philosophical conviction)?
- Does it involve processing of genetic information?
- Does it involve tracking or observation of participants?
- Does your research involve further processing of previously collected personal data (Secondary use)?
- Does your research involve animals?

Other issues (Third countries, Environment & Health and Safety, Dual use, Misuse) are complex in nature and not suitable for self-assessment. They may be identified during the evaluation process by any expert reviewer, or during the execution of a project by anyone involved.

For more information on ethical issues please refer to Relevant Links section of this Guide.

10 Funding

The INSPIRE fellowship salary will consist of the following components: living allowance, mobility allowance and family allowance (if applicable) (Table 5). There will also be a contribution to research costs to cover consumables and training. The budget for research, training and networking costs is €1250 per month.

Table 5. INSPIRE Fellowship Salary

	Gross Salary/year
*Fellow with family	€49,330
Fellow without family	€43,928

Please note that salaries received by the fellow **will be liable for taxes and/or other deductions**. Information on Irish taxation can be found at the Office of Revenue Commissioners website. https://revenue.ie/

*Paid when the Fellow has family obligations. Family is defined as persons linked to the Fellow (i) by marriage; (ii) a relationship with equivalent status to a marriage recognised by the legislation of the country where this relationship was formalised; (iii) dependent children who are being maintained by the Fellow.

11 Training and career development aspects

At the heart of INSPIRE is the training and career development of the experienced researchers. It is a condition of the fellowship that the fellows fully engage in the training programme. Fellows will develop a professional development plan (PDP) with the guidance of their supervisory team and be expected to fulfil INSPIRE requirements in complementary research skills and transferable skills training. A training programme has been developed to meet the needs of the INSPIRE fellows, to complement the fellows' PDP and to meet the changing needs of the sector (both in the academic and non-academic setting), thus facilitating the rapid development of fellows to key leadership positions in the field.

The INSPIRE training programme will include the following integral elements:

- Supervised interdisciplinary research project.
- Career coaching, mentoring and development/regular review of a personal PDP.
- Policy advocacy training, outreach, public engagement and communication.
- Bespoke skills training including complementary/advanced research skills e.g., APC technology platforms and transferable skills.
- Intersectoral and interdisciplinary transfer of knowledge (through secondments, short interdisciplinary visits and training interventions) and mentoring.
- Dissemination, exploitation / commercialisation training & guidance.
- Compulsory ethics training in UCC prior to the start of all fellowships (APC orientation).
- Summer/winter schools covering key topics including Global Solutions, Communicating Science, Industry Engagement and Entrepreneurship.

Fellows will be expected to complete complementary research skills training courses during their fellowship. These courses have been closely aligned to the APC Technology Platforms and are designed to support fellows in achieving a truly multidisciplinary portfolio of research skills. Fellows will also attend and present at group lab meetings, APC Fora and Research Symposia. Fellows will also complete transferable skills training during their fellowship. All fellows are required to undertake a three to six months secondment in a non-academic organisation that suits their research, training and development needs. Fellows will be supported by their supervisors in selecting and shaping a secondment that best suits their scientific training goals. Secondments must be planned in the research proposal.

12   Support for the fellows

INSPIRE will support fellows from application during their fellowship and afterwards. All documentation will be available once the Call is published. Documentation includes application guidelines, T&Cs, FAQs and application forms.

12.1   INSPIRE helpdesk

INSPIRE will run an application helpdesk during the selection and evaluation period to answer queries and provide support connecting with supervisors. Queries can be posted to the project manager through the dedicated programme email address INSPIRE@UCC.ie. Support is also provided for applications from Researchers at Risk, who are refuges in a Member State or Associated Country (under the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol), during the application process. Such support will be addressed on a case-by-case basis and researchers at risk will be able to discuss these supports with the INSPIRE Programme Manager.

12.2   EURAXESS Ireland service centre

Applicants and Fellows can avail of a range of services offered by the Irish EURAXESS Office. EURAXESS.ie provides information on a range of issues and areas affecting researchers, including immigration and visas, employment law, healthcare, childcare, social services and life in Ireland. It also operates the Irish Hosting Agreement scheme which offers a fast-track service for visa applications for organisations who wish to recruit non-EU researchers. Under the scheme visas are issued rapidly and work permits are not required. Researcher's families can accompany them immediately and may work while in Ireland and the researchers can remain in the country to look for a job after their contract ends.

12.3   Hosting agreement/researcher Visa scheme

If you are a citizen of an EU/EEA (European Economic Area) nation, except for Bulgaria and Romania, or a Swiss national, you do not require a permit to work or study in Ireland. Otherwise, you will be required to fulfil several conditions to seek permission to work or study in Ireland. The eligibility requirements and contractual terms of the INSPIRE programme is designed to fulfil these conditions and access the 'Hosting Agreement Scheme'. However, it is the candidate`s responsibility to review all information on visas and work permit to ensure you can work in Ireland before applying.

The Hosting Agreement Scheme offers a free and fast track service for visa applications for

higher education institutions and the private sector, who wish to recruit non-EU

researchers to work in Ireland. Under the Scheme visas are issued rapidly and work permits

are not required. Researcher's families can accompany them immediately and use public schooling. Family members have access to the job market and the researchers can stay on to look for a job after their contract ends. For more information about visas and work permits visit.

https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/information#information-assistance-tab-component-tab-2-name

13 Relevant links

EURAXESS:

> https://www.euraxess.ie/

European Charter for Researchers:

> http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/europeanCharter

Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers:

> http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/codeOfConduct

Guide to Ethics self -assessment:

> http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/ethics/h2020_hi_ethics-self-assess_en.pdf

UCC's Template for Research Skills Development Training Paths
Training Paths

UCC's guidelines for Career Planning for Research Staff
Career Planning

UCC's Template for a Professional Development Plan
UCCPDP

14 Contact details.

Address: INSPIRE Programme Manager, APC Microbiome Ireland, Rm 5.04, 5th Floor, Biosciences Building, UCC, Ireland.

Email: INSPIRE@ucc.ie

Twitter: @INSPIREMSCA

Website: https://www.ucc.ie/en/inspire/