

 Touch

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Guide for evaluators
(2nd call)

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CED: Centre d'Estudis Demogràfics
CRM: Centre de Recerca Matemàtica
CVC: Centre de Visió per Computació
FSIE: Fundació Salut i Envel·liment
GDM: Gender and Diversity Manager
I3PT: Institut d'Investigació i Innovació Parc Taulí
IP: Interview Panel
IR Sant Pau: Institut de Recerca Sant Pau
PM: Project Manager
PMT: Project Management Team
SEC: Scientific Evaluation Committee
UAB: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
VHIR: Vall d'Hebron Institut de Recerca

1. INTRODUCTION

The TOUCH guide for evaluators explains the principles and procedures which will be followed during the evaluation of candidates. It describes in detail the programme, the evaluation committees, selection process and provides relevant instructions for the evaluators. This document is intended to be used by the evaluators, but it can also be useful for the candidates who want to inquire about the selection process and evaluation criteria to prepare a competitive application.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAMME

TOUCH (“Towards the next generatiOn of excellent yoUng doctoral researchers on mental health by developing an intersectoral and transdisciplinary approaCH”) is a new excellent doctoral programme led by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) for the recruitment and training of 24 doctoral candidates (13 in the first call and 11 in the second call) in the field of mental health and wellbeing, providing a new dimension through highly interdisciplinary and intersectoral research while fulfilling all the principles of Open Science and maintaining the highest research quality standards.

UAB is the main Beneficiary and coordinator of the programme (12 doctoral positions offered) together with 7 institutions from the Sphere UAB-CIE as Implementing partners by recruiting, hosting, and training PhD students. Implementing partners include 3 research centres (CED – 2 positions, CRM – 2 positions, CVC – 1 position), 1 research foundation (FSIE – 2 positions) and 3 research organisations linked to prestigious hospitals from the Barcelona area (I3PT –2 positions, IR Sant Pau – 1 position, VHIR – 2 positions). Several renowned international organisations complete the programme through their involvement as Associated partners collaborating in the successful development of the training programme for higher impact and a multiplier effect. Figure 1 presents a schematic description of the COFUND partnership. TOUCH is a doctoral programme created to provide a tailor-made training programme for recruited fellows to educate tomorrow’s researchers in mental health through a broad set of scientific, transferable, and business skills to develop the mind-set of future academics and entrepreneurs. The programme offers a bottom-up approach in which doctoral fellows will be free to choose from a wide range of multidisciplinary research topics in 4 major sub-themes:

- Fostering mental health and wellbeing across lifespan
- Transdisciplinary approach to mental health and wellbeing determinants
- Multilevel strategies for assessment and intervention in mental health and wellbeing: from genomics to personomics
- Governance in mental health systems: participation, education, and community.

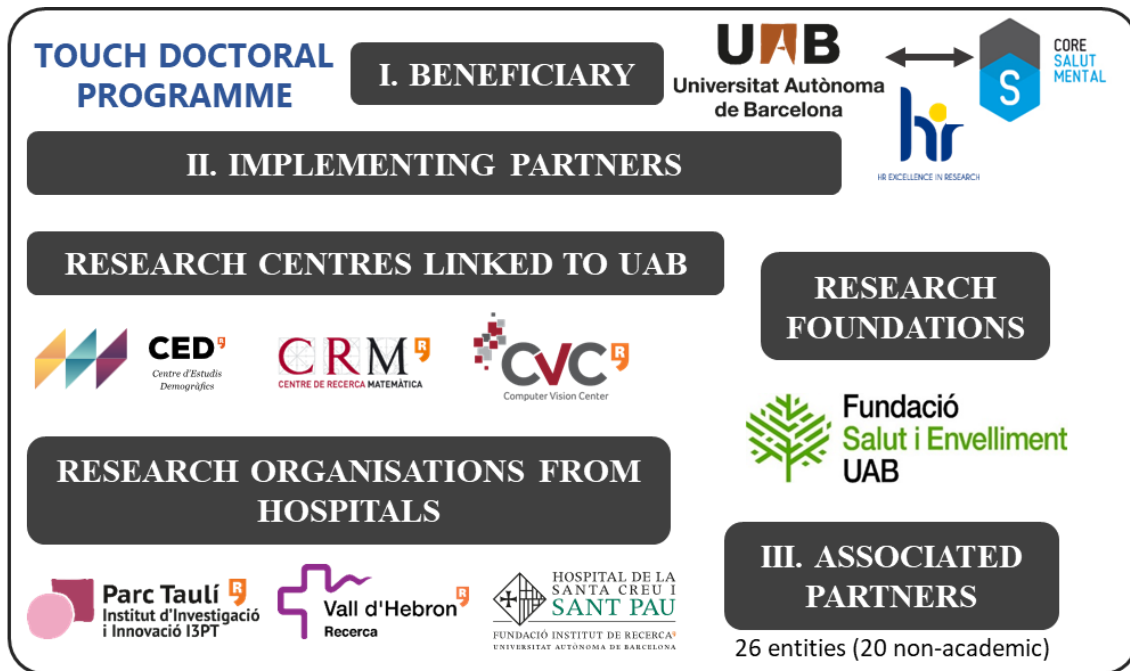


Figure 1: Schematic representation of TOUCH doctoral programme.

TOUCH builds up on the CORE partnership on Mental Health as a strategic excellence network for the development of novel research and innovation in the field of mental health through an interdisciplinary, intersectoral and international approach to mobilise UAB as Beneficiary and coordinator plus its local network of research organisations and hospitals in the Sphere UAB-CEI and international partners in the search for the next generation of young researchers in the mental health field.

3. SELECTION PROCESS

3.1. Evaluation principles

During the evaluation and selection process the evaluators are expected to follow the principles of the [Code of Conduct for Recruitment](#). For this reason, the members of the selection panels will **receive training** in order to complete the process in the most effective, transparent and fair way, and briefed before the selection process on how to implement good recruitment practices. The following principles must be complied by the evaluators:

- **Independence:** act independently and in the public interest.
- **Impartiality:** treat all applications equally and evaluate them based only on their merits, regardless of their gender, age, nationality, race, or any other ethical-related issues.
- **Objectivity:** evaluate realistically the information submitted by the candidates.
- **Accuracy:** assess the candidates following the official evaluation criteria and nothing else.
- **Consistency:** apply the same standard of judgement to all applications.

Conflict of interest and confidentiality: Experts participating in the selection process for TOUCH must sign a letter confirming that any data, knowledge and documents communicated to them as part of the evaluation process will be kept confidential. Also, they must confirm that they do not have any conflict of interest in relation to the candidates on which they have been required to give an evaluation (shared publications, projects, other relationship with the selected supervisor). If a conflict of interest is detected in the process, the expert will be set aside, and the application handed over to a different evaluator from the panel. A provision regarding the fulfilment to conform to the *European Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* will be also included.

3.2. Evaluation phases

The TOUCH selection process will be carried out in four main phases (Figure 2):

Phase I (Eligibility check): The PMT will be in charge of the eligibility verification of the potential candidates, with the GDM overlooking the whole process to ensure non-discrimination. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be accepted. Applications which do not include the complete "Application Package" documentation will be considered ineligible. Then each application will be carefully checked against mobility and doctoral candidates' eligibility rules. Those not fulfilling the criteria will be considered ineligible. Finally, the applicants will have to demonstrate the academic requirements in order to embark on the PhD studies (in collaboration with a representative from the UAB Doctoral School). It is expected that the full process will take 10 days to complete. Only those applications passing through the different eligibility checks will go through to the external evaluation (Phase II).

Phase II (Evaluation of merits): the Scientific Evaluation Committee (SEC) evaluates applications passing from Phase I through a peer-review system by panels of independent experts. Each application will be reviewed by 5 experts: 1 representative of the coordinator UAB, 1 representative from the organisation selected by the fellow as first choice and 3 external experts in the field selected from the pool of experts (with no conflict of interest). Candidates will be evaluated and scored by SEC against several criteria (see section 3.4) by filling the evaluation report template (Annex 1). A **Summary Report** will be prepared after a consensus meeting of each panel, including strengths/weaknesses for each candidate and comments for each criterion. The PMT will then revise all reports and accept them or ask the evaluators to provide additional information. Once all the evaluations for a single application are accepted, those with the highest and lowest overall marks will be disregarded to ensure a fair and transparent procedure. The three remaining scores will be averaged, providing the Final Evaluation Score. Results will be communicated to all applicants via email, with 22 candidates (twice the number of positions available) shortlisted and passing through to the interview stage (Phase III). The PMT will prepare an **Evaluation Summary Report** that will be sent to all the applicants that participated in this phase and were not shortlisted, including Final Score, funding decision and a summary of strengths and weaknesses as identified by the evaluators. The report will not only inform the applicants of the final decision, but it will also be useful for them to improve their chances in future Open Calls and/or applications to other similar programmes. The full process will take approximately 1 month to complete (15 April- 15 May 2025).

Phase III (Interviews): The 22 shortlisted candidates from Phase II will be invited to a remote 20' interview with the following structure: Part 1 (duration 10'): introduction and oral presentation of the candidate merits including scientific/academic background and appropriateness for the position, using any additional material (.ppt) to present her/himself. Part 2 (duration 10'): interactive Q&A session to get additional insights and assess the suitability of the candidate (interest in the programme, level of independence, potential as future leading researcher, self-identification of strengths and weaknesses, etc.). The Interview Panel (IP) will consist of 5 members: 2 externals (selected from the SEC, one must be the panel leader) + 1 from UAB + 2 from Implementing partners. An **Interview Report** (Annex 2) will be prepared by the IP for each candidate. The interviews will take place in June 2025.

Phase IV (Final scoring and ranking): The PMT will proceed to prepare the final ranking using evaluations and scorings from Phases II (50% scoring weight) and III (50% scoring weight). A **Consensus Report** will be prepared by collaboration and agreement of the evaluation committees with the final decision. As in Phase II, an **Evaluation Summary Report** will be prepared and sent to those fellows not selected for funding, including if they are part of the reserve list and their position in the ranking. After the final ranking list is produced, those fellows ranked "recommended for funding" will be asked to **sign an acceptance letter within a period of 15 days to secure their fellowship**. A reserve list will be established in case one of the selected candidates rejects the offer. Once the acceptance letters are received by the PMT, the awarded fellows will be contacted by the PM via email with an invitation to start negotiating the terms of the contract and associated procedures with the hosting organisation to enrol them in the PhD doctoral studies. In this email the contact details of the person in charge at the hosting institution and the future PhD supervisor will be included.

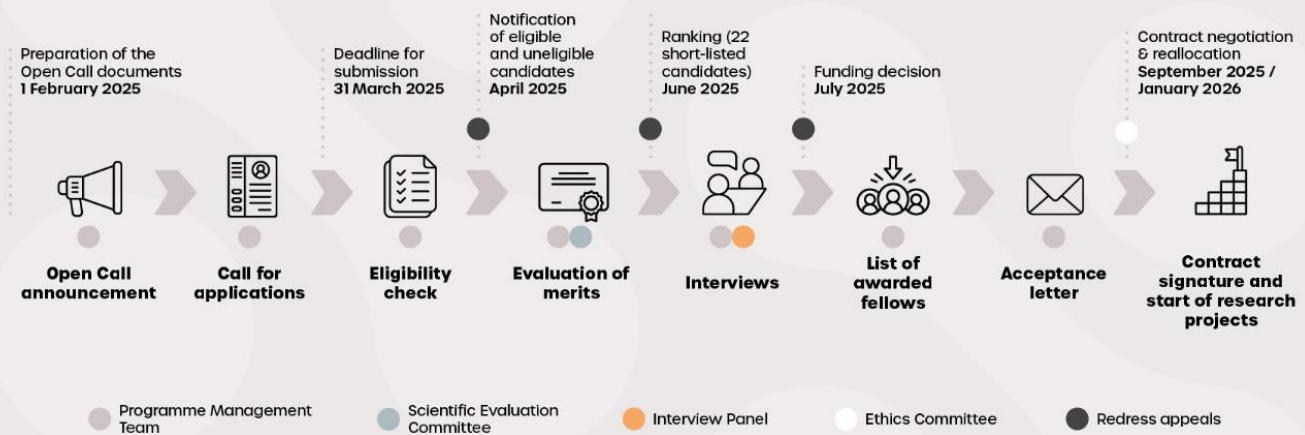


Figure 2: TOUCH selection workflow.

Redress appeals: an opportunity to submit a **request for redress** will be available for applicants under Phases I-II-III if they believe that the process or scores obtained are not fair. A period of 10 days will be given for the redress procedure after receiving the email informing of their eligibility, evaluation of merits or final ranking position after the

interview stage. The PMT will carefully review each redress request on an individual basis before taking a final decision. A maximum of 10 days will be given to communicate the result of the redress procedure. If the appeal is accepted, the application will be reviewed again. For Phase II (Evaluation of merits), the application will be sent to different experts to contrast with the original evaluation in order to spot inconsistencies in the process.

3.3. Eligibility criteria

In support of **equality and non-discrimination** principles, gender, age, nationality, race, or any other ethical-related issues will not be considered during the application and selection process. Scientific/academic merits and excellence of the candidates are the only criteria for evaluation. The two eligibility criteria to comply by prospective candidates are related to mobility and experience:

- **Mobility rule:** candidates must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Spain for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately preceding the deadline for the programme call (31 March 2025).
- **Experience rule:** researchers must be doctoral candidates at the date of recruitment, i.e. not already in possession of a doctoral degree at the deadline of the open calls. Researchers who have successfully defended their doctoral thesis but have not yet formally awarded the doctoral degree will not be considered eligible. Recruited researchers must comply the requirements to be enrolled in a doctoral programme leading to the award of a doctoral degree at UAB.

Diversity aspects: Applications from women, candidates with disability, special assistance, researchers at risk, LGBTQ+ community, etc. are encouraged. Equal opportunities in terms of **diversity** will be fully taken into consideration during the recruitment process. To avoid that 'unconscious' or 'implicit' bias unintentionally influences judgements and opinions about others, the members of the panels involved in the selection process will be properly trained and instructions to be aware of their own biases will be provided. In case of similar CVs, applications from minority or underrepresented groups, refugees and researchers with disabilities will be preferably selected.

3.4. Evaluation criteria

Different criteria and sub-criteria for the selection of researchers under TOUCH will apply for the two stages that conform the evaluation and selection process after passing the eligibility check (Evaluation of Merits + Interviews). These criteria are summarised in Table 1, along with the scoring, thresholds, and priority (in case of ex-aequo). The evaluation considers not only the educational aspects of the applicant, but also other activities in the context of career progression and development of personal skills. These criteria will ensure an objective and consistent selection procedure, in alignment with the principles and requirements of the *Code of Conduct*. Since this is a doctoral programme, applicants will be at the early-stage of their research careers, so the score does not rely exclusively on bibliometric indices, but mainly on **education and other relevant aspects, skills and competences** (teaching, supervision, teamwork, knowledge transfer, management or scientific-technical implication in research and innovation projects, foreign language skills, computer literacy and social or public awareness

activities). The interview stage will consider additional aspects which may not be so evident from the CV, for example creativity, level of independence, leadership skills, overall potential as researchers and self-identification of strengths and weaknesses. A maximum score of 50 points may be obtained from the evaluation of merits, with 26 shortlisted candidates passing through the interviews stage. An additional 50 points will be decided on the interview stage, providing the final score and ranking (over 100).

PHASE	SELECTION CRITERIA	SCORING (over 100)	THRESHOLD	PRIORITY (in case of ex-aequo)	
ELIGIBILITY CHECK (PHASE I)	Application submitted before the deadline / All necessary documents included / Mobility + definition doctoral candidates rules fulfilled / Academic requirements for doctoral studies	<i>In order to pass to Step 2, applicants must fulfil all these criteria</i>			
EVALUATION OF MERITS (PHASE II)	Education: graduate (Bachelor) and postgraduate education (Masters) (0-20).	50	30	2	1
	Research and working experience: participation in projects, research outcomes (publications, awards), attendance to conferences/events, patents, research skills and competences, letters of recommendation (0-15).				2
	Motivation letter: interest and motivation to join the programme (0-5);				3
	Others: mobility (research stays), supervision and mentoring, public awareness, English level, suitability of the profile to the programme, industrial experience (0-10).				4
INTERVIEWS (PHASE III)	Research Skills: scientific excellence, level of independence, motivation and potential as a future lead researcher, scientific quality of the presentation and answers during the Q&A session, capacity to discuss the suitability of the candidate for the position (0-25).	50	25	1	1
	Interpersonal Skills: professional attitude, team player, reliability, motivation, etc. (0-15).				2
	Communication Skills: English skills and oral communication skills (0-10).				3

Table 1: evaluation criteria, scores, thresholds and priority for TOUCH programme.

4. EVALUATORS

4.1. Selection of evaluators

The PMT was in charge of selecting the experts who will participate in the evaluation panels. For this, hosting supervisors and Implementing partners were asked to provide a list of possible evaluators. Experts were contacted by email with an **Invitation Letter** to be incorporated into a **database/pool of experts**, and they will be assigned an estimated number of **5-10 applications** (final number depending on the number of candidates to evaluate the Open Call) per panel. Evaluators will receive a **financial contribution** of 750 €/panel. Experts will provide feedback based on this "Guide for Evaluators" which details

all the steps of the recruitment process, the structure and role of the committees and the evaluation and selection criteria (and sub-criteria).

A good **balance of experts** will contribute to the establishment of an **open, efficient, transparent, supportive and internationally comparable** recruitment procedure. Among the members of each panel, there will be at least one female, one international and one independent expert. The following criteria have been considered to select the pool of independent experts:

- **Renowned research leaders** with relevant experience in recruitment processes.
- **Independent:** all the experts are from outside the partnership with no conflict of interests.
- **Gender balance:** at least 40% of the experts are female.
- **International:** the experts are from different countries, at least 40% international experts.
- **Interdisciplinary and intersectoral:** the experts have different backgrounds and competences.

4.2. Instructions for the evaluators

We will send you the application documents submitted by the candidates including:

- Personal details
- Full CV
- Motivation letter
- Letters of recommendation
- BSc and MSc certificates and transcripts
- Certificate of English level

Each candidate will select three of the research projects offered by the programme. Before starting the evaluation, please check the profile required for the research project selected by the candidate as first choice in the [offered PhD position](#) section of the TOUCH website.

All the applications have passed the eligibility check (Phase I). However, if you notice any issues concerning the **eligibility criteria** (section 3.3), please let us know.

You will have to declare that there are no conflicts of interest between you and the evaluated candidates and sign a non-disclosure agreement before starting the evaluation.

A training on the selection process and the measures to avoid unintentional bias during the evaluation will be organized and you are required to participate.

Please let us know as soon as possible if the evaluation will not be completed on time.

To evaluate the candidates during the Phase II, you must fill in the evaluation of merits report (Annex 1). Afterwards, a consensus meeting will be organized with the panel members to prepare the final summary report using the same template (section 3.2).

To evaluate the candidates during the Phase III, an interview report (Annex 2) must be prepared by the Interview Panel after each interview (section 3.2).

The comments for the evaluation of merits report and the interview report must be:

- Specific to each criterion
- Clear and substantial
- Consistent with the score awarded
- The adequate length
- Relative to the application

The comments must not be:

- Too short, too long, or inappropriate
- General statements
- Not properly verified
- Aimed at giving advice to improve the application.
- Referring to the same weakness under different criteria
- Discriminating or politically incorrect
- Related to details that could be a factual mistake
- If some aspects of the application are not clear, it should be mentioned in comments and reflected in the scores

If you encounter any problem during the evaluation of the candidates, please contact the PMT through the programme email (pr.cofund.touch@uab.cat).

5. TOUCH CONTACT DETAILS

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Annex 1: Evaluation of merits report template

EVALUATION OF MERITS REPORT			
SELECTION CRITERIA	DOCUMENTS TO EVALUATE	SCORE	COMMENTS
Education: graduate (Bachelor) and postgraduate education (Masters) (0-20).	CV, degree transcripts and certificates		
Research and working experience: participation in projects, research outcomes (publications, awards), attendance to conferences/events, patents, research skills and competences, letters of recommendation (0-15).	CV, letters of recommendation		
Motivation letter: interest and motivation to join the programme (0-5).	Motivation letter		
Others: mobility (research stays), supervision and mentoring, public awareness, English level, suitability of the profile to the programme, industrial experience (0-10).	CV, motivation letter, certificate of English level		
Strengths of the application (in bullet point format):		Weaknesses of the application (in bullet point format):	

Annex 2: Interviews report template

INTERVIEW REPORT			
SELECTION CRITERIA	INTERVIEW PARTS	SCORE	COMMENTS
Research Skills: scientific excellence, level of independence, motivation and potential as a future lead researcher, scientific quality of the presentation and answers during the Q&A session, capacity to discuss the suitability of the candidate for the position (0-25).	Presentation, Q&A session		
Interpersonal Skills: professional attitude, team player, reliability, motivation, etc. (0-15).	Presentation, Q&A session		
Communication Skills: English skills and oral communication skills (0-10).	Presentation, Q&A session		
Strengths of the application (in bullet point format):		Weaknesses of the application (in bullet point format):	