**The H2020 SME Innovation Associate:
matching SMEs up with talented researchers**

Additional information for SMEs and Start-ups

The H2020 SME Innovation Associate is a new pilot action under the EU Research and Innovation Framework Programme 'Horizon 2020' supporting European SMEs and Start-ups to recruit post-doctoral research associates from other countries to explore an innovation business idea.

- **Objective**

The action aims at overcoming barriers for EU SMEs and Start-ups to the recruitment of highly qualified specialists (PhD or equivalent) that are not available on the national job market (either because the required skills are not available or because they are not affordable), but whose knowledge would be crucial to open up opportunities for innovation and significant growth for the enterprise.

- **Context**

Innovation in SMEs is often hampered by a lack of access to specialised skills and knowledge. At the same time, many companies find it difficult to manage innovation processes effectively and struggle to recruit specialised knowledge as they don't tend to have extensive international Networks or the well-known brand names of large enterprises.

The H2020 SME Innovation Associate Programme is a first step to change this and to develop an enterprise-led mobility programme in the EU, helping European SMEs recruit expertise and get better access to scientific excellence. This call is an experiment to test the feasibility of an European measure to increase access to talent for SMEs and Start-ups by encouraging mobility. Because of this experimental nature it applies a fixed period for the recruitment of the researcher aligned to Academic year in most European countries. This allows the European Commission to organise training in industrial innovation management to the group of innovation associates and to monitor better recruitment success, employment conditions and impact. These feed the evaluation and eventual scale-up of the action.

- ▪ **Key points**

  - ➢ Early stage support
  - ➢ EU Grant covering the salary of the researcher for a period of one year
  - ➢ Training Package for Enterprises and Researchers
  - ➢ "Light" application
  - ➢ Internationalisation, mobility, innovation, excellence.

- ▪ **Eligibility**

  a) **The Enterprise**

Only SMEs (including start-up companies) established in the EU Member States and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) or countries associated[1] to Horizon 2020 are eligible.

Applicants must complete the SME self-assessment questionnaire in the Beneficiary Register of the Research and Innovation Participant Portal to apply for a grant under this programme. Organisations will only be eligible to participate if this self-assessment confirms their *status*[2] as small and medium-sized enterprise.

  b) **The Associate**

The required profile to be recruited must at least have reached R2 level in the European Framework for Research Careers[3]. This means he or she must:

  - o **Hold a PhD (or equivalent);**

  - o **Have demonstrated expertise** in line with the job advertisement;

  - o **Comply with the Transnational mobility criteria:** the researcher must come from a different country than the place of employment (irrespective of his/her nationality). This means that at the time of recruitment (September 2017), researchers must have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country where the company is established for no more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately before the reference date (from 01/09/2014 until 31/08/2017). Compulsory national service and/or short stays such as holidays are not taken into account.

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[1] Enterprises established in Switzerland are excluded from this call.
[2] The status of SME is defined in the EU recommendation 2003/361
[3] European Framework for Research Career: R1 First Stage Researcher (up to the point of PhD); R2 Recognised Researcher (PhD holders or equivalent who are not yet fully independent); R3 Established Researcher (researchers who have developed a level of independence.); R4 Leading Researcher (researchers leading their research area or field).

▪ **Support provided by the European Union under this call**

1. International Visibility

All applicants, whether successful or not, will have the possibility to benefit, free of charge, from the EU's researcher mobility portal EURAXESS, thus making the **job vacancy visible to researchers all around Europe and beyond.**

2. Financial Support

Successful applicants (recruiting SMEs) will furthermore receive an **individual grant** covering salary and related costs of employing a post-doctoral research associates recruited in the context of the programme from a country other than the home country of the company.

The following costs are eligible under this programme:

- The salary of the researcher for a period of one year (the salary must be reasonable – i.e. a competitive salary for the position at normal local labour market conditions). Proposals where the suggested salary package is evidently excessive or insufficient will be rejected.
- Relocation cost for the researcher (at the beginning and at the end of the 12 month assignment under this programme), up to a maximum total of €5000.
- Travel and subsistence costs related to the training

3. Training package

To increase and maximise the outcomes but also to accelerate the integration of the associate in the company's staff, a full training package is foreseen under this action for both the associate and his/her supervisor in the enterprise. The training package is composed by two parallel programmes:

1. Core training programme is made available for all researchers participating in the programme as Innovation Associate. This training programme is managed and organised under the responsibility of the European Commission and will address the general needs/requirements of Innovation Associates.

2. Tailored training programme organised by the enterprise as a personal training and development plan for the Innovation Associate intended to maximise the potential of the recruitment and multiply its effects while assuring a smooth integration of the researcher in the structure and cultural environment of the enterprise.

▪ **Participation Phases**

Participation to this call foresees three phases of which two are optional.

- **Phase one (optional): 11/02-30/06/2016 - Testing ideas and job vacancies**

SMEs can test the attractiveness of both their ideas and vacancy notice in advance (i.e. before submitting their proposal for this pilot action) by publishing their call for manifestation of interest on EURAXESS, the European Job Platform for Researchers, and other international or globally accessible web-based resources.

This pre-publication will allows to:

- Test the business idea
- Fine-tune the vacancy notice
- Create contacts with potential candidates

The call for manifestation of interest will be available until the call deadline (i.e. 30/06/2016) and can be conditional to the awarding of the grant (i.e. the recruitment will take place only if the company is awarded the grant).

The testing phase will help companies to improving their offer and will increase the chances of being awarded a grant as the vacancy notice is:

- An essential element of the selection phase (see below)
- Part of the application form (Annex I).

After the awarding and signature of the grant (28/02/2017 at the latest), the vacancy notice, as it was submitted in the proposal (Annex I), will be published on a European researcher-dedicated portal such as EURAXESS between 1/03/2017 (at the latest) and 30/04/2017.

- **Phase two (optional): 01/07/2016-28/02/2017 - Parallel recruiting phase**

During the testing phase (phase one), companies can decide whether they want to make the vacancy conditional on the award of an EU grant.

By making the offer non-conditional on the EU financial support, SMEs and Start-ups can keep the opportunity of recruiting experts as soon as they are available/identifies without having to wait for 1st September 2017 (the official starting date of the positions supported by the European Union).

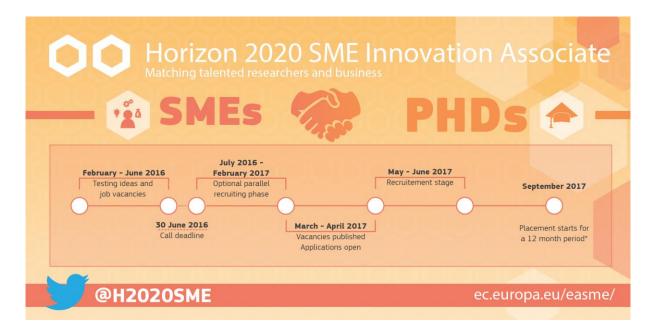Advantage: Without conditionality the job will be immediately available.

Disadvantage: The recruiting of the candidate outside this EU funding schemes will prevent companies from receiving the grant and researchers and their supervisors in the company from participating in the core training programme organised by the European Union.

- **Phase three: 01/03-30/04/2017 – Publish the job offer**

Once the European Commission has selected the (up-to) 90 SMEs and Start-ups with the most innovative ideas and best recruitment plans, job vacancies will be published on EURAXESS and other international or globally accessible web-based resources from 1st March 2017 to 30 April 2017. The recruitment will take place in May-June 2017 and the new positions will start in September 2017 for a period of 12 months.

- **Milestones**

a) Call opens on: 11 February 2016
b) Deadline for applications: **30 June 2016.**
c) Testing phase: between 11 February 2016 and 30 June 2016.
d) Awarding and Signature of the Grants: 28 February 2017 (at the latest).
e) Publication of the Vacancies: between 1 March 2017 (or before) and 30 April 2017.
f) Recruitment phase: May-June 2017.
g) Start date for the position: 1 September 2017.

- **Application Procedure**

The application is simple and paperless:

- **Register** your SME or Start-up at the EU Participant Portal - the single gateway to EU research funding. The process will take no more than 10 minutes;
- Complete the **SME self-assessment**
- **Read carefully** the call for application of the H2020 SME innovation Associate -
- Prepare a **short application** (see below)
- **Submit** the application **online** by 30/06/2016 at 17:00:00 (Brussels time).

- **Selection criteria**

Applicants will be required to prepare a 10 pages' application based on a standard form available on the Participant Portal.

Applications will be evaluated based on 3 criteria: Excellence, Impact and Implementation.

Excellence	Clarity and pertinence of the objectives	Quality of the proposed coordination and/or support measure	Ambition and innovation potential for the SME from the filled vacancy eventually leading to radical innovations in the SME.
Impact	The extent to which the outputs of the project would contribute to each of the expected impacts mentioned in the work programme under the relevant topic	Quality of the proposed method to communicate the project activities to different target audiences	Demonstrated inability to recruit the required skills on the national labour market
Implementation	Quality and effectiveness of the work plan including extent to which the resources assigned to work packages are in line with their objectives and deliverables	Appropriateness of the allocation of tasks, ensuring that all participants have valid role and adequate resources in the project to fulfil that role	Coherence and effectiveness of the recruitment and personnel development plan

The Excellence of the application will be evaluated based on:
- The matching between the business idea and the envisaged profile on the light of the objectives.
- The problem to be solved and/or the expected business opportunity to be address
- The innovation potential for the SME from the filled vacancy and the expected outcomes

The Impact of the recruitment will be evaluated based on:
- How the innovation associate will help the SME in exploring the business idea
- Recruitment communication plan: how will the enterprise reach the best talent?
- Barriers to the recruitment on the national labour market: why is this grant needed?

The Implementation plan will be evaluated based on:

- The Work packages and deliverables: actions and milestones during the 12 months of employment of the Associate (September 2017 – August 2018)
- Allocation of Tasks to the Associate both within the Company and the project
- Recruitment and Personnel development Plant for the Associate and the future prospective of recruitment after the period covered by the grant.

Questions? Need Help?

Consult our webpage or contact us by e-Mail

or the H2020 FAQ related to this call;

or find your Enterprise Europe Network Contact point