

## Centres of Excellence in Research 2024-2028

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### Application period:

- First call for proposals
  - o The call opens on 1 January 2023
  - o The call closes on 28 February 2023 at 15:15
- Second call for proposals
  - o The round opens on 16 May 2023
  - o The round closes on 30 June 2023 at 15:15

### Decisions:

- The first evaluation round
  - o 16 May 2023: The *Vice-rector for research* decides which units will proceed to the second round
- The second evaluation round
  - o 24 October 2023: The *Vice-rector for research* decides which units are appointed as ÅAU Centres of Excellence

### Funding:

- Funding period: 1 January 2024 – 31 December 2028
- The units will share up to € 1,200,000 per year

## 1. Background and objectives

With the support from the Åbo Akademi University Foundation (SÅA), Åbo Akademi University has appointed Centres of Excellence in Research since 2006. CoE2024 will be the fifth round of the CoE programme. The CoE programme supports research at Åbo Akademi University with the aim of achieving the highest possible quality and impact. The strategic investment in the CoE programme will also support researchers and research teams to become competitive in the contest for funding from the most competitive funding sources, such as Horizon Europe 2021–2027, Nordforsk, the Academy of Finland and Business Finland. The objectives therefore follow those set for the Centres of Excellence appointed by the Academy of Finland.

### ***Finnish Centres of Excellence Programme 2022–2029 by Academy of Finland***

*The units selected as CoEs are scientifically first-rate research communities that have capacity for renewal and high societal impact. The CoE programmes contribute to the renewal of science by supplying new research topics, new methods and approaches, and new research teams. Thanks to the long-term funding provided in collaboration with CoE host organisations, the funding instrument effectively works as an incentive for risk-taking and new initiatives in research.*

In cooperation with the communication unit, the ÅAU Centres of Excellence are expected to develop a communication strategy to make the team and its results visible. The ÅAU Centres of Excellence should, assisted by the research services, also develop a plan for identifying suitable future calls for international funding. During the programme period, the ÅAU Centres of Excellence must systematically improve their competence and networks.

## 2. Funding

The appointed Centres of Excellence share strategic funds up to € 1,200,000 per year for the funding period. The Vice-rector for research decides on the distribution of funds per unit when appointing the units. If the CoE does not follow the main objectives of the presented research plan, the funding can be reduced or terminated. Unused funding at the end of the programme period will return to the CoE programme unless otherwise agreed.

The funding is intended primarily for hiring researchers in the project and for costs for implementing the research plan. Employments for the whole programme period should be given priority. The guidelines by the Academy of Finland indicates for which purposes the funding can be used:

- research team salaries,
- salary funding for researchers returning to Finland,
- expenditure necessary for the implementation of research,
- travels,
- national collaboration and mobility,
- international collaboration and mobility,
- preparation of international projects.

### 3. Application criteria and limitations

- The director (responsible leader of the CoE) must be a senior researcher (professor, tenure track professor or researcher with the title of docent) and be employed (minimum 50 %) by ÅAU.
- The director cannot be replaced during the call except for particularly weighty reasons.
- An applicant may only participate as director in one application but may participate in several applications.
- The CoE funds is to be used for activities carried out at ÅAU.
- The research team must present a research plan and a preliminary budget covering the whole CoE period.
- Persons who have participated in the planning of the call in a way that would give them a competitive advantage over other applicants cannot participate in the call.

### 4. How to apply

#### The first application round

The research team submits an electronic application in English. The application should be in pdf-format, but not saved as an image. The application is submitted to the address [registrator@abo.fi](mailto:registrator@abo.fi). The file is named after the director as follows *CoE2024\_surname*. Åbo Akademi University publishes the name of the director and the name of the applying Centre of Excellence. The application itself is classified as confidential accessible only to appointed members of the evaluation process.

Incomplete applications or applications submitted after the given deadline will not be evaluated. In the event of unclear cases concerning submitted applications, the Vice-rector for research will decide on the fate of the application.

When writing the application, the applicants should consider that the evaluation panel is multidisciplinary and that its size means that not all fields of science are represented.

#### **The file should consist of**

- 1) [The application form, incl. an abstract](#) [Word docx]
- 2) The research plan
  - The research plan should have the following headings:
    - (1) **Background, objectives and implementation**
    - (2) **Applicant, research team and partners**
  - The content of the research plan must not exceed 6 A4-pages using Times New Roman, font size 12 pt, line spacing 1.15 and margins 20 mm
  - A list of references used in the research plan can be added but should not exceed 2 A4-pages

- 3) The budget plan for the whole CoE programme period
  - [The Budget Tool](#) [Excel] is used to specify planned costs for salaries and infrastructure.
- 4) Ten (10) publications by the research team
  - Publications demonstrating expertise in implementing the proposed research plan.
  - Preferably, a list of web address references to the online location of the publication. If a publication is submitted, please send it as a separate attachment to the actual application.
  - The publication list should only include necessary source references, not e.g. journal impact factors or classifications (JuFo)
- 5) Curriculum vitae of the director
  - 3 A4 pages, Times New Roman, font size 12 pt, line spacing 1.15 and margins 20 mm
  - [Instructions for the curriculum vitae](#) [website]
- 6) Merits for one or more of the other researchers in the team
  - Together 4 A4 pages, Times New Roman, font size 12 pt, line spacing 1.15 and margins 20 mm

## The second application round

The research team submits an electronic application in English. The application should be in pdf-format, but not saved as an image. The application is submitted to the address [registrator@abo.fi](mailto:registrator@abo.fi). The file is named after the director as follows *CoE2024\_surname*. Åbo Akademi University publishes the name of the director and the name of the applying Centre of Excellence. The application itself is classified as confidential accessible only to appointed members of the evaluation process.

Incomplete applications or applications submitted after the given deadline will not be evaluated. In the event of unclear cases concerning submitted applications, the Vice-rector for research will decide on the fate of the application.

When writing the application, the applicants should consider that the evaluation panel is multidisciplinary and that its size means that not all fields of science are represented.

### The file should consist of

- 1) The application form, incl. an abstract
- 2) The research plan
  - The research plan should have the following headings:
    - (1) Scientific quality, renewal and impact**
    - (2) Research questions and/or hypotheses**
    - (3) Feasibility and expected results**
    - (4) The research environment and collaboration**
    - (5) Research ethics, risk assessment and exit plan**
  - The content of the research plan must not exceed 12 A4-pages using Times New Roman, font size 12 pt, line spacing 1.15 and margins 20 mm
  - A list of references used in the research plan can be added but should not exceed 4 A4-pages.

- 3) The budget plan for the whole CoE programme period
  - Budget Tool is used to specify planned costs for salaries and infrastructure.
- 4) Twenty (20) publications by the research team
  - Publications demonstrating expertise in implementing the proposed research plan
  - Preferably, a list of web address references to the online location of the publication. If a publication is submitted, please send it as a separate attachment to the actual application.
  - The publication list should only include necessary source references, not e.g. journal impact factors or classifications (JuFo).
- 5) Curriculum vitae of the director
  - 3 A4 pages, Times New Roman, font size 12 pt, line spacing 1.15 and margins 20 mm
  - Link to the full CV
- 6) Curriculum vitae for the researchers in the steering group
  - 3 A4 pages per member, Times New Roman, font size 12 pt, line spacing 1.15 and margins 20 mm

## 5. Evaluation of applications

For both application rounds, external evaluators will assess the submitted applications.

### The first evaluation round

The applications are divided into four groups according to the field of science:

- 1) Science and engineering,
- 2) Life sciences, health, and environment,
- 3) Culture, language, and theology,
- 4) Society, education, and business.

In the application, the director must indicate to which group their application belongs. The Vice-rector for research decides on the division into groups and may, for justified reasons, place an application in a different group than the one indicated in the application.

The Vice-rector for research appoints four expert panels. Each panel consists of three experienced researchers. Their responsibility is to evaluate the applications in one of the four groups. The evaluators represent fields of science placed in the group. The evaluators read all applications in the group and provide an individual statement for each application based on the CoE application round assessment criteria. The statement includes a numerical assessment, a verbal assessment, and a ranking among all applications in the group. The applying research team will receive the statements concerning their application. The statements are not public, and an applicant will not get access to other statements than their own. The ÅAU Strategic Council for Research will be informed of the evaluation process and the results of the evaluation. An expert representative of the funder SÅA will also take part in this evaluation process assessment. This assessment will take place after the decision to appoint new CoEs has been made.

Based on the evaluations in the groups, the Vice-rector for research decides which applications will proceed to the second application round. For justified reasons, the Vice-rector for research may deviate from the evaluation ranking.

## The second evaluation round

The Vice-rector for research appoints an evaluation panel consisting of at least four (4) experienced researchers representing different fields of science. The aim is to continue with evaluators from the first evaluation round.

Each evaluator assesses all applications and provide a statement for each application based on ÅAU's instructions and assessment criteria. The statement includes a numerical assessment, a verbal assessment, and a ranking. The applying research team will receive the statements concerning their application. The statements are not public, and an applicant will not get access to other statements than their own.

The evaluators meet for a joint evaluation meeting. At the evaluation meeting, the director (or another steering group member) of the applying research team is interviewed. Based on the interviews and assessments, the evaluators prepare a proposal for the ranking of the applications. If the evaluators do not reach a joint decision, several proposals for ranking can be submitted. The ÅAU Strategic Council for Research will be informed of the evaluation process and the results of the evaluation. An expert representative of the funder SÅA will also take part in this evaluation process assessment. This assessment will take place after the decision to appoint new CoEs has been made.

Based on the evaluators' statements and rankings, the Vice-rector for research decides on which applying research teams are appointed Centres of Excellence in Research for 2024-2028. For justified reasons, the Vice-rector for research may deviate from the evaluation ranking.

## 6. Assessment criteria

The evaluation panel will use three overarching criteria when making an overall assessment of an application and comparing it to other applications. The bullets under each criterion should be understood as indicative (more as help for the applicant than regulative for the evaluator). Especially in the first round the applicant must make priority decisions due to the limitations set for the application. The traditions and conditions of the different scientific fields will be taken into consideration as far as possible. When ranking the applications, the evaluators will be instructed to give priority to the excellence and impact of the research plan compared to the other two criteria.

### Excellence and impact of the research plan

- The starting point (e.g. previous research conducted by the researchers in the research team, the knowledge and consideration of related research);
- The level of ambition (e.g. the significance and impact of the expected results relevant to the renewal of knowledge in an international perspective);
- The occurrence of innovative features (e.g. how the research questions are posed, the data/phenomenon being analysed, the examination methods, the forms of cooperation);

- The potential for developing the research environment (e.g. possibility for expansion, possibility for unique profiling nationally and/or internationally, societal impact);
- The dissemination, impact and communication of the results
- The research plan's consideration of diversity, openness and sustainability.

### **Implementation of the research plan**

- Feasibility of the plan within the framework of the estimated budget and given time frame;
- Current state of the research team (e.g. facilities, research infrastructure, equipment, other sources of funding);
- The risk analysis of the research plan, incl. sensitivity to personnel changes;
- The exit plan for the research plan;
- Other risks (e.g. access to the planned resources/materials, ethical issues, confidentiality issues).

### **The research team's competency and networks**

- The competency of the director (e.g. scientific achievements, previous team leader experience);
- The competency of the research team (e.g. scientific achievements considering the research age of the participating researchers);
- Externally recognized excellence (e.g. evaluations, prizes, and other honours);
- The planned composition, size, and organization in relation to the established goals;
- Collaboration with other national and/or international research teams;
- Contacts with other parties important to the planned research (e.g. experts, companies, organisations, state, municipalities, third sector).

## **7. CoE Application Round Team**

### **Commissioning vice-rector**

Reko Leino, Vice-rector for research, ÅAU

### **Team for planning and implementation of the application round**

Mats Lindfelt, Director of Research services, ÅAU

Ruth Illman, Research Director, ÅAU Foundation

Ole Karlsson, Quality Management Coordinator, ÅAU

## **8. Contact information**

The applying research teams are requested to send their questions concerning the application round to the Application Round mailbox. Good questions and their answers will be gathered at the website under the header FAQ.

Application Round mailbox: [CoE@abo.fi](mailto:CoE@abo.fi) (monitored by all members in the Application Round Team)