

Constructive Advanced Thinking (CAT) Programme Presentation

Objectives

The aim of the CAT initiative is to foster **networks of excellent early-career researchers** dedicated to devise new ideas to understand and to tackle current or emerging **societal challenges**. Although the programme has a strong focus on the societal relevance of the projects, it is entirely **blue-sky**, bottom-up and non-thematic. CAT encourages a **collaboration with stakeholder outside academia** (industry, policymakers, NGOs, etc.) who are willing to support or engage in innovative research initiatives

The programme is for groups of 3 to 5 early-career researchers of any discipline who have less than 10 years of experience after earning a doctorate, including doctoral researchers. In any case, the principal investigator (team leader) must have a stable position for the duration of the project. The groups can include a representative of a stakeholder organization related to the theme of the project. In order to engage in fruitful discussions and mature their ideas, the groups will be given the opportunity to **meet for short stays** (i.e. maximum two weeks) in different participating institutes, and to be **put in contact with their fellows and local research communities**. The projects can last up to 3 years (subject to positive evaluation at mid-term, max 6 stays in total).

With few guidelines and a very light application process, CAT is designed to maximize the creativity of research groups. The collaboration between different institutes in different countries aims at giving these groups access to a great variety of high-level thinkers and researchers in order to go beyond the current frontiers of knowledge and to develop highly innovative ideas on how to address very complex societal issues.

Process

Groups must apply with a project (in the form of a text proposal or a video) and a plan for short stays in the participating institutes. They are encouraged to suggest preferred institutes, but the institutes will decide the final distribution of the groups.

In a first step after the deadline of the call, the participating institutes mark the applications they are most interested in. At the preparatory stage, an excel spreadsheet with the schedules of the previously selected CAT groups will be shared together with the application materials of the applicants. The number of projects that can be flagged by an institute can depend on the total number of applications received, but it should not represent more than 20% of the applications. Institutes can differentiate their interest ("preselect", "second choice" and "do not preselect"). When assigning ranking points, institutes should consider the team members, research projects and how they fit their IAS. Only the projects that have been flagged by, at least, 3 institutes ("preselect") are forwarded to external reviewers. The programme coordinator delegates the task of finding experts for evaluations to the participating institutes based on the projects they flagged (wherever possible).

The CAT selection committee is composed of representatives from all the participating institutes. It selects the projects and assigns them to different institutes. One participating IAS is 'appointed' as 'coordinating institute' for a selected CAT group and will act as a group's main contact point. After the programme coordinator has informed all selected and not selected groups, the coordinating institutes will be in charge of communication with other participating institutes and will request the mid-term and final report from 'their' CAT groups.

The host institutes fund the meetings of the groups (travel, accommodation and, if possible, catering for lunches on weekdays).

Evaluation criteria for the projects

These six criteria were given to experts in the second year of the call to consider in their evaluations:

- Academic quality of the proposal
- Potential for societal impact
- Interdisciplinary/ intersectoral character of the project
- Motivation and fit to the call
- Ability of the team to carry out the project
- Feasibility of the project (work plan and deliverables)

Experts were also asked to provide a concluding remark and rate the proposal on a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent).

Administration, website and budget

There is **no common budget** for the programme. The **institutes directly cover the costs of the groups' stays** on their premises (reimbursements or direct reservations of travels and accommodations, catering for lunches on weekdays, if possible). Each institute keeps track of and covers its own expenses.

A centralized online application/ selection platform will be used to ease the coordination process. **Each IAS should have a separate subpage dedicated on CAT on their institutional websites.** The Netias website will provide overall information on the programme and will channel interest on the open call. The specific details on the open call will be published on the coordinating institute's website. The webpage will display the information on the selected groups and their projects after the ongoing call for applications is closed.

In 2021, the participating IAS will discuss the possibilities of securing external funding for development of the CAT programme. The available options include both applying to existing national schemes of science and research support and to the existing European schemes (Horizon Europe etc.). A network/consortium of funding organizations that could jointly co-finance the CAT programme might be created in the future. External fund-raising activities might also require creation of a sub-group that will consist of the participating IAS with a purpose to discuss funding options, prepare and submit an application, etc.

Milestones for the 2023 call

July 25, 2022	Launch and dissemination for the 2023 call for applications
September 4, 2022	Opening the applications platform.
October 15, 2022	Deadline for applications.
October 20, 2022	The programme coordinator checks the eligibility of the projects and sends the eligible projects to the institutes for preselection.
October 31, 2022	The institutes provide the coordinator with a list of preferred projects.
Mid November, 2022	Zoom meeting in which the coordinator compiles a shortlist with the projects flagged by at least 3 institutes, and distributes the applications among the institutes for evaluations, on the basis of the interests of each institute.
Early December, 2022	Deadline for sending the evaluations to the programme coordinator, who then shares them with all the institutes.
Mid December	Selection meeting via ZOOM. Each selected project is assigned a contact institute who will coordinate communication with the groups
December 30, 2022	Notification of the groups by the contact institute, negotiation of the dates and conditions of stay with each institute. The programme coordinator notifies the projects that were not selected.
January 2023	Start of the selected projects.

ANNEX

Role of the coordinating institute for a CAT team

One participating IAS is 'appointed' as a 'host' or 'coordinating institute' for a selected CAT group and will act as a group's main contact point.

Its first task is to collect information about the available support for the team and possible dates of stay at other host institutes.

First contact with the CAT team

- Give the team the list of possible host institutes and the periods when they can host
- Remind the group that a brief mid-term report will be requested
- In order to update the Netias website and call website (on the administrator's home institute website), request an updated abstract of the project + a complete list of participants:
 - List of members (PI: Name, institution; other members: name, institution); list of stakeholder organizations who are participating or supporting the project

After the first contact

- Get feedback on the group's planned meetings (where and when the meetings will take place)
- Check from time to time if everything is OK with the group
- Update current coordinator of CAT from time to time (in particular when major changes arise)

At mid-term (usually after 18 months) and at the end of the project:

- request a report