

**SyMeCo**

# Terms & Conditions

**Call 2**

**Rev 2 – Published May 2024**

These Terms and Conditions should be read in conjunction with the guidance documents and application documents available at <https://symeco.lero.ie/call-for-proposals-2/>.

### **Version History**

Version 2 published in May 2024.

#### **Changes:**

- Section 3 *Lero And Symeco Host Institutions And Fellowship Location* and Section 4 *Open Science Practices* added.
- Section 6 *Applying For A Fellowship* amended to include clarifications in relation to eliminating candidates from the selection process should any of the information provided in the application be found to be false or misleading.
- Section 7 *Evaluation and Selection* amended to include clarifications in relation to the peer review and interview stages and the funding decision.
- Section 8 *Fellowship Offers* amended to include 2<sup>nd</sup> cohort start date.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The **SyMeCo** (**S**ystems, **M**ethods, **C**ontext) is an innovative research training fellowship programme funding **16 postdoctoral fellowships** of a **2-year duration**. The programme is coordinated by [Lero](#), the Science Foundation Ireland Research Centre for Software, headquartered at the University of Limerick (UL), with partners in other Irish universities and institutes of technology. The initiative is co-funded by the European Commission under the [Marie Skłodowska-Curie programme](#) and [Science Foundation Ireland \(SFI\)](#).

The fellows will be recruited via **2 international calls for proposals**. 10 fellowships were awarded in the first call for proposals, and up to 6 fellowships may be awarded in the second call. Additional calls may be published for unfilled fellowships.

**All fellowships will be based in Ireland** at Lero and [SyMeCo's host institutions](#). The fellows will be based in Ireland and will be hosted by their supervisor host institution. All fellows will be required to relocate to Ireland for the duration of their fellowship. Remote working from abroad is not possible as per MSCA requirements.

Applications are welcome from researchers of any nationality who hold a PhD degree and comply with the programme's eligibility criteria.

**The programme aims to provide exceptional training and career development opportunities** to postdoctoral researchers, **fostering international mobility, intersectoral collaboration, and interdisciplinary exposure**. As a Marie Skłodowska-Curie (MSCA) fellowship programme, SyMeCo offers high-quality professional opportunities to researchers from all walks of life, regardless of their age, nationality, or disciplinary background, as long as they meet the programme's eligibility criteria.

The SyMeCo fellows will have access to all Lero supports in training, industry collaboration, public engagement, and marketing and communications. Fellows will receive discipline-specific and transferable skills training to diversify their employment options. In addition, the fellows will create long-lasting professional networks through collaboration with Lero industry partners and the Lero academic community.

For further details, please see <https://symeco.lero.ie/>

**The SyMeCo fellowships is subject to the terms and conditions stipulated in the SyMeCo Grant Agreement (No. 101081459) in respect of the fellowships scheme signed by the Research Executive Agency (REA) under the power delegated by the European Commission and by the University of Limerick.**

## 2 RESEARCH THEMES AND ELIGIBLE SUPERVISORS

There are **3 broad research themes: Systems, Methods, and Context**, as shown in the figure below. Applicants have the freedom to choose their own research project. However, **it is important to ensure that the research topic aligns with the programme's research themes, Lero and the interests of an eligible supervisor.**

Before applying, all candidates must discuss their research idea and proposal and seek the support of an [eligible supervisor](#) for their application. Please note that **applications without the support of an eligible supervisor will not be considered and will not be evaluated.**

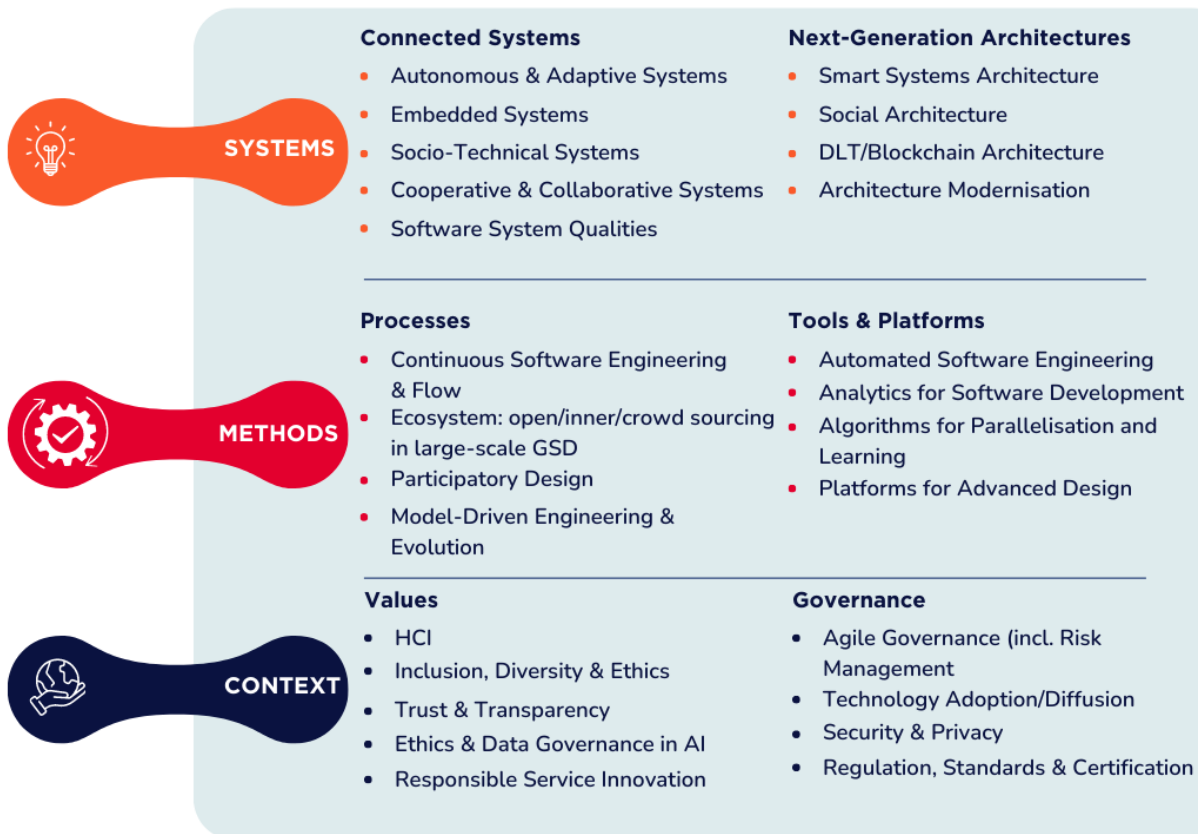


Figure 2:1 SyMeCo research themes

## 3 LERO AND SYMECO HOST INSTITUTIONS AND FELLOWSHIP LOCATION

SyMeCo is coordinated by Lero, the Science Foundation Ireland Research Centre for Software. Lero brings together expert software teams from universities and institutes of technology across Ireland in a coordinated centre of research excellence with a strong industry focus.

**All fellowships will be based in Ireland** at one of the participating [host institutions](#). The fellows will be based in Ireland and will be employed by their supervisor's host institution. **The fellows will undertake a mandatory secondment (3–8 month) during their fellowship. The secondment element may be in Ireland or abroad.**

**International mobility** is a key element of the SyMeCo and other MSCA fellowships. Therefore, **your presence in Ireland** at your host institution is essential to your fellowship and the MSCA programme in general. **Remote working from abroad is therefore not permitted.** Remote working in Ireland, where this is in line with the policy of the host institution, is permitted as long as it is agreed with the host institution and the supervisor and it does not interfere with the correct implementation of your research project and fellowship activities (e.g. participation in training and career development and EPE activities).

As previously stated, there is an exception regarding the secondment element, as the secondment may take place abroad.

## 4 OPEN SCIENCE PRACTICES

SyMeCo is committed to the principles and practices of Open Science, including making its publications and research outputs openly available. Fellows will be provided with Lero's [Open Science Charter](#) and will be supported by the Lero [Open Source and Open Science Programme Office](#) throughout their fellowship.

## 5 APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Applicants may be of any nationality.
- Applicants must be **postdoctoral researchers** as per the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA) definition: applicants must have a PhD degree at the call deadline (**19th of June 2024**). Applicants who have successfully defended their PhD thesis but have not formally been awarded the doctoral degree will also be eligible to apply. The successful defence must take place before the call deadline. Supporting documentation may be requested.
- Applicants must comply with the following mobility rule: they must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Ireland for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before the call deadline (**19th of June 2024**). Compulsory national service and/or short stays, such as holidays, are not considered when assessing mobility compliance. In addition, for applicants who applied/are applying for refugee status in Ireland, the time spent in that process will not count as a time resident in Ireland.
- Applicants must have working proficiency in English or be fluent in English. Applicants whose first language is not English may be required to provide evidence of their English proficiency.
- Applicants must agree to the programme's Terms and Conditions.

## 6 APPLYING FOR A FELLOWSHIP

- Before applying, candidates must contact an eligible SyMeCo supervisor to discuss their proposal and gain support for their application. Applicants who applied in the first call and wish to re-apply on the second call, must contact an eligible supervisor to discuss their proposal and gain their support for their second call application. Only applications which received support from an eligible SyMeCo supervisor will be considered. The list of eligible SyMeCo supervisors is available at <https://symeco.lero.ie/supervisors/>.
- Each applicant can only submit 1 application per call.

- Applications must be submitted via the [SyMeCo online application system](#) by the call deadline (**19th of June 2024, 23:59 GMT**). Applications submitted after the call deadline will not be considered.
- Confirmation of receipt of your application will be sent to the email address entered when registering. If you do not receive an acknowledgement within 2 hours of submitting your application, contact SyMeCo after checking the junk/spam folder in your email.
- Applicants who are at risk/displaced by conflict and might require alternative submission arrangements are encouraged to discuss the support available to them with SyMeCo. In certain circumstances, applications submitted in hard copy may be accepted. However, alternative arrangements must be agreed upon with SyMeCo before the call deadline.
- The application and its documentation must be in English.
- SyMeCo will follow the MSCA 'bottom-up' principle allowing applicants to choose their research project.
- Applicants must submit a research proposal, and the proposal must: be complete and in English and based on the SyMeCo proposal template, describe a research project with an implementation period of 2 years and include a planned secondment period. The proposal must have received support from an eligible SyMeCo supervisor, align with one of the SyMeCo research themes, Lero and the research interests of the proposed supervisor, and adhere to the ethical standards applicable to the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions and the SyMeCo programme.
- Applicants must use the [templates](#) for Part A Administrative Information, Part B – Proposal, Part C – CV and Part D – Ethics Issues Table and Ethics Self-Assessment.
- Only complete applications using the templates provided and supported by eligible SyMeCo supervisors will be assessed. All application sections must be completed. Incomplete applications will not be considered. The required documentation must be in English, completed and submitted before the call deadline.
- By submitting an application, the applicant declares that the information supplied is correct. SyMeCo reserves the right to eliminate the candidate from the selection process, withdraw any fellowship awarded, or if the employment has commenced, the host institution reserves the right to terminate such employment should any of the information provided in the application be found to be false or misleading.

## 7 EVALUATION AND SELECTION

In line with the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021-2022 and the [Charter and Code](#), SyMeCo will promote open, merit-based, transparent recruitment. The SyMeCo programme selection process will also adhere to the recommendations in the Charter and Code.

Applicants may be required to provide evidence of the qualifications listed on their application, proof of identity and any other relevant documentation, such as evidence of compliance with eligibility and mobility requirements. Where the information provided by the applicant is found to be incorrect or cannot be verified if requested, SyMeCo reserves the right to eliminate the candidate from the selection process or withdraw the award.

There are two scoring stages in the selection process: ***International peer review stage and Interview stage.***

**International peer review stage:** Each application will be reviewed by 3 independent expert reviewers based outside Ireland. Reviewers will be allocated based on the match between the proposal and the reviewer's expertise. The proposal and supporting CV will be sent to the reviewers. Each reviewer will evaluate the **written proposal** independently and submit their evaluation form, including a score for each evaluation criterion and feedback comments that underpin their score. They will use the programme's evaluation criteria and scoring system. In cases where there is no significant disparity between the reviewers' scores (score disparity  $\leq 1$  point), the scores for each criterion will be averaged, and the weightings will be applied to calculate the final peer review score for that proposal. The 3 reviewers to agree on a consensus score for cases where: (i) the score disparity  $>1$  point or (ii) the final peer review score is over 69% and below the 70% threshold. Should a consensus not be reached, a fourth reviewer will be appointed to evaluate the proposal, and the 4 reviewers scores will be averaged. As above, the weightings will be applied to calculate the final peer review score. All applicants will receive feedback including the scores per evaluation criterion, the final peer review score and feedback comments. Applicants scoring above the 70% threshold will be invited for an interview. The other applicants will be advised that they will not be progressing further.

**Interview stage:** The interview's objective is to further evaluate the proposal's excellence, impact and implementation using the programme's evaluation criteria. SyMeCo will provide the Interview Panel with the proposal, CV and the Peer Review feedback comments as supporting documentation for the application. **The interview evaluation consists of the candidate's presentation of their proposal followed by questions from the Interview Panel.** The Interview Panel does not evaluate the written proposal. As previously stated, the International Peer Review Panel evaluates the written proposal. Applicants proceeding to the interview stage must be available to attend the interview on the date requested. The interview may be carried out face-to-face or via video conferencing. No advantage will be conferred to those attending the interview in person. **The applicant will be responsible for organising the necessary video conferencing facilities at their end. The applicant should ensure they have a strong Internet connection; if there is a connection failure before or during the interview session SyMeCo cannot guarantee re-scheduling of the interview.** If there are any connection issues, the interview Travel and accommodation expenses will not be provided for those wishing to attend the in-person interview. However, support documentation to enable the applicant to travel may be offered. The interviews will be in English and last up to 60 minutes. Applicants will be asked to prepare a 10-minute presentation on their proposal. They will present their proposal and this will be followed by questions from the Interview Panel. Following the interview, the Interview Panel will agree on feedback comments and reach a consensus score for each evaluation criterion, using the programme's evaluation criteria and scoring system show. The corresponding weightings will be applied to calculate the final interview score. The 70% threshold will also apply to the interview stage. Applicants will receive feedback with the final interview score and feedback comments.

Please see the Guide for Applicants for further information on the selection process stages.

## **7.1 Evaluation criteria and scoring system**

A **standard evaluation criteria** and **scoring system** will be used by all reviewers and interviewers.



### 7.1.1 Evaluation criteria

There are **3 evaluation criteria: Excellence, Impact and Implementation, weighting 50%, 30% and 20%, respectively**. The evaluation criteria are weighted differently and the set of weightings shown below will be applied to the scores provided for each of the criteria. Priority ranking will be used to rank applications that achieve exactly the same score. The SyMeCo evaluation criteria, weighting and priority ranking are shown below.

<b>EXCELLENCE (50%) Priority: 1</b>	<b>IMPACT (30%) Priority: 2</b>	<b>IMPLEMENTATION (20%) Priority:3</b>
Quality of the research and its methodology and innovative aspects (the extent to which they are ambitious and go beyond the state of the art)	Potential impact of the fellowship on the researcher's career prospects	Overall coherence and feasibility of the work plans
Clarity of the plans to acquire new knowledge/skills from the host and to transfer knowledge/skills to the host		
Quality and appropriateness of the researcher's professional experience, competencies and skills	Expected impact of the research and quality of the plans for dissemination, exploitation and communication	Appropriateness of the risk management plan
Match between the proposal and the supervisor/research group		

## 7.2 Scoring

- Eligible applications will be first scored during the International Peer Review Stage. Applications that proceed to the Interview Stage will receive a second score for that stage.
- A score between 0 (very poor) and 5 (excellent) will be provided for each of the three evaluation criteria as a whole.
- The corresponding weighting will be applied to the scores provided.
- The weighted scores for each criterion will be added, producing a final weighted score. After each stage, the maximum final score for a given application will be 5 (excellent).

Full range of possible scores	Description
5	Excellent The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.
4.9 ↕ 4	Very good The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
3.9 ↕ 3	Good The proposal addresses the criterion well, but some shortcomings are present.
2.9 ↕ 2	Fair The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but significant weaknesses exist.
1.9 ↕ 1	Poor The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
0	Very poor The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed owing to missing or incomplete information.

### Definitions for score descriptors:

- **'Minor shortcoming'** is an issue that relates to a marginal aspect of the proposal with respect to the criterion and/or can be easily rectified (it will not impact the scoring).
- A **'shortcoming'** is a problem that relates to an important aspect of the proposal. It impacts the scoring but does not render the proposal inappropriate for funding (i.e. the proposal is still expected to lead to useful results with positive impact).
- A **'significant weakness'** means that the proposal addresses the criterion in a limited and/or not sufficiently effective way. It can also be the case when the

proposal includes a large number of shortcomings, which together means that the proposal does not address the criterion sufficiently effectively.

### 7.3 Thresholds

An **overall threshold of 70% will be applied to the weighted score produced for each proposal**. Therefore, only applications with a **final peer review score equal to or higher than 3.5 will proceed to the interview stage**.

**The same 70% threshold will apply to the interview stage**. Applications with a final interview score below 70% will not be considered for funding.

**Only applications scoring above the 70% funding threshold will be considered for funding.**

### 7.4 Ranking and funding decision

- The final application score will be calculated by adding up the final peer review and final interview scores (with equal weighting leading to a final mark between 0 and 10). **Only applications scoring above 7.0 will be considered for funding.**
- The applications will be ranked taking into account the final application score.
- The programme's Steering Committee will approve the final funding decision based on the ranked list and budget available. The remaining applicants scoring above the 70% funding threshold will be placed on a reserve list.
- **All applicants will receive feedback.** They will be informed: i) they will be offered a fellowship, or ii) their proposal will not be funded, or (iii) they will be placed on the reserve list. Reserved list candidates will be notified within 3 months of whether their proposal will be funded or not.
- Upon a favourable funding decision, applicants will be offered an employment contract for the duration of their fellowship from their supervisor's host institution.

### 7.5 Code of conduct

All individuals involved in the selection process must agree to the programme's *Code of Conduct* and confirm that no *Conflict of Interest* exists. In cases where a conflict of interest arises, the individual must inform SyMeCo immediately. Actions to be taken may include the removal of the expert from the proposal in question and/or from the entire evaluation process.

By agreeing to the *Code of Conduct*, they commit themselves to conform to the *Charter and Code* principles, be independent, impartial and objective, and act professionally throughout the selection process. Strict confidentiality will be applied. The *Code of Conduct* includes a confidentiality clause stating that under no circumstance may any actor involved in the selection process attempt to contact an applicant of their own accord, either during the evaluation or afterwards.

### 7.6 Feedback and redress

Feedback will be provided to applicants following each stage of the selection process.

Applicants have a right to redress. Applicants wishing to start the redress procedure should contact SyMeCo within 30 days of receiving the eligibility, peer review, or interview feedback. **Redress requests can only be made about procedural issues or perceived incorrect application of eligibility criteria, not the scientific judgments of reviewers/members of**

**the interview panels.** If the redress request is accepted, a new remote peer review and/or interview will be arranged. Applicants will be informed about the redress results within 30 days of their request. **Decisions from the Redress Committee are binding.**

## 8 FELLOWSHIP OFFERS

The offer to successful applicants will consist of 2 stages:

- Award of the Fellowship by SyMeCo
- An offer of employment by the host institution

The applicant will be required to accept each part of the offer, the award and the employment offer, in writing, within 7 days of receiving each respective notification. Accepting the award at the first stage does not commit the applicant to accept the employment offer from the host institution.

Personal data, in addition to that already supplied during the application, may be required by the host institution to complete the offer of employment. Requests will be made by the host institution under its own data management policies.

Currently, the latest start date for the 2<sup>nd</sup> cohort of fellows is February 2025, which is indicative only and subject to change. Successful applicants are expected to commence the fellowship at the earliest convenience taking into account any periods required by UL to sign inter-institutional agreements with the host institution and for the successful applicant to gain permission to enter and work in Ireland. A start date will be discussed with the successful applicant and stated in the offer of employment.

In the unlikely event that the host university cannot support the fellowship and SyMeCo cannot find an alternative eligible host, the fellowship award may be withdrawn. Similarly, the host institution reserves the right to withdraw an offer if the programme is withdrawn for any reason or if the host institution has made an error.

## 9 EMPLOYMENT AS A SYMECO FELLOW

- The fellows will be employed full-time for the duration of their fellowship by their host institution under the same employment conditions as other externally funded researchers employed at that institution. The employment contracts will be in line with Irish Law, and the Terms of Employment (Information) Acts 1994 and 2001. Applicants wishing to know the terms and conditions associated with the employment contracts should contact the host institution directly.
- In addition to the general terms and conditions, the employment contract will be full time include the following: (i) nature of the appointment and fellowship, (ii) start date and total duration of the fellowship, (iii) guarantee that the employment contract with the host organisation will be maintained for the total duration of the fellowship including secondment periods, (iv) name (s) of the supervisors, (v) salary, (vi) annual leave and other leave entitlements (e.g. maternity leave), (vii) Intellectual Property Rights arrangements between organisation (s) and the fellow, (viii) details of grounds and notice periods relating to termination or dismissal.
- The **total gross salary** awarded to fellows will be **€50,124 per annum (without family allowance) and €56,604 per annum (with family allowance)**. SyMeCo will apply family definition as indicated in the [MSCA WP 2021-2022](#): persons linked to the fellow by (i) marriage, or (ii) a relationship with equivalent status to a

marriage recognised by the legislation of the country or region where this relationship was formalised, or (iii) dependent children who are actually being maintained by the fellow. Supporting documentation to confirm eligibility for the family allowance may be requested.

- The salaries received will be liable for taxes and/or other deductions which may vary from host institution to institution. Information on Irish taxation can be found on the [Office of Revenue Commissioners website](#). Compliance with Irish law and national regulations on taxation will be a matter for resolution between the fellow, the host institution and the Irish Revenue Commissioners.
- SyMeCo will provide contributions towards the cost of conducting the fellowship, such as equipment (up to €2,000), consumables (up to €2,064) and travel (up to €5,000), which will be held in a cost centre at the host institution, under the authorisation of the Supervisor.
- SyMeCo will also provide contributions to training and career development activities.
- The fellow's main duties will be the execution of the research project tasks proposed in their fellowship.

## 10 ETHICS

- SyMeCo will comply fully with the Horizon Europe ethics policy, including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights and its supplementary protocols.
- SyMeCo will not fund projects: (i) aiming at human cloning for reproductive purposes, (ii) intending to modify the genetic heritage of human beings which could make such modifications heritable (with the exception of research relating to cancer treatment of the gonads), (iii) intending 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, (iv) leading to the destruction of human embryos (for example, for obtaining stem cells).
- Projects involving human embryonic stem cells (hESC) or human embryos (hE) will require approval from the Research Executive Agency (REA) before commencing. Therefore, SyMeCo must inform REA of any research project selected for funding that may involve the use of hESC or hE. Furthermore, such research may not start without approvals from the European ethics review and the relevant Programme Committee.
- Applicants must complete an Ethics Issues Table as part of the application process. In addition, a Programme Ethical Review Committee (PERC) will be set up to review all proposals for which ethical issues are flagged.
- SyMeCo fellows must comply with their host institution's ethical guidelines and obtain formal ethical approval from the host Research Ethics Committee where ethical issues arise. Such approval must be sought before commencing any project activity involving ethical issues. All hosts have strict procedures for ethical approval that align with national ethical regulations and procedures. In addition, the fellows will be required to commit themselves to conducting their research to the highest standards of integrity, as outlined in the [National Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland](#).

## 11 REPORTING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- The fellows will report directly to their supervisor. The supervisor will support the fellow in all aspects of their research project, monitoring the progress/milestones of research and access to appropriate facilities and infrastructure. In addition, the supervisor will also identify and introduce the fellow to colleagues and collaborators to broaden the fellow's professional network. An open-door policy will be in place so supervisors are readily accessible to the fellows.
- The fellows will be required to prepare a career development plan supported by the supervisor and SyMeCo. A skills audit will be carried out, considering the fellow's existing and the skills required to ensure the successful completion of the project and career development. The career development plan will be reviewed annually or as required to reflect changes regarding the project or career development goals.
- The fellows will be required to partake in training and career development opportunities such as those organised by SyMeCo and the host institution. In addition, the fellows are also required to participate in Education and Public Engagement activities as well as communication and dissemination activities.
- The fellows will be required to provide progress updates to the SyMeCo Project Manager, including research outputs, training and career development activities and education and public engagement activities completed.

## 12 FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- All publications, presentations or dissemination activities carried out by the fellow which arise from work carried out during their fellowship must acknowledge that the work was co-funded by the European Union using the following wording:

*"Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them".*

- In addition to the EU acknowledgement above, all publications, presentations or dissemination activities carried out by the fellow which arise from work carried out during their fellowship must acknowledge that the work was co-funded by SFI:

*"This work was supported, in part, by Science Foundation Ireland grant 13/RC/2094\_P2 and co-funded under the European Regional Development Fund through the Southern & Eastern Regional Operational Programme to Lero - the Science Foundation Ireland Research Centre for Software ([www.lero.ie](http://www.lero.ie))" or if space is short ... "supported, in part, by Science Foundation Ireland grant 13/RC/2094\_P2".*