

MATURE YOUR PHD CHALLENGE 2026

Rules

This document has been translated into English for reference from the French version of the contest rules "Mature Your PhD". In case of any discrepancy between this English version and the original French version, the French version shall prevail.

Article 1: Scope of the challenge

Société d'Accélération du Transfert de Technologies Conectus, a company incorporated under private law registered with the trade and company register of Strasbourg, having its registered office at 5 rue Schiller 67000 STRASBOURG (main organiser), is organising the 8th edition of a challenge (contest) named "Mature your PhD" to facilitate the professional integration of doctoral students and young researchers with innovative projects, and boost entrepreneurship through research.

This 2026 edition is fully funded and supported by the Pôle Universitaire d'Innovation Alsace (PUIA), with the assistance of Pepite Etena.

This Challenge is aimed at:

1. **2nd and 3rd year PhD students:**

- registered at an Alsace university
- attached to and working in a public research laboratory based in Alsace
- working on an innovative thesis project with long-term application potential

2. **Young researchers (thesis + 2 years max.):**

- who have presented their thesis within the last 2 years in one of Alsace's universities
- are either attached to and working in a public research laboratory based in Alsace
OR hosted and supported by Pepite Etena.
- involved in an innovative research project with long-term application potential

The aim is to provide them with personalized support focused on research-based entrepreneurship, market issues and intellectual property, in order to guide their innovative projects (scientific and/or technological), carrying a disruptive innovation, towards industrialization or the creation of start-ups.

If they are successful in the Mature Your PhD Challenge, PhD students and young researchers will be eligible, **subject to certain conditions**, for a financial contribution from Conectus to help them mature their Mature your PhD 2026 Challenge's winning project(s) (proof of concept). **This is on condition that the results of the project associated with their application meet the requirements of the Conectus Investment Committee and Board of Directors.**

Doctoral students or young researchers with innovative projects not attached to a research unit, if they are successful in this Mature your PhD Challenge, will not be eligible for financial assistance from Conectus,

unless they develop their project in association with a public research laboratory based in Alsace. They will, however, be eligible for support from Pepite Etena in developing their entrepreneurial project.

Article 2: Eligible contestants

This competition is open to:

2A - 2nd and 3rd year doctoral students:

- registered at an Alsatian university (Université de Strasbourg or Université de Haute Alsace)
- attached to and working in a public research laboratory based in Alsace
- working on an innovative thesis project with long-term application potential.

- “Doctoral student” means any individual registered at one of the two above-mentioned universities and enrolled in a doctoral program during the 2025-2026 academic year.
- Candidates must have begun a promising research thesis project as part of their doctoral studies
- This project must have **the potential to be applied in the long term**, enabling the emergence of an innovation with an industrial application (industrialization and marketing of the innovation concerned, creation of a dedicated start-up, etc.). **The present competition is not intended to reward thesis projects focusing on fundamental research. Failure to meet this last condition will result in elimination from the competition.**
- **To be eligible for this Challenge, candidates must have obtained the agreement of their thesis supervisor. This last condition, if not met, is eliminatory**

2B - Young researchers:

- who have defended their thesis within the last 2 years in one of Alsace's universities
- being either attached to and working in a public research laboratory based in Alsace OR hosted and supported by Pepite Etena and demonstrating a connection with academic research
- carrying out an innovative research project with potential for future applications

- Candidates **must have started an innovative research project and have promising initial research results**, enabling them to envisage the emergence of an innovation with a long-term industrial application (industrialization and marketing of the innovation concerned, creation of a dedicated start-up, etc.). **The present competition is not intended to reward fundamental research projects. Failure to meet this last condition will result in elimination from the competition.**
- **In order to apply for this Challenge, candidates must have obtained the agreement of their laboratory director or a recommendation from the director of Pepite Etena at the University of Strasbourg.**

To be eligible, the innovative project associated with each Mature your PHD Challenge application must:

1. Demonstrate the potential for technological innovation = ultimately lead to a new product, service or process that will provide one or more technological solutions that do not yet exist on the market and/or that respond to technological obstacles that have not yet been resolved.

2. Show potential for future industrial application = innovation that can be industrialized and marketed in the long term.

3. Ultimately lead to scientific results that can be protected by intellectual property rights: e.g. patent registration, know-how, software registration, database, etc.

IMPORTANT :

Do you have any doubts about the eligibility or potential of your project?

Contact Conectus: challenge-myphd@satt.conectus.fr

The following are not eligible:

1. Doctoral students who:

- are not registered at an Alsatian university for the 2025/2026 academic year
- are not attached to or working in a public research laboratory based in Alsace

OR who:

- benefit from a CIFRE thesis, or whose research program is part of a partnership with a company or other entity that benefits from the rights to exploit the results.

OR who:

- are completing their thesis in 4 years or more, or are in their 1st year of doctoral studies

OR who:

- present a fundamental research project

2. Young researchers who:

- have not completed their thesis in a public research laboratory in Alsace
- have obtained their doctorate more than 2 years before the application deadline for the Challenge Mature your Phd 2026
- present a fundamental research project

AND who:

at the date of application to this 2026 Mature your PhD Challenge, are not working in an Alsatian research laboratory OR are not hosted and supervised by Pepite Etena at the University of Strasbourg

Each applicant may submit only one application.

Projects that have already received support or funding from Conectus (current or past) will be subject to special scrutiny and may not be selected.

Applicants who have already submitted a project supported or financed by Conectus under the Mature your PhD Challenge may only take part in the Mature your PhD Challenge if they are submitting a new project that is different from their previous project.

Article 3: Prizes

The Challenge Mature your PhD 2026 will reward a maximum of 7 winners, all categories combined.

The 7 winners will correspond to the 7 best projects/application profiles, across all categories of candidates. The list of the 7 winners will be established by the final selection jury at the end of the audition stage, on the basis of the following criteria: quality and potential of each project presented, quality of each presentation pitch, and motivation of each candidate.

The Mature Your PhD Challenge jury decides on the final list of winning innovative projects at the end of the final selection process. It reserves the right to select fewer than 7 winners if the applications received do not meet the selection criteria set out in this Mature Your PhD Challenge, or if the number of applications corresponding to the criteria is insufficient. This choice will be made behind closed doors. The jury's decision does not need to be justified and cannot be challenged by unsuccessful candidates. In the case of collective entries, prizes will be awarded to the candidate identified by name in the application file.

The winners will each receive the 4 following prizes:

1. A €1,000 prize:

Each winner will receive a sum of €1,000.

- > *The prize can be used freely, with no restrictions on destination or use.*
- > *Payment will be made directly by Conectus or Pépite Etena or through the winner's employer, after approval by the Board of Directors.*

2. A “D.U. Deeptech Entrepreneurship” diploma course from the University of Strasbourg, worth €2,600:

Each winner will receive a diploma course: D.U. “Deeptech Entrepreneurship”.

Designed and operated in partnership with Conectus, Pépite Etena and Quest for Change, this course focuses on research-based entrepreneurship and start-up creation. Subject to passing grades, it will lead to a university diploma (D.U.). It will be taught in Strasbourg by regional and national experts in start-up creation, under the aegis of the University of Strasbourg.

- > *You'll gain new skills and the fundamentals to one day create your startup the right way.*

3. A personalized diagnosis of the economic potential of your innovative project:

Conectus will carry out, free of charge, a personalized study of the innovative project submitted by “PhD” or “Young Researcher” applicants. The aim of this study is to identify the project's applicative and economic potential. Our innovation experts will help you understand the market expectations and opportunities associated with your innovative project. You'll benefit from personalized recommendations to help you adapt your research project to the expectations of society and the business world. You'll also have access to tailor-made advice on intellectual property. Pépite Etena also offers entrepreneurship coaching to prizewinners (under conditions).

- > *You'll secure the authorship of your discoveries and build an innovative project that can eventually lead to an innovative product / service / process that can be industrialized and marketed, with a potential return on investment for you, the inventor.*

4. Privileged access to Starthèse, I-PhD and I-Lab national innovation competitions:

Being a Challenge Mature your PhD winner gives you privileged access to the national innovation competitions [Starthèse](#), [IphD](#) and [ILab](#). Conectus and its partners are at your side to help you prepare a winning application.

> *You'll gain visibility and notoriety in your professional world, both regionally and nationally. You meet the right people at the right time. You'll quickly build or strengthen your professional network, facilitating and accelerating your professional development and opening up opportunities throughout your career.*

Starthèse Ambassador:

The Challenge Mature Your PhD jury will select a Starthèse Ambassador from among the winners (decision made behind closed doors). The Starthèse Ambassador will then be invited to take part in the annual national "Starthèse" event organized by the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research. This event brings together and presents all the Starthèse Ambassadors promoted by each French territory organizing a territorial innovation competition such as the Challenge Mature your PhD.

The designated winner may refuse this opportunity without having to justify his or her choice.

IMPORTANT / Social networking promotional campaign:

The winners will be honoured in a social media campaign organized by Conectus. Candidates will have to wait for this official announcement of the results to communicate on their distinction.

Article 4: Modalities of participation

In order to take part in the Mature your PhD Challenge, candidates need to complete the application form that can be downloaded from the site dedicated to the challenge: www.challenge-myphd.com/en

The form may be completed in French or English. A detailed CV of the candidate shall be attached with the form. Candidates may also attach any publications they find relevant to the assessment of their applications.

The completed form shall be sent by email in .pdf format BEFORE MONDAY, MAY 18, 2026 (midnight) to the following email address: challenge-myphd@satt.conectus.fr. The candidate shall take care to specify that the subject of their email is: "Candidature au Challenge Mature Your PhD 2026" (Application for the Mature Your PhD Challenge)

An email confirming the receipt of the application will be sent to the candidate within seventy-two (72) hours of such receipt.

Only such applications as fulfil the eligibility criteria shall be selected and reviewed.

The complete application form (regulations excepted) may not exceed 13 A4 pages.

Only the Times New Roman font in size 11 with single line spacing may be used.

Please complete all the sections. If you are unable to reply or if you wish to add information, please justify that as far as possible and enter your comments in the free-format field of the application form titled "Comments and observations".

In general, candidates must provide a complete and true description of the position of their project in respect of intellectual property and any constraints that may apply to the project due to earlier commitments made by the candidate or a member of their team. Any failure to fulfil this provision could call into question the possible positive decision by the judges.

Any charges incurred by the candidates for participating in the challenge shall not be refunded.

IMPORTANT: Applications that do not comply with the instructions shall not be taken into account

Article 5: Selection of winners

Short-listing: based on applications

A pre-selection, based on applications, will be made in May 2026 by experts from SATT Conectus and Pepite Etena. The criteria on which applications will be evaluated are as follows

1. Innovative potential of the thesis project
2. Match for an economic and/or social need
3. Ambitions of the thesis project

Short-listed candidates will be called to pitch their project on **Tuesday, 30 June 2026 to a panel of judges chosen by Conectus.**

Selection: upon a hearing by the judges

The short-listed candidates will be invited by an email to the address given by them on their application forms.

The hearing, which will last **20 minutes**, will take place as follows:

- oral presentation of the candidate's project: 10 minutes
- question-and-answer session with the jury: 10 minutes

Depending on the number of candidates selected to present to the panel, the presentation time may be slightly reduced to allow the panel to interview all candidates within a maximum of one day. Detailed information will be provided several weeks before the interview date.

Candidates are asked to comply strictly with the duration of the hearing.

The project presentation must cover the key points of the application form.

It may be supported by a PowerPoint presentation, which must be sent by the doctoral student to Conectus by a date to be confirmed by e-mail > to be sent to: challenge-myphd@satt.conectus.fr **⚠ Attention: if your presentation exceeds 10 Mb in weight, please contact <mailto:france.mandry@satt.conectus.fr>** before sending.

For reasons of compatibility and time, your presentation will be broadcast using a Conectus computer (windows PC).

For doctoral candidates, the thesis director may attend the session, but the oral presentation must be made by the doctoral candidate alone.

The criteria for assessing the project shall be as follows:

1. **Ambition of the project and potential in terms of technology transfer**
2. **Motivation, ambition and commitment of the candidate**
3. **Relevance of the work and consistency of the whole project**

A maximum of 7 winners shall be selected by the judges and informed by email in **July 2026**.

Article 6: Composition of the jury

The panel of judges for the hearings shall be constituted of professionals from academia, industry and social and business environments.

It shall include 10 voting members (one vote per member):

- **6 representatives from Conectus**
- **4 representatives of society, business and academia (company directors, investors, representatives from research institutions, socio-economic players etc.)**

Conectus shall chair the session.

The judges shall be sovereign and do not have to justify their decisions.

Article 7: Commitments of winners

Any candidate accepting to be a prizewinner undertakes to :

During and after the PhD :

- Be available for meetings and discussions with the Conectus and Pépite Etena teams to establish a personalized diagnosis of the long-term economic potential of the winning innovative project.
- Contribute transparently to exchanges on project data
- Inform their thesis supervisor (for doctoral candidates) OR, for young researchers, their laboratory director (if the project is attached to a public laboratory in Alsace) of exchanges with the Conectus and Pépite teams, obtain their agreement for all joint actions, and invite them to all follow-up meetings with Conectus or Pépite.
- Candidates and winners hereby authorize Conectus to publish their surname, first name and e-mail address, the full contact details of their laboratory, the general public (non-confidential) summary of their project given in the application file, and photos taken in the course of the challenge, as part of information and communication campaigns linked to the challenge, including on its website, without being entitled to claim any rights whatsoever.

- Undertake to be present or be represented on the day of the official announcement of the winners and the prize-giving ceremony.
- Be an ambassador for the Mature your PhD Challenge, and as such participate free of charge in all promotional activities for the Challenge (winners, assessment, etc.), at Conectus' request.
- Undertake not to denigrate the image, professionalism or, more generally, the Conectus company, the Mature your PhD Challenge and/or the Conectus, Pôle Universitaire d'Innovation and Pepite Etena teams.
- Wait for the official announcement of the results of the Challenge Mature your PhD or Starthese to communicate on their distinction of winner.

The winners of the competition will have the option of refusing the prize and withdrawing from the competition.

Article 8: Confidentiality

The members of the short-listing committee and the judges and the parties with access to the applications made as part of the *Mature your PhD Challenge* agree in writing (in the form of a confidentiality agreement) to keep confidential any information about the projects and to comply with ethics rules.

Besides, the content of the projects shall not be disclosed to outside parties without the prior written consent of both the candidates and Conectus, other than in the form of the non-confidential summary supplied in the application form.

Article 9: Patents and intellectual property

As research work is part of theses or research projects carried out within research establishments, the latter are de facto considered as owners of the intellectual property rights attached to the results. Individuals will nevertheless remain inventors, subject to their inventive contribution to the development of the protected results.

Article 10: Disputes

If any of the provisions of these regulations is found to be null and void, the other clauses shall retain their validity and scope.

Any cases not covered in the regulations shall be settled by the organiser, whose decisions shall be final. These regulations shall be governed by the laws of France. The parties shall endeavour to amicably settle any dispute arising on the occasion of the contest. Failing such settlement, the courts of Strasbourg shall have jurisdiction.

Article 11: Limit of liability

The organiser shall not be liable in any way if, in the event of an act of God or events out of its control or justified necessity, it has to cancel, shorten, extend or postpone this challenge or amend its conditions.

The organiser reserves the right to take legal action against any fraud or attempted fraud. It shall not be liable in any way towards the candidates as a result of any fraud.

Article 12: Contact

Any queries may be sent by email by the candidates to:
challenge-myphd@satt.conectus.fr

Article 13: Acceptance of regulations

Candidates who submit an application shall at the end of the form agree that they have reviewed and accepted these regulations.

Article 14 : Use of personal data

By entering the competition, all candidates authorize CONECTUS in advance to use their surname, first name and image, without restriction or reservation and without this conferring on them any right to any benefit whatsoever, throughout the competition period and for a period of 10 years.

Article 15 : Data protection

CONECTUS has set up a system for storing contributions sent by participants in the present competition, as well as their personal data, to enable control in the event of a complaint.

In accordance with the provisions of law no. 78-17 of January 6, 1978 relating to information technology, files and civil liberties, participants have the right to access and rectify data concerning them and may request that their details be deleted and not communicated to third parties.

For any request concerning their personal data, participants may send a letter stating the purpose of their request and their contact details to the following address: **CONECTUS - Communication Department - 5 rue Schiller 67000 STRASBOURG / dpo@satt.conectus.fr**

Article 16 : Accessibility of contest rules

The present regulations have been drawn up in compliance with articles L.121-1 and L.121-20 of the French Consumer Code and articles L.320-1 et seq. of the French Internal Security Code.

It may also be sent, free of charge, to any person who requests it. This request can be sent to the following address **CONECTUS 5 rue Schiller 67000 STRASBOURG**.

The present rules have been filed with the **SELARL ANGLE DROIT HAGUENAU - WISSEMBOURG (Maîtres Rodolphe WESTERMANN & Alexandre SPEEG) - Commissaires de Justice Associés - 1 rue de la Musau - 67500 HAGUENAU**.