

## Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA)

### *Individual Fellowships*

A call for applications for MSCA **Individual Fellowships**, which provide fellowships for scholars to move to conduct research in another European country for 12-24 months, is now open.

**The deadline is 11 September 2019.**

### What are Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions?

The Marie Curie Actions (MCA) were set up in 1996; since 2014 – when the current EU Research and Innovation Programme, *Horizon 2020* (2014-2020), commenced – they have been called Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). Awarding €6.16bn overall, the MSCA provide funding for doctoral researchers, experienced researchers<sup>1</sup> and managerial/technical staff, requiring transnational, and preferably inter-sectoral (especially SMEs and industry) and interdisciplinary, mobility in the pursuit of excellent research in any field or discipline. Grants support a combination of excellent research and training and career development with a focus on innovation skills.

The MSCA programme sits under the ‘Excellent Science’ pillar of *Horizon 2020* along with the European Research Council (ERC), another popular research funding scheme across the University.

While the other two pillars of *Horizon 2020* (‘Industrial Leadership’ and ‘Societal Challenges’) provide some (arguably limited) opportunities for Arts, Humanities and Social Science (AHSS) researchers to apply for research funding,<sup>2</sup> applications usually require consortia of a minimum of three countries and are typically contingent on tightly defined topics. In contrast, the ‘bottom-up’ approach to research of the MSCA (and ERC) provides a greater opportunity for AHSS researchers to engage; unsurprisingly this is where the bulk of applications from academics in AHSS at Cambridge have tended to target their applications when applying to *Horizon 2020*.

While there are five types of MSCA, this document focusses on Individual Fellowships, for which **the next application deadline is 11 September 2019.**

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as more than four years’ research experience or a doctoral degree (PhD).

<sup>2</sup> For more information about AHSS opportunities within *Horizon 2020*, please see:

<https://www.ahssresearch.group.cam.ac.uk/Horizon2020/h2020-ahss> (Raven protected)

## What are Individual Fellowships (IF)?

Individual Fellowships support ‘experienced researchers’ (i.e. at least PhD level or equivalent) undertaking mobility between countries, with the option to devise secondments in either academic or non-academic organisations. Cambridge hosts more Individual Fellowships than most other institutions in Europe and is consistently in the top two in the UK, ahead of other UK HEIs by a wide margin.

There are two types of Individual Fellowships: European and Global.

- **European Fellowships** are 1-2 year fellowships held in EU Member States or Associated Countries<sup>3</sup> and are open to researchers either coming to Europe (from any country in the world) or moving within Europe. The researcher must comply with the rules of mobility by moving from one country to another. This is the most popular MSCA scheme at Cambridge by far.
- **Global Fellowships** are based on a secondment to a Third (non-EU) Country (TC) for 12-24 months and a mandatory 12-month return period to a European host country. The researcher must comply with the rules of mobility in the country where the Global Fellowship secondment takes place, not for the country of the return phase. The University tends to support considerably fewer Global Fellowships.

## Who is eligible to apply?

### European Fellowships eligibility

- The researcher must be an established researcher, defined as being ‘in possession of a doctoral degree’ or having ‘at least four years of full-time equivalent research experience’.
- There are no restrictions on nationality or age.
- The researcher must move or have moved from any country to the EU member state or associated country in which the host institution (‘the beneficiary’) is located. *The researcher cannot have resided or carried out his/her main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of the beneficiary for more than 12 months in the three years immediately before the call deadline.*

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<sup>3</sup> Associated countries are non-EU countries that have reached an agreement with the EU that allows their participation in *Horizon 2020* programmes. The associated countries are: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Faroe Islands, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Tunisia, Turkey, and Ukraine. An updated list is maintained [here](#).

## Global Fellowships eligibility

- The researcher must be an established researcher, defined as being ‘in possession of a doctoral degree’ or having ‘at least four years of full-time equivalent research experience’.
- The researcher **must be a national or long-term resident of an EU member state or an associated country.**<sup>4</sup>
- No age restrictions apply.
- The researcher must move or have moved from any country to the partner organisation located in the Third Country (TC). *The researcher cannot have resided or carried out his/her main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of the TC partner organisation for more than 12 months in the three years immediately before the call deadline.* For international organisations located in a TC, the researcher must not have spent more than 12 months in the three years immediately before the call deadline at the same partner organisation.
- After the stay at the partner institution, the researcher **must return** to the European host institution.

## What obligations do the supervisor and host institution have?

- The proposal should be prepared by the researcher **in cooperation with the applicant organisation, which is represented by the main supervisor in the framework of the proposal.** However, the **submission of the proposal** falls under the **final responsibility** of the applicant organisation as represented by the main supervisor.
- Detailed obligation of the host institution to the researcher are provided in Article 32 of the [model grant agreement](#) (pp.45 onwards).

## Why host an MSCA Fellowship?

- Although the application process can be complex, the MSCA Fellowships provide an excellent way of bringing leading postdoctoral researchers to Cambridge and building networks of researchers across Europe.
- Because the MSCA Fellowships are ‘bottom up’ rather than challenge-led, they are completely open with regard to the field of research.

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<sup>4</sup> Long term residence is defined as ‘a period of legal and continuous residence within EU Member States or Horizon 2020 Associated Countries of at least 5 consecutive years. Periods of absence from the territory of the Member State or Horizon 2020 Associated Country shall be taken into account for the calculation of this period where they are shorter than 6 consecutive months and do not exceed in total ten months within this period of five years.’

## How much funding is available?

The MSCA account for 8% of the overall *Horizon 2020* budget, with more than €6 billion in funding for 2014-2020. The overall MSCA budget for the 2018-2020 Work Programme is €2.88 billion, of which €893 million is allocated to funding Individual Fellowships.

The **indicative budget** for the current, 2019 call is **€294 million**, and is distributed as follows:

- **Global Fellowships: € 50 million** distributed between the scientific areas based on the number of eligible proposals received in each of these areas.
- **European Fellowships: € 236 million** distributed between its panels (except for the Society and Enterprise Panel) based on the number of eligible proposals received in each of the panels.
- **Society and Enterprise Panel: € 8 million.**

The funding of each Fellowship is determined using the fixed costs set out in the Work Programme. A [model grant agreement](#) and an [annotated version](#) of the model grant agreement are both available from the [funding and tenders portal](#). The Fellowships cover:

- Living, mobility and family allowances for the researcher
- Research, training and networking costs
- Management and indirect costs

These translate into a generous living allowance of €4,880 per month<sup>5</sup>, a mobility allowance of €600 per month, and a family allowance (where applicable) of €500 per month for each Fellow. A further €800 for research, training and networking costs and €650 for management and indirect costs is made available to the host institution.

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<sup>5</sup> This is subject to a 'country coefficient'. Researchers living in Finland, for example, will receive 120.8% of this amount (i.e. €5,895 per month), whereas researchers based in Hungary, for example, will receive 83.9% of this amount (i.e. €4,094 per month). The country coefficient for the UK is 139.8% (i.e. €6,822 per month). Country coefficients are listed on pp.77-78 of the current Work Programme.

## What is the timeline for applications?

The EC has published the following indicative timeline for MSCA Individual Fellowship applications for 2019.

Opening of call	<i>11 April 2019</i>
Deadline for submission of proposals	<i>11 September 2019 at 17:00:00, Brussels local time (4pm, UK time)</i>
Evaluation of proposals	<i>October - December 2019</i>
Information on the outcome of the evaluation	<i>February 2020</i>
Indicative date for the signature of Grant Agreements	<i>March - May 2020</i>
Possible start dates for the Fellowship	<i>1 March 2020 – 1 September 2021</i>

## How can I apply?

- The proposal should be prepared by the researcher **in cooperation with the applicant organisation, which is represented by the main supervisor in the framework of the proposal**. The experienced researcher and the supervisor must be two different people.
- Proposals *can* be submitted by the researcher. However, the **submission of the proposal** (and other actions that follow this procedure such as withdrawal) falls under the **final responsibility** of the applicant organisation as represented by the main supervisor.
- Only **one** proposal per researcher may be submitted.
- Proposals must be submitted electronically, using the European Commission's Online Submission Service (SEP) accessible via the [funding and tenders portal](#).
- Proposals must be submitted before **Wednesday 11 September 2019**, 5pm Brussels time (4pm UK time). To avoid missing the deadline, **you should submit your proposal as early as possible**, as it remains possible to reopen, edit and resubmit your proposal as many times as required before the call deadline. Only the last submitted version will be evaluated.

- Detailed **instructions and templates** for creating proposals are contained in the [Guide for Applicants](#) (pp. 28-45) and on the [funding and tenders portal](#); proposals must use the templates provided and conform to the specifications set out in order to be considered.
- The core of the proposal is 'Part B-1'. This section must be no longer than 10 pages and should be split into three sections, addressing Excellence, Impact, and Implementation respectively.
- The Research Operations Office will be organising an information session on applying for MSCA Fellowships, which will take place in June; more details will be available shortly.

## What criteria are used to judge applications?

- Proposals are evaluated in a **single-stage process**. Evaluation is carried out by the EC's Research Executive Agency, assisted by **independent experts**.
- Assessment is carried out by eight panels, each covering a spread of research areas.
- Each proposal is judged against the criteria set out in the table below (taken from pp. 24-25 of the [Guide for Applicants](#)):

Excellence	Impact	Quality and efficient of the implementation
Quality and credibility of the research/innovation project; level of novelty, appropriate consideration of inter/multidisciplinary and gender aspects	Enhancing the future career prospects of the researcher after the fellowship	Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources
Quality and appropriateness of the training and of the two way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host	Quality of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate the project results	Appropriateness of the management structure and procedures, including risk management
Quality of the supervision and of the integration in the team/institution	Quality of the proposed measures to communicate the project activities to different target audiences	Appropriateness of the institutional environment (infrastructure)
Potential of the researcher to reach or re-enforce professional maturity/independence during the fellowship		
<b>50% weighting</b>	<b>30% weighting</b>	<b>20% weighting</b>
Priority in case of <i>ex aequo</i> :		
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>

- Each criterion is scored out of 5:
  - 0 Proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
  - 1 **Poor.** The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
  - 2 **Fair.** Proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
  - 3 **Good.** Proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
  - 4 **Very Good.** Proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
  - 5 **Excellent.** Proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

There is further information on the evaluation process in the [MSCA Work Programme document](#) (pp. 66 onwards).

### Where can I find more information?

- The EC funding and tenders portal:
- <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/msca-if-2019>
- The MSCA Guide for applicants:
- [http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/guides\\_for\\_applicants/h2020-guide-appl-msca-if-2018-20\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/guides_for_applicants/h2020-guide-appl-msca-if-2018-20_en.pdf)
- The 2018-2020 MSCA Work Programme: [http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2018-2020/main/h2020-wp1820-msca\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2018-2020/main/h2020-wp1820-msca_en.pdf)
- The EC's Information Pack for MSCA Fellows: [http://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/resources/document-libraries/information-package-marie-sk%C5%82odowska-curie-fellows\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/resources/document-libraries/information-package-marie-sk%C5%82odowska-curie-fellows_en)
- The EC participant portal FAQ page: <https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/support/faq.html>