

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowships: application guide

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION: WHAT ARE MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE INDIVIDUAL FELLOWSHIPS (MSCIFs):

Here is how these fellowships are described on the European Commission portal:

‘The goal of the Individual Fellowships is to enhance the **creative** and **innovative** potential of experienced researchers, wishing to **diversify** their individual competence in terms of **skill acquisition** through **advanced training, international** and **intersectoral mobility**’.

... These are **particular** fellowships: they don’t just want you to use the award to pay your salary while you write a monograph. They are about developing new skills and gaining experience in environments including and beyond academia.

About my MSCIF: My Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship was a standard European one and I spent the full 24 months at Queen’s University Belfast. In addition to this, I spent 3 months on secondment at the Seamus Heaney HomePlace, working 2 days a week on the Education programme for local schools, and approximately 6 weeks at BBC NI, working on average of 3 days per week. While at BBC NI, I produced a short series of programmes based on my research (<https://canvas-story.bbcrewind.co.uk/loveacrossthdivide/>). I also used my MSCIF to gain teaching experience that I had not been able to previously: this included designing and convening my own research-based 3rd year undergraduate course; and supervising MA dissertations.

2. TYPES OF MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE INDIVIDUAL FELLOWSHIPS:

- **European:** 2 years at a European institution.
- **Global:** 2 or 3 years: 1 or 2 year(s) at a non-European institution; 1 year ‘return’ to Europe.
» For example: 2 years at Yale, 1 year at University College Dublin.
- **Other fellowships:** Career Restart Panel (CAR), Reintegration Panel (RI), or Society & Enterprise Panel (SE). These follow the ‘relaxed mobility’ rule.
- **Brexit:** still unclear how this will impact on European Commission funding. Best to check with the UK’s ‘contact point’ for the award. This is: mariecurie-uk@ukro.ac.uk.

3. KEY INFORMATION ABOUT MSCIFs:

- **Timeline:** usually apply mid-September for next academic year (applications open in April): contact your host ASAP;
- **Mobility:** There is a strict mobility rule: ‘you must not have resided or worked in the country of the beneficiary for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately before the call deadline’;
- **Eligibility:** ‘you must, at the date of the call deadline, be in possession of a doctoral degree or have at least four years of full-time equivalent research experience’; this means they can be taken at any stage once you qualify as an ‘experienced researcher’, not just immediately postdoctoral or early career.
- **Success rate/score:** In 2017, the SOC threshold for funding was 91.8% (reserve: 91.4%) and 13.1% applicants made this; but note it varies between ‘panels’.
- **Expenses:** generous salary, plus €800 p/m research/training costs, €500 ‘mobility’ allowance and €500 p/m family allowance. Note: all your taxes come out of this lump sum salary payment. In the UK, this means the employees and employers National Insurance come out of this sum before your monthly tax deductions. This makes a significant impact on your take-home salary. Make sure you discuss this with your institution to get a confirmation on how much you will get paid.

4. MSCIFs LANGUAGE:

Don’t be put off by the language used in the application documents. Here’s a breakdown:

- **‘Excellent science’:** or, good research.

- **'Experienced Researcher'**: that's you.
- **'Beneficiary/Host Institution'**: the university/research institution where you plan to be based.
- **'Main supervisor'**: your mentor, responsible for you, your training and development. May also be known as the 'PI' (Principal Investigator); also note, the award will be in their name, not yours.
- **'Secondments'**: short placements in another, non-academic, institution.
- **'Panel'**: the 'subject group' and team of evaluators who will assess your application.
- **'Action'**: your project.

CHOOSING YOUR HOST INSTITUTION AND MENTOR:

- **Make sure the fit is right**: don't go for an institution based on prestige alone if there is no one there you can work with or the resources aren't right. Choose the best institution to facilitate your individual training plans and research needs.
- **Think carefully about your mentor**: this is an area where prestige *is* important. Applying with a prestigious and internationally renowned expert will make a difference. The aim of MSCIFs is to develop research leaders, so make sure you are positioning yourself to learn from one!

MSCIF APPLICATION DOCUMENTS:

- These are in two parts:
 - **B1**: a 10 page research statement where you have to answer particular questions but can allocate as much or as little space to each as you like;
 - **B2**: a 5 page CV; detailed summaries of the 'capacities' of your host institution / any secondment institutions; ethics statement.
- **Plus online form**: for biographical / administrative data: your name, address; supervisor's name, address etc. Give yourself enough time to fill this in – it is a significant undertaking!

B1: THE 10 PAGE RESEARCH STATEMENT:

- This is split across three sections: excellence, impact and implementation.
 - **Excellence (worth 50% of your score)**: academic research proposal; methodology; originality; interdisciplinarity; knowledge transfer; 5-6 pages.
 - **Impact (worth 30% of your score)**: on researcher's career and more broadly on society and scholarship; address EU policy – if you can!; dissemination; 2-3 pages.
 - **Implementation (worth 20% of your score)**: 'work packages'; 'deliverables'; 'milestones'; 1-2 pages.
- Each section is given a mark out of 5.
- Remember to refer assessors to other parts of the form as necessary for consistency and clarity: e.g., 'for more on this, see 2.3' etc.
- The combination of the format, language and information required ('work packages?!', 'milestones?') can seem daunting, especially for researchers working in the arts and humanities so give yourself enough time and head space to work out exactly what you want and need to get across to reviewers.
- Remember that you can reduce the font size if you put information into tables, so putting these to good use means you can add a lot more information into your application.
- Also remember that some of the material in this form can be repurposed for future projects if you need further funding or for monograph proposals.

B1: SECTION 1: EXCELLENCE

- This is split across four sections.
- **1.1 Quality and credibility of the research/innovation action:**
 - Make sure the research element is watertight and the 'state of the art' section is detailed enough.
 - Remember to answer all of the prompts, including the 'Gender dimension' part. It is

absolutely **vital**, so do not think this does not apply to your project.

- **1.2 Quality and appropriateness of the training and of the two way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host.**
 - Really think about knowledge exchange: *why* do you need to go to your host institution, rather than any other institution, and *why* do they need *you*? What can you bring?
- **1.3 Quality of the supervision and of the integration in the team/institution.**
 - Show you have thought about induction – MSCIFs are not awards for you to sit alone in an ivory tower: how will you hit the ground running?
- **1.4 Capacity of the researcher to reach or re-enforce a position of professional maturity/independence.**
 - There is a similar question at beginning of the impact section – do not repeat yourself. Perhaps use this question as a chance to write about what you've done so far: what have you done in the past that is indicative of future success?

B1: SECTION 2: IMPACT

- This is split across three sections.
- **2.1 Quality of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate the action results.**
 - You might want to think of this as academic dissemination, rather than repeat material you'll also use for 2.3.
- **2.2 Quality and appropriateness of the training and of the two way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host.**
 - How will this award help you get a job, within and/or beyond academia?
- **2.3 Quality of the proposed measures to communicate the action activities to different target audiences.**
 - Think of this as non-academic dissemination (public engagement and outreach).

B1: SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTATION (A.K.A HOW WILL YOU GET THIS DONE?)

- This is split across four sections. It might seem the most unwieldy section to crack but I would start with this so you can plan your project, break down its various parts and work out how it will all fit together.
- **3.1 Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan** (your 'work packages');
- **3.2. Appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources;**
- **3.3 Appropriateness of the management structure and procedures, including risk management;**
- **3.4 Appropriateness of the institutional environment (infrastructure).**

WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL MSCIF APPLICANT?

- Before you apply, you need to think about making yourself competitive through:
 - **Publications** (monographs and peer-reviewed articles are the aims but also book chapters; book/event reviews; review articles);
 - **Networks/collaborations;**
 - **Event organisation;**
 - **Public engagement** (significantly more important for a MSCIF than other awards);
 - **Creativity / innovation:** MSCIFs seem designed for researchers who embed public engagement, innovation and collaboration into their scholarship, and have an established track record of doing this. This is about designing research and establishing an academic career in an intentional way, not about box ticking for a funding application.
- ...But remember, it is about **excellence** for **career stage** and subject area; the EU Commission are generous and good at recognising this.
- #1 tip: Give yourself enough **TIME** – remember people go on holidays and research leave over the summer.

WRITING COMPELLING AND COMPETITIVE MSCIF APPLICATIONS:

- **Don't be boring:** convey your excitement! If you aren't excited about your work, why should anyone else be?
- **Be ambitious:** what new ways can you disseminate your work? Who are the top publishers in your field? Who can you work with as project partners?
- **...But realistic:** if it took you 4 years to finish your PhD, you are not going to convince anyone you can write a new monograph, two journal articles, host an international conference and put together a set of public engagement activities in 2 years.
- **Understand engaged research:** there is a difference between public engagement, media engagement and community outreach work. Make sure you understand these differences.
- **Research narrative:** make sure you are advancing your areas of expertise in a feasible way. Interdisciplinarity is 'trendy' now but if you have no experience in this, don't suddenly decide you are interdisciplinary. The same goes for developing collaborative and engaged research: suddenly deciding that this is important to you when you're applying for grants and fellowships is pretty transparent.
- **Apply again:** if you're unsuccessful the first time, don't be scared to reapply. Many people get the award on a subsequent attempt.
- **Final words:** as with all funding and fellowship proposals: be compelling, convincing and realistic.