

# Introduction to ERC and MSCA in Horizon Europe

## Response to Q&A

This document was produced by UKRO in their role as National Contact Point (NCP) for the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA) and the European Research Council (ERC), in response to questions received during the webinar hosted on 31 March 2021.

## Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA)

### Resubmission Restrictions

Throughout Horizon 2020 the interest in MSC actions has substantially increased, resulting in decreased success rates. In order address demand management issues resubmission restrictions will be introduced for Postdoctoral Fellowships and Doctoral Networks. The restrictions will not come into force until the 2022 calls and will be solely based on the 2021 call results. Specifically, proposals submitted to the 2021 Postdoctoral Fellowship call scoring less than 70% will not be eligible to resubmit to the 2022 Postdoctoral Fellowship call and proposals submitted to the 2021 Doctoral Network call receiving a score less than 80% will not be able to resubmit to the 2022 Doctoral Network Call.

### Doctoral Networks Eligibility Criteria

Applications must be submitted by a consortium of universities, research institutions and research infrastructures, businesses including SMEs, and other socio-economic actors which include at least three independent legal entities, each established in a different EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country and with at least one of them established in an EU Member State. No more than 40.0% of the EU contribution can be allocated to beneficiaries in the same country or to a single International European Research Organisation (IERO) or international organisation. There are additional eligibility criteria for consortium establishing joint degrees or Industrial Doctorates as outlined in the MSCA Work Programme

The funded projects will then recruit doctoral candidates that are not already in possession of a doctoral degree, and they must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of the recruiting beneficiary for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before their recruitment date.

### Doctoral Networks and PhD Fees

In general, non-UK nationals will not be entitled to home fees for courses started in AY21/22, however institutions have the ability to determine the fee charged. The recruited doctoral candidates will have a full employment contract and as such will need to be treated the same as all other members of staff. If the internal policy is to waive the tuition fees or offer a reduced fee for staff then it is expected that this will be extended to individuals recruited on a Doctoral Network. If the recruited doctoral candidate does have PhD tuition fees, these are considered professional costs and should be claimed from the Institutions unit cost contribution. They cannot be directly charged to the individual ([EC FAQ](#)).

### Postdoctoral Fellowships Eligibility Criteria

Applications must be submitted by a single independent legal entity, established in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country. The individual researcher must be in a possession of a doctoral degree at the call deadline. They must also have not resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of the beneficiary (for European Postdoctoral Fellowships), or the host organisation for the outgoing phase (for Global Postdoctoral Fellowships) for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before the call deadline. Moreover researchers applying for a Global Postdoctoral Fellowships or researchers who wish to reintegrate to Europe, must be nationals or long-term residents of EU Member States or Horizon Europe Associated Countries.

For researchers wishing to reintegrate from a third country, there must be a direct mobility to an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country within the last 12 months before the call deadline.

## New Allowances

To help promote diversity and inclusion two new researcher allowances will be introduced and the definition of 'family' will be amended.

### *Family Allowance*

- Applicable to Doctoral Network and Postdoctoral Fellowships only;
- researcher has family obligations or acquires family obligations during the action duration;
- persons linked to him/her 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 researcher; and
- requested when/if the need arises.

### *Long-term Leave Allowance*

- Applicable to Doctoral Network, Postdoctoral Fellowships and COFUND;
- contributes to the beneficiary's pay obligations related to researchers' leave, including maternity, paternity, parental, sick or special leave, longer than 30 consecutive days; and
- requested when/if the need arises.

### *Special Needs Allowance*

- Applicable to Doctoral Network, Postdoctoral Fellowships, COFUND and Staff Exchanges;
- contributes to the additional costs of researchers with disabilities, whose long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments are certified by a competent national authority and of such nature that their participation in the action may not be possible without the acquisition of special needs items or services;
- These special needs items or services shall not have been funded from another source (e.g. social security or health insurance); and
- requested when/if the need arises.

## Staff Exchanges

Staff Exchanges fund collaborative research and innovation projects which involve organisations from the academic and non-academic sectors (including SMEs) from across the globe. The Staff Exchanges promote international, inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary mobility of research and innovation staff leading to the sharing of knowledge and best practices.

The mobility will take place through secondments within a joint research and innovation project, and secondments can be undertaken by research, technical, administrative and managerial staff both based in Europe (EU Member States and Horizon Europe Associated Countries) and outside of Europe (third countries).

The Staff Exchange projects run for a maximum of 48 months and the individual secondments must last at least one month and cannot be longer than 12 months for the same staff member and can be split into several stays with one or several beneficiaries or associated partners. The EC provide a top-up allowance to contribute towards the cost of the secondment as well as a contribution to the research, training and networking costs and the overall management of the project. Secondments must be between countries and if they only occur within EU member states or Horizon Europe Associated Countries they must also be intersectoral or interdisciplinary.

## European Research Council (ERC)

### What is meant by 'Frontier Science' for ERC funding?

The ERC funds ambitious 'frontier research' proposals submitted by a Principal Investigator (PI) in any area of research and without predefined priorities. The ERC aims to fund the best research undertaken by the best researchers in Europe, with scientific excellence as the sole evaluation criterion (both the scientific excellence of the PI's track record and of the proposed project).

'Frontier science' is applicable to all disciplines of research including social science & humanities scholarship and engineering.

It can take many forms but, at a basic level, evaluators will consider whether a proposal is pioneering by addressing new and emerging fields of research or by introducing unconventional, innovative approaches and scientific inventions or by crossing boundaries between different fields of research through a multi- or interdisciplinary approach.

### Who is eligible to apply?

Anyone can apply to the ERC schemes, there are no nationality rules and the PI does not have to be currently based in Europe. The PI does need to be engaged for the duration of the ERC project by the Host Institution (HI), which must be a legal entity established in an EU Member State of Associated Country. To achieve the outputs of their project, the PI may employ Team Members, who may be of any level of experience and may be based either at the HI or anywhere in the world and their contribution towards the project will be funded by the ERC.

### Are there any extensions to the PhD eligibility window for the Starting and Consolidator Grant calls?

For Starting and Consolidator Grant the PhD eligibility window can be extended for four reasons:

- **Maternity:** 18 months extension for each child born before or after the PhD award. If the applicant can document a longer maternity leave, the eligibility period will be extended by the documented amount of actual leave taken until the call deadline.
- **Paternity:** extension by the documented time of paternity leave taken until the call deadline for each child born before or after the PhD award.
- **Long-term illness, or national service:** extension by the documented amount of leave taken by the Principal Investigator until the call deadline for each incident which occurred after the PhD award date.
- **Clinical training:** extension by the documented amount of clinical training received by the PI after the award of the first eligible degree and until the call deadline, up to a maximum of 4 years

### How are Synergy grants different from other ERC schemes?

The Synergy grant is like other ERC schemes inasmuch as its sole criteria is excellence and evaluators will be looking for ground-breaking, 'frontier research'. However, it is distinct in its collaborative nature.

The way in which 2 – 4 ERC Co-Principal Investigators collaborate on a Synergy Grant needs to be excellent in of itself, alongside the excellence of the project and applicants that jointly address ambitious research problems.

To be considered excellent in terms of collaboration, a Synergy Grant proposal should be:

- Major scientific question with transformative scientific potential that could not be addressed by individual PI teams on their own
- Teams with exceptional combinations of knowledge and skills in which the PIs hold a central role

- PIs who can demonstrate that their group can successfully bring together the scientific elements necessary to address the scope and complexity of the proposed research question.
- As with all ERC funding, any discipline or field of research may apply, therefore any combination of different disciplines may join together on a Synergy Grant. However, the proposed work does not need to cover more than one discipline or field.

It should not be:

- Loose cooperation or networking between PIs
- Simple passing of data or information from one team to another

## 2022 ERC Call Timetable

Provisional dates have been announced by the ERC for the 2022 Work Programme. These have been included in [UKRO's regularly updated ERC Calls page](#), alongside call dates for the 2021 Work Programme and any ongoing evaluation processes for previous calls.

## Further Questions about MSCA or ERC

If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact the NCPs directly [mariecurie-uk@ukro.ac.uk](mailto:mariecurie-uk@ukro.ac.uk) or [erc-uk@ukro.ac.uk](mailto:erc-uk@ukro.ac.uk) as appropriate.

Details on upcoming events, including dedicated information sessions for applicants to upcoming MSCA and ERC calls, can be found on the UKRO portal <https://www.ukro.ac.uk/>.