

Researchers Coming to the UK on Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)

Disclaimer: Please note this document gives general information on available visa routes into the UK. It is based on the GOV.UK website and is not designed to give immigration advice to individuals. UKRO is not legally permitted to provide immigration advice on individual cases. Individuals may well have multiple options for a visa route and the options detailed are not exhaustive. Any individual requiring specific immigration advice must utilise the services of an adviser approved through the Office of Immigration Services (OISC) or consult your own internal HR or immigration team.

The UK had several visa routes for researchers who wish to visit/research in the UK.

The UK government set out its aim to “attract and retain a diverse pool of talent, nationally and internationally at all levels” in its [R&D Roadmap](#) in July 2020.

About MSCA

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) provide grants for all stages of researchers' careers - be they doctoral candidates or highly experienced researchers - and encourage transnational, intersectoral and interdisciplinary mobility. The Actions enable research-focused organisations - universities, research centres, and companies – to host talented foreign researchers and to create strategic partnerships with leading institutions worldwide.

The MSCA aim to equip researchers with the necessary skills and international experience for a successful career, either in the public or the private sector. The programme responds to the challenges sometimes faced by researchers, offering them attractive working conditions and the opportunity to move between academic and other sectors.

The MSCA are open to all domains of research and innovation, from fundamental research to market take-up and innovation services. Research and innovation fields are chosen freely by the applicants (individuals and/or organisations) in a fully 'bottom-up' manner.

Mobility

The MSCA are based on the principle of physical mobility: researchers who receive funding must move from one country to another to acquire new knowledge, skills and competences, and develop their research career. Researchers are also strongly encouraged to move between sectors and disciplines.

MSCA and the UK

The UK is an active participant in MSCA and has hosted many grant recipients from this sub-programme under Horizon 2020. From 1 January 2021, UK universities, research centres and companies can still host recipients of MSCA grants. If these recipients are non-UK nationals, they may need a visa to come to the UK to visit, study or work.

MSCA schemes

There are four main MSCA funding schemes which have been renamed in Horizon Europe:

Horizon 2020	Horizon Europe	Description
Innovative Training Networks (ITN)	Doctoral Networks	Funding to support early-stage researchers
Individual Fellowships (IF)	Postdoctoral Fellowships	Support for experienced researchers undertaking mobility between countries, optionally to the non-academic sector
Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (RISE)	Staff Exchanges	International and inter-sectoral cooperation
Co-funding of regional, national and international programmes (COFUND)	Co-funding of regional, national and international programmes (COFUND)	Funding for early-stage researchers or experienced researchers involving mobility to or from another country

About the UK immigration system

The UK immigration system is the means of regulating immigration to the United Kingdom. The system is administered by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI).

The UK immigration system is undergoing fundamental changes following the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union. These changes apply from 1 January 2021 with development of certain routes continuing throughout the year.

These changes affect newly arriving EU citizens (except Irish nationals), European Economic Area (EEA) and Swiss citizens and non-EEA nationals who wish to come to the UK. The new system will treat EU and non-EU citizens equally (excluding Irish citizens).

What you will need to work in, or visit the UK?

Anyone can check on the [UK government website](#) if they need a UK visa to visit, study or work.

Whether or not an individual is required to obtain a visa before they travel to the UK depends on their nationality and the reason for the travel.

For citizens outside the EEA, whether they need a visa before they travel is dependent upon whether they are Visa Nationals or Non-Visa nationals.

There may be requirements in addition to a visa to visit, study or work in the UK, e.g. a vaccination certificate, an [Academic Technology Approval Scheme](#) certificate, [immigration healthcare surcharge](#). We recommend you speak to your HR department to confirm additional requirements.

MSCA schemes and possible visa requirements

These requirements apply from 1 January 2021 and are therefore relevant to Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe funded projects.

MSCA Doctoral Networks

MSCA Doctoral Networks also include Industrial Doctorates and Joint Doctorates. Each recruited researcher can participate from a minimum of three months for up to a maximum of 36 months.

Options that can be considered for those working on MSCA Doctoral Network Industrial or Joint Doctorates employed by a UK host institution include:

1. Applying for the Global Talent Visa, through the UKRI endorsed funders route, where specific criteria for the visa have been met (e.g. 12-month duration).
2. Applying for the UK Ancestry Visa, if they are Commonwealth citizens with a UK-born grandparent.
3. Irish citizens do not need to apply for a visa

MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships

MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships include European Postdoctoral Fellowships and Global Postdoctoral Fellowships. European Postdoctoral Fellowships last between 12 and 24 months. Global Postdoctoral Fellowships can run for between 24 and 36 months, with up to 24 months for the outgoing phase in a Third Country and a mandatory 12-month return phase in an EU Member State or Associated Country.

Options that can be considered for those working on MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships employed by a UK host institution include:

1. Applying for the Global Talent Visa, through the fellowship route.
2. Applying for the UK Ancestry Visa, if they are Commonwealth citizens with a UK-born grandparent.
3. Irish citizens do not need to apply for a visa

Options that can be considered for those who have held a MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship outside of the UK within the last 12 to 60 months prior to their employment by a UK institution include:

1. Applying for the Global Talent Visa, through the fellowship route.
2. Applying for the Global Talent Visa, through the Academic and Research Appointments route.
3. Applying for the Skilled Workers Visa route.
4. Applying for the UK Ancestry Visa, if they are Commonwealth citizens with a UK-born grandparent.
5. Irish citizens do not need to apply for a visa

MSCA COFUND

MSCA COFUND includes organisations supporting doctoral candidates or postdoctoral researchers and international mobility is a compulsory part of the scheme. Typically, doctorates funded through this route are for three and 26 months, and post-doctorates are for 12 to 24 months.

Options that can be considered for those on Doctoral and Fellowship programmes supported by MSCA COFUND and employed by UK institutions include:

1. Applying for the Global Talent Visa, through the endorsed funder route, where specific criteria for the visa have been met.
2. Applying for the UK Ancestry Visa, if they are Commonwealth citizens with a UK-born grandparent.
3. Irish citizens do not need to apply for a visa

Secondments

MSCA Staff Exchanges include grants for secondments from one month to one year. Both MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships have an optional secondment phase and placement of a single period or shorter mobility periods, and an optional non-academic placement of up to six months, if this is specified at proposal stage. MSCA Doctorates have secondments of up to 12 months.

Options for all MSCA secondments include:

1. Applying for the UK Visitor Visa – if you plan to be in the UK for up to 12 months and are not recruited by a UK institution. The activities to be carried out by the visitor must be in line with the visitor rules permitted activities and/or the institute to which they are hosted, subject to the endorsing body's specific criteria for the chosen route.
2. Applying for the Tier 5 Visa, through the government's authorised exchange route – if you plan to stay in the UK for up to 12 months or up to 24 months or visit the UK multiple times, depending on the criteria and subject to the host organisation holding the relevant sponsor licence.
3. Applying for a Global Talent Visa, either through the endorsed funder or individual fellowship route, where specific criteria for the visa have been met.
4. Irish citizens do not need to apply for a visa.

Immigration health surcharge (IHS), also known as the NHS Surcharge

You usually need to pay the immigration [healthcare surcharge](#) if you are applying for a visa or immigration application:

- for more than six months, if you are applying outside the UK
- for any length of time, if you are applying inside the UK

You do not need to pay if you are applying for a visitor visa or to remain in the UK permanently.

Further information about UK visas

Global Talent Visa

Global Talent Visa is relevant if you will work in the UK as a leader or potential leader in one of the following fields (subject to the Endorsing Body criteria):

- academia or research
- arts and culture
- digital technology

Further information

- The UK government information on the [Global Talent Visa](#)
- Some useful [frequently asked questions](#)
- A [decision tree](#) to help you navigate the options

Visitor Visa

To be considered for a Visitor (Standard) visa, an individual must be undertaking approved activities allowed under this visa type, but the reason for visit must fall under one of the following:

- for leisure, e.g. on holiday or to see family and friends
- for business, or to take part in sports or creative events
- for another reason, e.g. to receive private medical treatment

In all cases the individual would be limited to the permitted activities set out in the Visitor Rules.

- Examples of what activities an individual can undertake:
 - take part in any of the business-related activities mentioned in the Visitor Rules
 - attend meetings, conferences, seminars, interviews

- receive training on work practices/techniques not available within their own country
- gather information and facts for a specific project which directly relates to their employment overseas
- share knowledge or advise on an international project that is being led from the UK, provided the visitor is not carrying out research in the UK. Certain Higher Education Institutions may be able to offer engagements where the individual is to undertake research or be taught about research - research tuition - where the criteria in [Appendix V](#) paragraph V9.2 of the immigration rules is met
- An individual cannot:
 - do paid or unpaid work
 - live in the UK for long periods of time through frequent visits
 - get public funds
 - marry or register a civil partnership, or give notice of marriage or civil partnership
 - undertake research unless in accordance with the permitted activities

Other visa options

Individuals may well have multiple options for a visa route – to support the activity or engagement to be carried out in the UK.

One visa option that may be relevant is the Skilled Worker Visa. Under this route, there are tradeable options that would be specific to each individual and the subject to condition of visa can switch, for example, from Skilled Worker to Global Talent Visa. Note that the host organisation must hold a Points-Based Licence for skilled workers and the individual and/or placement would need to meet specific criteria that enables the institute to issue a certificate of sponsorship in line with the Skilled Worker Visa rules.

Individuals may also have preserved rights under the EU Settled Status dependent on case-specific scenarios.

Individuals may well have other options for a visa route and the options detailed in this document are not exhaustive.

How can visa costs be covered?

On MSCA projects, the visa costs for the recruited researcher to take up the research position should be covered by the Research, Training and Networking (RTN) costs or the management and direct costs (Institutional costs), even if they are incurred prior to the date of recruitment. The NHS surcharge (immigration health surcharge) is also an eligible cost under this budget line.

Points to consider

- The Home Office are the sole decision makers on each visa application.
- Applicants should always check to see if a visa is required before travelling to the UK and ensure the correct visa is held to undertake the activity as individuals can be refused entry on arrival.
- Endorsement or sponsorship by a host, employer or overarching body is a requirement specific to some visa routes.
- Only one visa application can be made at a time.
- Immigration healthcare surcharge: You usually need to pay the healthcare surcharge if you are applying for a visa or immigration application (see section above for details).

- Your family may need to apply for visas and pay the healthcare surcharge too.
- Bear in mind how long it may take to get a visa to give yourself enough time to apply
- Think about how long you may need your visa to be. For example, the Global talent Visa can last up to 5 years.
- You can transfer to a Global Talent Visa through the UKRI endorsed funders route or renew your existing Global Talent Visa provided you have at least 12 months remaining on your contract or hosting agreement and met the eligibility criteria.
- Depending on your research area, you may also need to apply for an [Academic Technology Approval Scheme](#) (ATAS) certificate.

Where to next?

We recommend you speak to your coordinator or supervisor, your UK university HR department, and ask the Home Office for further guidance.

The [GREAT Talent campaign](#) also provides key information on working, living and moving to the UK.

UKRO in collaboration with the UKRI Global Mobility team and the Royal Society have held a series of webinars, [Navigating the UK Immigration Landscape](#), to help those involved in MSCA funded research to navigate the UK immigration landscape.

- [Navigating the UK Immigration Landscape: Supporting Short term Mobility to the UK](#)
- [Navigating the UK Immigration Landscape: MSCA Innovative Training Networks, Doctoral Networks and COFUND](#)
- [Navigating the UK Immigration Landscape: MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships](#)