

# Marie Curie Fellows Association



## Letter to Members

January–February 2009

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Dear MCFA Member,

Welcome to a new issue of the Letter to members with news concerning our Association!

*The MCFA board*

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## Life of the Association

### Happy new year!

Dear members and all readers of our Letter to Members,

I would like to wish you all Welcome to an exciting new year in the MCFA! All members, new and old, you should know that your contributions are extremely important to the life of the

MCFA. With your help, the Chair of the MCFA is now a member of the Advisory Board of the FP7 “People” programme, with great opportunities to change the structure of the programme to fit members needs.

Some of you are still in the middle of your exciting MC projects, others have finished years ago and have continued with careers in science

and research, or have moved into industry or politics. In every case, the MC project was an important and valuable opportunity to learn more about your particular field, a new country, a new institute or company, and to meet people from all over the world. To all of us, it is utterly important that the MC Fellowships are recognized for their importance. This can only happen if every single one of you use every possible opportunity to raise awareness about these great grants. You have bragging rights, use them! To the benefit of us all.

I would like to talk now about a few things to take place in the coming year. The Czech presidency will arrange a conference to discuss the structure of research in Europe. The MCFA is planning to contribute with workshops here, and you are extremely welcome to participate. Also, we have been invited to participate in ESOF2010, likewise a conference to discuss all issues related to science. Again, we would greatly appreciate your participation. Finally, we in the MCFA hope to be able to plan a workshop, only for MCFA members, during this year. For this to happen, we need volunteers, and that means you.

The Administrative Board has identified a number of positions that we would like to fill. These positions range from liaising with industry to PR management. I hope that you would like to take the opportunity to take on some of these tasks, they would greatly help to fulfil our wishes for a lively Association, while at the same time help you to gain valuable organizational experience. Remember, a whole scientific career contains much more than just science.

Most importantly, you should take a moment to consider the National Group of the country you are in. Do you know who is your NG Coordinator? Does your country have one? Please take some of your time out to participate in making all the National Groups a fun place to be. Check your social and career networking websites, we are present there too.

I would like to remind you all what an important year this is. In about half a year, the current Commission will be replaced with (probably) all new Commissioners. We generally agree in the MCFA that the current Commissioner responsible for Science and Research, Janez Potočnik, has been a great force to improve his area. In

this time, the yearly budget for FP7 Science and Research has been increased roughly by 50%. Although we in the MCFA appreciate the increase, we also know that the absolute budget is still very low compared to the agriculture and development budgets. We believe that a bright European future hinges on European science and research, and we want the next Commissioner to fight just as hard for increasing the European, as well as the National, science and research budgets throughout Europe, as the leaving Commissioner has.

With this, I would like to wish you all and the MCFA a prosperous new year. I am looking forward to working with the new Administrative and Advisory Boards, as with the National Group Coordinators.

Yours sincerely,

*Guggi Kofod, Chair of the MCFA*

## **Outcome of the Extraordinary General Meeting**

The Extraordinary General Assembly (EGA) was convened in accordance with the MCFA statute, because no quorum had been reached at the Annual General Assembly (AGA) in Potsdam on 15 November 2008. The EGA took place in Orsay, France, on 10 January 2009. The agenda for the EGA was the same as for the AGA as required by the statute. Prior to the EGA, a new online voting for the MCFA Administrative Board was arranged between 29 December 2008 and 9 January 2009 on the MCFA website. Additional voting was arranged on the changes of the MCFA Statute as proposed by the current Administrative Board. Thank you to all members who participated in the voting! The results of the voting were announced at the EGA. Fifty-seven MCFA members participated in the voting. The results of voting are provided below.

Person / Item	Yes	No	Abst.	Tot.
Discharge of the present board	44	2	11	57
Riccarda Caputo	34	6	17	57
Éric Buchlin	41	6	10	57
Maria Antonietta Buccheri	38	4	15	57
Esperança Manuel	31	5	21	57
Nusrat J.M. Sanghamitra	35	4	18	57
Guggi Kofod	40	4	13	57
Vanessa Diaz Zuccharini	40	5	12	57
Giovanna Avellis	37	5	15	57
Natalia Balcázar	40	6	11	57
Yegor Domanov	41	5	11	57
Statute change 1 (include new funding schemes)	54	3	0	57
Statute change 2 (include represented members in quorum)	56	1	0	57

Thus the new MCFA Administrative Board in 2009 will consist of 10 members listed above. We wish to welcome 3 new members of the board that will join this year: Dr. Riccarda Caputo (EMPA, Switzerland), Dr. Nusrat J.M. Sanghamitra (Leiden Institute of Physics, The Netherlands), and Esperança Manuel (France)!

The changes of the board composition and the MCFA statute have been submitted to Moniteur Belge for official publication.

### Change for the “student” membership fees

At the last General Meeting, given the difficulty to raise enough money for our activities, it has been decided to cancel the reduced rate for students, as student MCFA members are normally current fellows and the MCFA membership fee can be paid from the Marie Curie grant (see our website for details). As a result, students are now normally expected to pay the full rate of 40 euros. However, if you are a student and not a current Marie Curie fellow, you may still be eligible for the special rate of 20 euros: then please send us an e-mail at [treasurer@mariecurie.org](mailto:treasurer@mariecurie.org) with the reasons of your request.

*Éric Buchlin, treasurer*

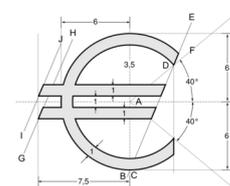
### Membership renewal 2009

We would like to thank all of you who already renewed their membership for 2009 and also the new Fellows who have recently joined the Association.

We would like to remind Fellows who have not paid the membership fee for 2009 to do it before 15 March. After this date all non-paying members will be considered “MCFA Affiliates”, with very limited access to the MCFA membership benefits.

Full membership benefits include access to the database of current and former Marie Curie Fellows (including contact details, professional profile, and contract data), access to MCFA discussion forum, access to internal documents (including administrative and financial reports, meeting minutes, collaboration documents). Furthermore, MCFA membership entitles you to vote at the Annual General Assembly and to otherwise actively participate in decision making, policy formulation, and contribute to MCFA publications. Full membership is also required in order to candidate for a position in the Administrative or Advisory Board.

Membership fee is payable either by international bank transfer or by credit card on our website (<http://mcfa.eu/site/memberArea/fees.php>). Please keep in mind that the MCFA membership is endorsed by the European Commission and the annual membership fee can be charged to the Marie Curie project (eligible participation costs).



If you are an Affiliate, we invite you to upgrade your status to Full Member. To do so, you only have to pay the fee for the current year. Full members have access to a number of membership benefits and are favoured by allocation of funds available to MCFA.

Finally, if you know any other Marie Curie Fellows in your institution, please invite them to join the MCFA.

Thank you for your support!

## MCFA Science Policy Group: call for contributions

We are re-organising the Science Policy Group of the MCFA. In this regard, Science Policy discussions will be developed according to different “themes” that will come out of the internal discussions of the board, advisory board, different working groups, feedback from Marie Curie fellows, etc. The coordination of the discussions will be done by the MCFA Science Policy Coordinator. The intention is that the Science Policy group will work throughout the year, with steady high-quality contributions producing papers and/or Science Policy documents. Calls for contributions to discussions are expected twice or 3 times a year, unless a particular event suggests a swift action.

Discussion sessions will be organised as follows:

- After a “theme” has been published for discussion in the Letter to Members, individuals will have 2 weeks (deadline will be announced clearly) to send an expression of interest to the board ([board@mariecurie.org](mailto:board@mariecurie.org)) with the Subject “[Science Policy Group] Name of topic”.
- After 2 weeks, the coordinator will contact individuals to set up a discussion area in the MCFA discussion Forum. Information about specifics will be given by e-mail.
- To start the discussion, the Science Policy coordinator will write a text in the dedicated discussion area with questions to be addressed, a draft paper to be discussed and/or a background document to read.
- Discussions will go on for a period of 6 weeks. Roles for editing and specific sections in the science policy paper will be decided on a case by case basis.
- By the end of the 6th week, a draft of the paper will be made available and sent out to the board and advisory board for revision and comments.
- The revision process will take up to 2 weeks.
- The total process, from publication of the theme to the final paper will take up to 8 weeks.

- Normal practice about authorship will apply and the coordinator will ensure that contributors are given due credit. In case of any queries or disputes regarding authorship, these will be dealt with internally and, if no agreement is reached, the matter will be passed on to the MCFA Board.

### Dissemination of Results:

- A summary of the paper will be published in the Letter to Members that month. The full paper will be made clearly available in the website as soon as possible, not later than 1 week after the final comments have been received.
- The paper will be sent to interested parties in Europe.

The first theme will be *The Two-Body Problem and the Likelihood of Dual Science Careers in Europe*, i.e., the difficulty for a couple of finding two scientific jobs in the same geographic location. The deadline for expressing your interest is 15 March.

*Vanessa Diaz-Zuccarini*

## Call for the MCFA advisory board

The main role of the Advisory Board is to give advice to the Administrative Board as well as to deal with specific tasks. Its action is of great value for the Association as the Administrative Board could not undertake such a broad range of tasks alone.

Last year the Administrative Board could rely on strong support by an Advisory Board of ten people, with varied backgrounds, ages and careers. They constantly helped us to reach concrete goals with their expertise or giving us advice or encouragement. We are grateful to them. You can find their names and profiles on our website: <http://mcfa.eu> > About us > Advisory board.

Fortunately for MCFA, the majority of these people will continue to be part of the Advisory Board. Nevertheless, the Association needs more people working on some specific topics. That’s why we publish a call for the following positions:

1. PR Associate: visibility of the MCFA needs to be increased. The PR Associate/s will assist the Administrative Board in the Public Relations of the MCFA. Among others,

his/her tasks will include: liaise with partners organisations and the media, write articles to promote the MCFA, make new contacts.

Profile: proactive, motivated and enthusiastic, communication skills are a must. Consistent, reliable.

2. Fund Raising Advisor/Campaigner: we are looking for an extremely motivated individual who will orient the board in fund raising campaigns for the MCFA. It is important to notice that this person will not necessarily carry on fund raising campaigns requiring external input, although a certain degree of self-confidence is required.

Profile: Motivated, experience in fund raising would be a plus but it is not necessary. Reliable, business-driven, like challenges, able to meet targets.

The life of the Association depends on the involvement of its members. *We warmly invite you to apply to the Advisory Board call.* Do not underestimate how important it is that we get YOUR support.

If you are interested in being member of the Advisory Board, even if you are not sure in which area you could work, send us your application (CV + short motivation e-mail) to [board@mariecurie.org](mailto:board@mariecurie.org). Deadline for applications is the 10th of March 2008.

We are looking forward to working with you!

## Careers, funding and networking opportunities

### Participate to a project on “Permanent Access to the Records of Science”

Digital media have become the dominant way in which we create, shape and exchange information. Government, businesses, research organisations and memory institutions as well as individuals have become completely dependent on digital information. This dependence on digital information presents us with a number of major risks because of the many unresolved challenges in the long-term management, access and preservation of this information.

There is a growing realisation that the answer to these challenges calls for coordinated approaches on both national and international level. Digital preservation is too big an issue for individual institutions or even sectors to address on their own. The required effort is simply not feasible and international exchange and collaboration are therefore essential.

The members of the [European Alliance for Permanent Access](#) aim to work together to preserve research data for future re-use. Members of the Alliance include science and research publishers through the participation of the [Inter-](#)

[national Association of Scientific Technical and Medical publishers](#), funders via the European Science Foundation, major national libraries and state archives, national preservation coalitions and major data producers such as CERN and ESA.

A number of Alliance partners have initiated a project, partly funded by the EU, entitled PARSE.Insight (<http://www.parse-insight.eu/>) which aims to gain insight into the requirements of researchers, data managers and funding agencies with regard to preserving research data. PARSE.Insight will help to shape the EU's preservation infrastructure, as part of the broader e-Research infrastructure, so that European citizens can continue to gain benefits from its digital resources, in all aspects of life.

Currently, the project is carrying out a survey on the preservation of digital research data in Europe. Everyone involved in scientific research — researchers, data managers, funding organisations, publishers, etc. — is encouraged to express their views through this survey: [https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=0A\\_2bp\\_2fFDSL\\_2bbyC\\_2bgx9bHF\\_2bQ\\_3d\\_3d](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=0A_2bp_2fFDSL_2bbyC_2bgx9bHF_2bQ_3d_3d). The research community as a whole will benefit from your cooperation!

Tom Kuipers, [tom.kuipers@kb.nl](mailto:tom.kuipers@kb.nl)

## The Speaker's Corner: Room for Improvement



Dear MCFA Members,

I spent the past two years as a postdoc at a Swedish University, funded by a Marie Curie Intra European fellowship. As I am preparing the final project report, I am reflecting on the impact the fellowship has had on my career. I would like to share some of my thoughts with you, without the intention to point fingers at the European Commission, but rather to draw attention to some shortcomings in the design of the Marie Curie fellowships.

I suppose we all agree that the goal of the individual Marie Curie fellowships is to promote the career of young researchers. But honestly, I was fairly disappointed by the whole experience. Based on the excellent reputation the Marie Curie fellowships have, I expected my postdoctoral term to be special in many regards: funding, training and networking opportunities. Let us start by talking about money because mobility is, despite all idealism, an expensive luxury.

In Sweden, basically all foreign postdocs receive a tax-free stipend from the Swedish government that provides health insurance but excludes postdocs from all other aspects of social security; correspondingly, the employer's contributions are very small. When I received the fellowship it looked as if my situation would improve. I would receive a full contract that provides the same benefits as to Swedish nationals, and the Marie Curie fellowship seemed to offer a couple of monetary rewards, such as a travel allowance or commuting benefits if your spouse lived in a different location. However, the employer is at liberty to adjust your income "according to local customs". What initially looked like generous personalized funding was funneled almost completely into Sweden's tax apparatus and the employer's contribution to social security and overhead costs. Taken together, I earned hardly more than without the fellowship and I had no direct access or insight into money issues because everything was administered by my supervisor. In practical terms, the Marie Curie fellowship helps greatly in finding a good postdoctoral position, because it provides the money.

Unfortunately, however, it provides its benefits almost exclusively to the supervisor, who gets to hire a postdoc "for free". After getting the postdoctoral position, there is no practical difference whether the salary comes from the supervisor or from the EU. The only sure way to allow these Marie Curie fellowships to focus on personal development is to put the career development portion of the funds directly in the hands of the postdoc who receives the fellowship. Under the current framework, with the funds managed only by the supervisor (who is invariably stressed and overworked), there is no direct motivation for the development money to be spent effectively.

The second issue that moves me is training and networking. It would certainly be a good idea to let Marie Curie fellows meet twice a year and to invite fellows to attend training workshops that improve skills that are not directly research related, such as leadership skills and career planning strategies. I wonder if the EC imagines that host institutions offer this kind of training or even have an interest in it? While it is nice to imagine that the principle investigators of Europe's premier academic labs are deeply involved in personal training, in fact it is usually the opposite that is true. Based on my experience, and what I hear anecdotally, the premier labs almost always have the least interest in the development of any individual researcher. You are really left to fend for yourself.

Most supervisors expect postdocs with several years of research experience to plan and manage their projects fairly independently, which is good and gives them the chance to develop leadership skills. However, I was constantly surprised by the tone of the documents coming from the EC because they implied that a postdoc is just somebody who is contracted by a Professor to carry out research. I stumbled over phrases like "consider the research you have been given to do" or "Have you been actively involved in the management of your research project". I think I am not exaggerating when I claim that most postdocs have developed the proposal on which basis they are funded mostly by themselves or with only a little help from the future supervisor. It is also ironic that the supervisor gets to evaluate the fellow's performance. Let's face it: what

the supervisor wants is the money, so why would he/she ever write a poor evaluation?

In Europe, postdocs have a fairly poor image with private companies because we are people who escape from the real world, which I guess refers to managing people and money. Apparently the EU does not assume postdocs are independently thinking adults either or capable of managing their own resources. I think the EC could do a lot to polish the image of European researchers by rewarding us with responsibility. But instead of helping young researchers into independence, the Commission supports the same old hierarchies that prevent fair competition in Europe: a senior scientist in charge of everything and a 10 year path to independence contingent on favors from the supervisor.

In conclusion, I am sad to say that the only

benefit of this fellowship is a single line in my CV and I truly hope people who read my CV know that the fellowship was actually hard to get.

*Anonymous* [name kept back]

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We welcome articles about your experience as a Fellow, good or bad: has your funding been taken away by someone else in the lab? Were the conditions of the contracts different than promised? Did you feel a lack of support from your lab or the EC management? Or on the contrary did everything go fine and the MC fellowship helped you start a successful career? More generally, we also welcome articles about your views on European Science policy. Please send an email to [office@mariecurie.org](mailto:office@mariecurie.org) (Subject line: "Speaker's corner") to be published in this section in the next Letter to Members.

## Publications

### Call for special feature articles on "Science Careers" in RESB

Reviews in Environmental Science and Bio/Technology (RESB) is a quarterly journal published by Springer. The editor in chief, Prof.Dr.ir. Piet Lens, is a Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowship and Marie Excellence Grant recipient. In collaboration with MCFA, RESB will soon start publishing a series of reports on "Science Careers". Each issue of the journal will contain in its guest editorial section an article written by a Marie Curie fellow, who will describe his/her career and research topic for the general public in 2 to 4 printed pages including pictures.

We invite MCFA members in the field of environmental sciences and biotechnology to submit an article: please send it to our e-mails below, with [office@mariecurie.org](mailto:office@mariecurie.org) in copy. This would not only be a valuable source of inspiration for the readers but also help develop our collaboration with RESB. Note that RESB does publish reviews only, not original research results. The deadline for submission is 15th of March 2009.

*Nusrat Sanghamitra*

[nusrat@physics.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:nusrat@physics.leidenuniv.nl)

*Philippe Zinck*

[philippe.zinck@ensc-lille.fr](mailto:philippe.zinck@ensc-lille.fr)

### Make your work known: call for abstracts to be published in the Letter to Members

According to our Statutes, one of the goals of MCFA is to give more visibility to Marie Curie Fellowships. In the past, this has been done by publishing scientific articles in the MCFA Annals (<http://www.mariecurie.org/annals/>), but given the evolutions of online publishing opportunities for fellows, discussions at the advisory and administrative Boards and at the General Meetings led to the idea of publishing abstracts in the MCFA Letter to Members, with links to the original articles.

We therefore invite MCFA fellows to submit a short abstract about the work they have done or initiated during their Marie Curie fellowship. The following format is required:

- Subject headings (very broad, e.g analytical chemistry, structural biology, etc...)
- MCFA fellow name, and reference to Marie Curie fellowship (type, and project name) during which the work was done or initiated
- Title

- Reference to published paper(s): Authors' first name and surname, journal, year, volume, page
- Link to electronic version of published paper (DOI-link if possible)
- Abstract (around 100 words, understandable for a broad public)

Please send your abstracts to Philippe Zinck and Riccarda Caputo: [philippe.zinck@ensc-lille.fr](mailto:philippe.zinck@ensc-lille.fr) and [riccarda.caputo@empa.ch](mailto:riccarda.caputo@empa.ch).

## Past meetings with MCFA participation

### French Presidency conference: Young Researchers in Europe

The aim of the conference, held in Rennes on 20-21 November, was to raise awareness among young researchers about the plans of the European Commission to create a more open and attractive European research area, designed to enhance researchers' careers and mobility. Right now only 3% of European researchers have worked in another European country for more than a short period. Identification of the main barriers to mobility remains a difficult task. A Strategy paper (see links below) was presented for the first time and details were highlighted during the conference.

The main themes were:

- opening up recruitment procedures to applications from abroad;
- meeting the social security protection and retirement needs of mobile researchers;
- establishing fair employment and working conditions;
- ensuring that researchers have the appropriate training and skills.

The conference was organized with a plenary session and various workshops focused on individual subthemes (see link to the program below). The conference was also an opportunity to meet and exchange views for comparing best practices and defining innovative proposals.

European Commissioner J. Potočnik gave his contribution through a video of his presentation. His main point was that there should be freedom of knowledge across Europe and free circulation of brain power. People should be allowed to dream and to realize their dreams.

The following issues were mentioned by several speakers:

- the need to create a welcoming environment for foreign researchers
- the use of or rather the creation of better tax benefits and other financial benefits for both host and scientist
- the need for coordination, not harmonization, of rules, legal systems and financial conditions across the EU
- case studies were presented from several countries and organizations (e.g., good practise from Norway): many described the intangible benefits of hosting scientists from another organization, and highlighted the value of bringing in their own networks and forming a basis for long-term relationships between Institutions

A plenary round-table was "Young researchers in Europe, which careers for tomorrow?", with:

- Irina Veretennicoff (Vrije Universiteit Brussel): as Chair she gave a brief introduction of the structure of the Round Table and she led the discussion and Q/A session afterwards. Speakers: Anne-Marie Kermarrec (INRIA Rennes): a young researcher from Rennes, who described how she lived and worked in the Netherlands and then in the UK and how she has used that experience in her current position as senior scientist at Rennes (including using her network to create international projects).
- Wei Shen (IFRI / ESSCA): a young researcher from China, who described how

he moved within Europe in 5 (!) countries. He shared his experiences as non-European scientist and what value this has added to his career (including insight in cultural differences).

- Frank Heemskerk (RIMS bvba): presented the experience of a scientific career of 15 years in 4 countries and the 11 years into industry, and now being a serial entrepreneur with global activities. He described how he sees the academia- industry gap and what he learned from this while crossing it. See attached powerpoint presentation for more detail.
- Dagmar Meyer (NCP mobility in Ireland): she gave an overview of her own experiences moving from Germany to France and UK (and now Ireland). She further elaborated as National Contact Point for Mobility issues on the (new) possibilities in the PEOPLE's part of the FP7 program. There is a whole range of financing instruments available.

For those who want to know more:

- The program of the Conference and the presentations can be found at <http://www.yre2008.eu/>
- The proposed new partnership for a Single Labour market in Europe for Researchers: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/802>
- The Mobility Portal: <http://ec.europa.eu/eracareers/>. There is also the Charter on Researchers under <http://ec.europa.eu/eracareers/europeancharter>
- And there is a booklet from the European Commission DG Research on Mobility of Researchers with 12 practical recommendations and outcomes of the various expert groups: publication identifier EUR 2253 or ISBN 92-79-03744-7, available via <http://publications.europa.eu/>

*Frank Heemskerk*

## News in Brief

### New organigram of DG Research

The EC Directorate General for Research has updated his organigram: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/research/pdf/organisation\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/research/pdf/organisation_en.pdf).

### From Science Careers

Please read these articles and others at <http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/> or click on the titles below (if you are reading the electronic version of this Letter to Members):

#### Stress, an Uninvited Lab Visitor

Job challenges are energizing and lead to satisfaction; stress is draining and demoralizing. Work-related stress is an insidious health hazard, especially for workers who, like scientists, take their work very seriously.

### Career Advantages of Collaboration

These days, the scientific value of collaboration is widely acknowledged, but the career advantages are rarely mentioned. However, scientific collaborations are some of the best and lowest cost opportunities for scientists to broaden their experiences, establish new professional connections, and cultivate job opportunities.

### A New Consulting Experience for Doctoral Students in France

Still in its early days, the so-called doctorants-conseil program, launched by the French government, allows PhD students to sell their skills to non-academic sectors and expand their career opportunities.

## Upcoming Events

### World Biotech Youth Forum

The Young European Biotech Network (YEBN) is organizing the World Biotech Youth Forum in Barcelona on 12 and 13 September 2009, hosted by the 14th European Congress on BioTechnol-

ogy (<http://www.ecb14.eu/>). The program includes discussions on educational systems, career development, and science in society. More information can be obtained from YEBN:

<http://www.yebn.org/>.

Please feel free to forward this Letter to Members to your colleagues and friends, even if they are not Marie Curie Fellows!

We also remind you that you are encouraged to use the MCFA flyers, available from the Internal Documents: <http://mcfa.eu/site/memberArea/internalDocuments.php>.

*The MCFA Board*