

Marie Curie Fellows Association



Letter to Members

November-December 2009

Dear MCFA Member,

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

On this special issue, we would like to wish you a bright and successful 2010 with rewarded work and wise decisions.

The MCFA board

Contents

Life of the Association	2
MCFA General meeting and Career workshop.....	2
Outcome of the General Assembly in Paris.....	5
Second General Assembly in Brussels	5
Update on the MCFA website.....	6
Careers, funding, and networking opportunities	6
Research policy: Mobility	7
The Speaker's Corner	8
Upcoming events	8
News in Brief.....	9

Life of the Association

MCFA General meeting and Career workshop

Paris 27- 29 November 09

The MCFA was glad to have the participants' heartening feedback about the MCFA Career workshop held in Paris the 28th and the 29th of November. The workshop was about Career boosting and advice seeking and was enriched by the contribution of outstanding speakers who interacted with the eager participants.



The day after a get-together dinner and the

visit of the Marie Curie Museum, the workshop talked over the following arguments:

Career Plan: How to get where you want?

The workshop opened with three talks by speakers who exposed how their careers had developed so far. All speakers had worked in at least three countries and all touched on the challenge of the combination of dual careers with mobility, which appeared to be a common problem for Marie Curie Fellows and mobile researchers. Eventually, mobility plays a positive role in a scientist's life however at a certain point, one yearns for stability and balance.

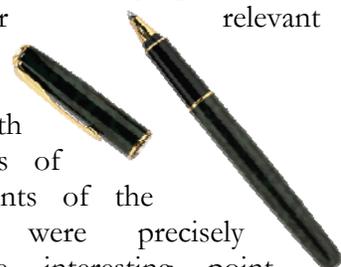
• Your selling points: How to identify your skills and communicate them?

Natalia Balcázar explained how it is possible to take responsibility for your own career by being more self aware. It is important to know your skills, tendencies and what you really want, so that you can communicate well with other people. Natalia argued that our skills, character and competencies are normally greater than our formal qualifications. As many of the organizational and leadership skills are formed outside of the formal education system, Natalia advised on how to evaluate and communicate these skills to identify strengths and weaknesses, where the latter is nothing but a chance to see where we must improve and collaborate with someone who can boost our performance. Natalia prepared a series of detailed interactive questionnaires concerning self evaluation with regard to social interaction, flexibility, communication, teamwork, response to criticism, leadership, motivation and organization.

• CV writing and interview techniques

Katrina Gray from the careers service of the University of Glasgow presented two separate lectures of career advice. The first was about CV writing techniques and the second about interview appointments.

Gray described the importance of content, layout and style in creating a CV and cover letter whose purpose is to market your relevant skills and experience backed up with evidence. Types of CV and contents of the cover letter were precisely discussed. One interesting point



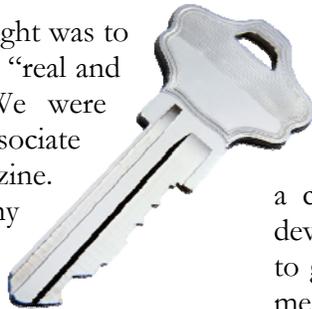
Katrina raised was to address the application to a real person to land on his desk soliciting some attention.

In her second talk, Gray described how to effectively prepare for and market yourself at an interview. An interview should be a two-way process: you are being assessed for suitability while you also check if you really want the position in its frame and employer packages. A basic attitude you must have is not to try too hard to impress: be yourself, be honest and be positive. Listen carefully, seek clarification if necessary and take a moment to consider your answer.

Katrina's and Natalia's slides are available for download from the [MCFA website](#) in Member Area -> Internal Documents.

• **Boost your CV: How to publish a scientific article?**

An interesting highlight was to meet and get insight from a “real and live” journal editor, We were joined by Maria Cruz, an associate editor for Science magazine. While the dream of many young scientists is to publish an article in either Science or Nature, Cruz disclosed the reality that around 70% of the submitted papers are rejected straightaway without further consideration while the rest are checked out by the reviewers or by the editorial board. Cruz clarified that Science accepts papers based on their perceived potential for scientific impact. Obviously, it could be argued that most papers rejected by Science proceed to be published in the best niche journals and accrue a decent amount of citations. Bias in scientific publishing against smaller institutes or younger researchers from outside the scientific clique of elderly gentlemen was also a subject raised by the audience. The selection of reviewers was



queried and Cruz commented that it makes the best impression to select the strongest possible reviewers. The argument of double blind peer reviewing was brought up and disproved by the associate editor: the reviewers mostly can tell anyway the source and authors of the work from instrumentation and references. The dark arts of the research world dictate that a young researcher must fight to corner his research niche and build his network of colleagues, collaborators, acolytes and enemies in the usual way.

• **Marie Curie Fellows – How to develop our careers?**

Practical ways that we can support our own careers:

- MCFA: The MCFA does a pretty good job despite its limited resources and continual membership turnover. We have diverse backgrounds and research directions, the MCFA can give its fellows, at best, certain pointers, such as the listing of workshops and conferences that take place that have a career aspect. Maybe the best way to develop your career through the MCFA is to get involved: attend the annual general meeting, become a member of the administrative board, organise a national group meeting, write an article for the “Letter to Members” or rewrite the Welcome Pack for your country. Being an active member can reduce your isolation and open your mind to other possibilities.
- The European Commission (EC): The most direct way the EC addresses our careers is the payment of the career exploratory grant at the end of the first year of the Marie Curie Fellowship. More significantly, the Marie Curie Reintegration Grant (ERG) is exclusively open to Marie Curie fellows and although it is of relatively low monetary value it gives the fellow power to negotiate with

prospective employers – it shows that the fellow is concerned with having a research career and allows him/her to set his/her own research direction. Unfortunately, Mike Rogers, from the Marie Curie Unit of DG research hinted that this grant may be discontinued. This is a topic where the MCFA can lobby to protect the main instrument with which the



European Commission exclusively empowers the careers of Marie Curie fellows. This grant supports the fellow at the critical point when he/she is at the end of his/her fellowship. At this stage the researcher may experience instability, disaffection and isolation: he/she may not speak the language of the host country to a sufficiently good standard to perform well at interview there, the host country may have political/cultural barriers to employing foreign researchers in more conventional (permanent) positions or the researcher may simply be too distant from his country of origin to be able to easily attend interviews there. If this grant is to be discontinued, the MCFA must campaign to contribute to the design of a successor program. Brian Cahill is a recipient of this grant: “Its personal value to me is a multiple of its monetary value. It forced me to consider my own situation and communicate this clearly in written form not only to the EC or to the proposal reviewers but more significantly to my future employer.”

Finally, [Euraxess](#) was created to facilitate international mobility of researchers and contains job listings and information for mobile researchers.

- Own resources: Fellows may have worked in multiple countries and may have had many different colleagues and bosses. From this, surely a career seeker still in touch with people who are sympathetic and know his/her work, personality, capabilities and potentials and who although may not have a job to give may be able to spare time on the phone for advice, fine-tuned to the personal circumstances. “I have a number of such people who keep me grounded”, says Brian. “As a Marie Curie fellow, you can use your international networks in direct practical ways. In many EU project calls, it is necessary to build an intra-European network of collaborating groups: with your experience of the combination of mobility and research, your international personal networks, your command of multiple languages and your understanding of cultural differences, you become particularly suited to build and manage such partnerships.”

Our long-term career problems are rarely the exclusive consequence of being Marie Curie fellows, but rather the problems of being young mobile researchers in general. We are



experienced researchers or aim to be: we take responsibility for our own decisions in the long run. In addition to one’s research backgrounds, soft skills play a decisive role in career advancement. Developing our own leadership, organisational and negotiation skills becomes critical as our careers progress hand in hand with responsibility.

Based on report by Brian Cahill

Outcome of the General Assembly in Paris

The Annual General Assembly of the MCFA was held on the 29 November 2009, the following day after the Career workshop. The agenda included the presentation of the MCFA activity and financial reports, discharge of the present Administrative Board, election of the new Board and approval of the proposals for the changes of the MCFA statute. The annual reports are available in the member area on the MCFA website (<http://mcfa.eu/> > Members > Member area > Internal documents). Following the presentation of the reports and the voting the discussion of the planned MCFA activities in the year 2010 followed.

The table below summarizes the results of the voting held before and at the Annual General Assembly.

	yes	no	abstain
discharge of the board 2009	54	3	10
Avellis	45	6	16
Balcázar	58	2	7
Buccheri	56	2	9
Buchlin	56	4	7
Domanov	54	6	7
Gromadzki	43	6	18
Kiss	45	8	14
Kofod	54	3	10
Manuel	48	5	14
Marina	38	9	20
O'Shea	44	5	18
Perez-Cruz	50	5	12
Sanghamitra	40	6	21
Zimmerman	46	9	12
statute change 1	61	1	5
statute change 2	61	1	5
procuration	64	1	2

The online voting was arranged for full MCFA members who did not plan to attend the AGA in Paris. Two alternative voting tools were offered: Helios voting system (secure but more demanding technically) and Google Forms (simpler alternative). The participants of the AGA in Paris voted on spot.

Total number of full members of the MCFA with voting rights: 232
 Number of members voting online: 39
 Number of members voting on spot: 28.

The results show that all the candidates for the new board and all proposals are supported by the majority of the MCFA members participating in the vote.

The quorum requirement for the AGA is 50 members to be physically present at the meeting. Therefore, no quorum has been reached this year, once again, and the Extraordinary General Assembly (EGA) will be convened in accordance with the MCFA statute to confirm the results.

Second General Assembly in Brussels

The second General Assembly will be held at the office of the notary Olivier Brouwers, Avenue de la Couronne 145, 1050 Ixelles, Belgium, on 21 January 2010 at 14:00. This second GA has the same agenda as the first one: discharge of the current Administrative Board, election of a new Board, confirmation of the changes of Statutes as voted at the 2008 GAs. This GA is required by our Statutes, as the first GA did not reach the quorum; however, members are welcome to attend. Please contact us at office@mariecurie.org for more information.

Update on the MCFA website

Beginning of December we had a problem on the "old website" <http://www.mariecurie.org/>, which includes services which have still not been transferred to <http://mcfa.eu/>, like the discussion forum. This website had been suspended by our provider. After some effort we managed to suppress the cause of the suspension, and our account has been reactivated.

For the longer term, we are still looking for a new webmaster. The task is quite complex and we are looking for a professional who can handle it properly. We have written a small document describing our needs, which include the transfer of the website to an open source content management system, the link to the database of members and to the payment system, the discussion forum... If you know someone who could work for us, please write to office@mariecurie.org, and we'll send you this document.

Careers, funding, and networking opportunities

Marie Curie Reintegration grants (FP7-PEOPLE-2010-RG):

First cut-off date: 09 March 2010.

- [Marie Curie European Reintegration Grants](#) (ERG) provide financial assistance to experienced researchers from Member States or Associated countries, who are looking for long-term employment in research after they have concluded their training within another Marie Curie Action either under the 6th or the 7th Framework Programme. The duration of these grants is between 2 and 3 years.

- [Marie Curie International Reintegration Grants](#) (IRG) provide financial assistance to researchers who wish to return and find a job in Europe after they have worked in research in a third country for at least three years. The duration of these grants is between 2 and 4 years.

EMBO long-term fellowship:

[The EMBO Long-Term Fellowships](#) are awarded for a period of up to two years and support post-doctoral research visits to laboratories throughout Europe and the world. Applications are only

considered from candidates with a maximum of three years postdoctoral experience. Next deadline is the 15th of February 2010.

Call for research projects within the programme "Retour Post-Doctorants" from the French Research Agency (ANR)

1. The aim

To encourage the return to France of young excellent researchers who did a postdoctoral stay abroad of at least one year before the end of the call. The call is open to all disciplines of research (including Social Sciences and Humanities Research).

2. Eligibility

The call is not only open to French researchers, who defended their doctoral thesis in France or abroad, but also to other nationalities researchers who defended their doctoral thesis in France. This program gives them the opportunity to establish a small team (one PhD and one post-doc) for a project up to three

years. This project must be innovative and the host institution should preferably be different from where they performed their PhD thesis.

3. Financial modalities

Funding for projects is up to 700 000 euros. It includes the salary of the laureate (3 200 euros gross per month subtracted from the allocation provided by the ANR), the salary costs for staff, equipments and travel.

4. Important notifications

The programme is open to researchers with a non-statutory position at the end of the call. However if after the end of the call they become statutory, their salary will be deducted from the final allocation provided by the ANR. Therefore they can as well register for recruitment competitions during the course of their project.

In 2009, this call for proposals considered eligible only the applicants who defended their PhD thesis within a period not exceeding three years before the end of the call. But this period will probably be extended in the 2010 session of this call.

5. Timetable

-Call Launch in the ANR [website](#): January 15th 2010

-Deadline for online submission: March 9th 2010

-Publication of the funding decision : July 2nd 2010

6. Contact

This call is managed by Miss Ferial KANDIL at the ANR. (feriel.kandil@agencerecherche.fr).

Research policy: Mobility

Your Rights

Does your mobility consist of stepping in several European countries?

We include here the link of [provisions](#) whose purpose is merely to prevent you from losing part or all of your social security rights when you move from one Member State to another.

Necessity and Challenges

Mobility is important not only for the career development of researchers, but also for scientific and economic performance as a whole. Researcher mobility has been low in many Member States and there are several obstacles for

mobility especially for young researchers. At the same time Europe is facing increasing competition over a highly educated workforce. As a response, the EU and the Member States have introduced several measures to support the mobility of researchers. Despite these efforts the progress has remained slow and further effort is still needed to facilitate mobility in particular of young researchers. This recently



launched [report](#) by the ITRE frames the necessity and challenges of Cross-Border Mobility of Young Researchers.

Costs of Mobility

Ten years after the launched concept of a European Research Area that aimed to enhance the free movement of researchers, knowledge and technology in Europe, this [article](#) tickles the bureaucratic, financial and career Costs of Mobility.



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

The Speaker's Corner

A Survey

The European Commission has launched a [survey](#) about the Mobility of Scientists, Researchers and Development Engineers in Europe.

We encourage you to participate in this survey to contribute to better understand the factors inhibiting or facilitating the mobility of this group of professionals in order to develop better targeted policies in support of cross border job changes.

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 (Subject line: "Speaker's corner") to be published in this section in the next Letter to Members.

Upcoming events

[ESOF2010](#)

The Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF) 2010 will be held in Torino, 2-7 July 2010. At the meeting leading scientists, researchers, young researchers, business people, entrepreneurs and innovators, policy makers, science and technology communicators and the general public from all over the world discuss new discoveries and debate the direction that

research is taking in the sciences, humanities and social sciences. The MCFA is glad to announce that 2 of its proposals for sessions have been accepted for ESOF 2010.

Registration will open on 15 January 2010.



News in Brief

Still too Few Women in Science in Europe

Women represent only 30% of European researchers and only 18% of full professors, according to the latest edition of the "[She Figures](#)", a survey on Statistics and Indicators on Gender Equality in Science published by the European Commission.

Even if the number of female researchers is growing faster than that of men and despite an increase in the proportion of female PhDs, the under-representation of women in scientific disciplines and careers remains a serious challenge in Europe. The publication of the "She Figures 2009" coincides with the 10th anniversary of the Helsinki Group on Women in Science, through which the EU Member States and the European Commission worked together to address gender inequalities in science.

Europe boosts budgets of national fellowship programmes

Transnational mobility opens up new horizons for researchers. The attractiveness of Europe for the best researchers and their career development has become a major concern for European competitiveness.

The Marie Curie [COFUND](#) action offers additional funding to existing or new regional and national fellowship programmes for research training and career development. Applicants should be public or private bodies that are responsible for funding and managing fellowships or research training programmes for experienced and advanced researchers. They may be ministries, research academies or agencies,

international organisations or other public or private bodies with a public mission.

COFUND is a turning point in the Marie Curie Actions as the implementation of the fellowship programmes is not done directly by the Commission but by actors of the Member States and Associated Countries. This new way of funding will substantially increase the number of international training opportunities for researchers in Europe and will contribute towards a Europe more attractive to researchers.

European Research Area Conference, 'Working together to strengthen research in Europe'

The [European Research Area Conference](#) was held in Brussels from October 21 to 23, 2009 with the aim to contribute to the development of key ERA policy initiatives as well as other areas of the ERA policy agenda under development or under consideration such as specialization, research policy in the post 2010 strategy, etc. The conference focused widely on all the main European and national policy developments to build the ERA and covered a wide variety of topics, including joint programming, knowledge transfer, infrastructures and international cooperation – all of which are expected to feed into the further development of ERA policy. A summary of the conclusions of each session can be downloaded from the website of the conference.

The role of community research policy in the knowledge-based economy (Expert Group Report)

The Expert Group chaired by Prof. Luc Soete



published their [report](#) providing recommendations on the future of Community research policy in the post-2010 period based on an assessment of the development of the knowledge-based economy in Europe and globally, elaborating rationales for research policy interventions.

[Major EU achievements in science and research 2004-2009](#) If you are interested in learning more about how your – or any other – country has benefited from European research during this period, you can download a short brochure summarizing EU achievements, participation in FP6 and FP7 and major success stories in various key fields. The brochures are in the language(s) of the country and also in English.

From Science Careers

[The Evolving Postdoctoral Experience](#)

Science has gotten bigger in the past decade. There are more scientists doing research and more competition for funding, jobs, and journal space. Projects have become larger in scale, often requiring the collaboration of several groups. Techniques are more powerful, generating massive amounts of data. There are also more career options for researchers to pursue. How have these changes affected the postdoctoral research experience? Postdoc supervisors share their view.



[Returning to Science](#)

Five female researchers share their experiences of juggling a science career

and personal and family obligations and their stories about returning to science after a couple of years off.

[Science Careers in Eastern Europe](#)

Science Careers examines how science has fared in Eastern Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall:

- [After the Fall of the Wall: Science Careers in Eastern Europe](#)

After an initial exodus of their young scientists, Eastern European countries are seeing returns on a world without walls.

- [More Opportunities for International Collaborations in Eastern Europe](#)

Eastern European scientists have many opportunities to benefit from international collaborations at home.

- [On Going Home: Succeeding in Science in Eastern Europe](#)

Three early-career scientists discuss returning to their native countries after spending time abroad.

- [Science Training and Collaboration in Eastern Europe: Resources](#)

These programs help researchers from Eastern Europe get training or experience abroad or bring researchers from elsewhere to the region.

[Mind Matters: In Defense of Downtime](#)

A lot of people assume that the key to productivity is hard work, and of course it is essential. But there are limits to how much work is useful. Research suggests that working harder and longer doesn't necessarily mean getting more done.

[Science Careers Editors' Best of 2009](#)

Science Careers editors selected the articles they thought best described 2009.

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

This Letter is edited by the Association des Boursiers Marie Curie a.i.s.b.l. (Marie Curie Fellows Association), <http://mcfa.eu/>. Editors: Anett Kiss (anett.z.kiss@plantphys.umu.se) and Samer Zaky (samer.zaky@unige.it) Director of publication: G. Kofod. Please send requests about articles in this Letter and submissions for the next Letter to Members to office@mariecurie.org.