



### Editorial

## Post-docs

Post-docs are in the news: last September a special report in Science magazine examined "The World of Post-docs" in the US, Europe and Japan. In July the London-based Institute of Physics published the findings of a detailed survey on "The Career Pathways of Physics Post-docs"; about a year ago another survey, jointly commissioned by Nature and the European Science Foundation, revealed the working conditions of young researchers in eight European countries.

This shows that there is a growing recognition within the scientific community of the importance of evaluating the training, working conditions, and career prospects of post-docs. Are post-docs involved in an important phase of career development and skills acquisition? Is the post-doctoral system a key mechanism for the transfer of knowledge among universities and between academia and industry? And crucially for young scientists themselves: What are the final career destinations of post-graduates and post-docs in today's tight academic job market? By tracking the career pathways of Marie Curie fellows, the MCFA can play an important role in providing the scientific community with hard data and facts related to these questions, at a European level and across many scientific disciplines.

*Maziar Nekovee, Editor*

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### Reports from the MCFA Board

## MCFA Participates in Major Scientific Debates

by Laure Ledoux and Christine Heller

During the months of June and July, we participated in three major events with the broad theme of science and society; our purpose was to further develop the scientific and international dimension of the MCFA, while focusing on increasing the reputation of Marie Curie fellowships. This article summarises the main points of our participation in each conference, before concluding on the impact this type of activity can have on the image of the Association. For further details about each event, we refer the reader to the Web sites included below.

### Salzburg Seminar session

The Salzburg Seminar was created in 1947 by three Harvard students, as a summer seminar in Europe, to bring together students from the war-ravaged continent in an effort to renew intellectual dialogue. Since then, it has evolved into an extraordinary centre for intellectual exchange that commands the attention of leaders from around the world. A central conviction in all of the activities of the Seminar is "that individuals throughout the world can make a difference in their institutions, their communities and their societies". The Salzburg Seminar has a growing alumni network of around 20,000 Fellows that extends across the globe.

The free interchange of ideas is achieved through a multifaceted program, whose series of core sessions forms its basis. The core sessions generally bring together fifty-five to sixty mid-career professionals from around the world; the participants, selected through a competitive process, are drawn from the public and private sectors,

non-governmental organisations and academic and research institutions, and they work with a distinguished, international faculty for one week. A few sessions, which are particularly relevant to the MCFA, have been centred on Europe, its enlargement and consolidation as well as the international impact of European Monetary Union.

The session on Scientific Development and the Democratic Process, June 16-23, 1999, was the first one related to science; its aim was to consider the intricate relationship between science and society. Following six plenary lectures, covering the broad issue of science and democracy, the participants were divided into four working groups on education, research priorities, economic development, and the link between science and democracy. One of the most interesting conclusions for the MCFA is the crucial role that scientific organisations, such as the MCFA, are likely to play in the future; networking and exchange of information and knowledge will be important to maintain flexible connections. Other conclusions included the opportunities for change through the training of young scientists and the need for increased flexibility and creativity in institutions.

### The World Conference on Science *Science for the 21st Century: A New Commitment*

This week-long event, probably the largest that the MCFA has participated in, was jointly organised by UNESCO and the International Council for Science, in Budapest, in June 1999. The International Forum for Young Scientists was

also organised, as a satellite event, a few days before the conference. Representatives of the MCFA participated in both events.

The World Conference attracted 2,000 international participants including scientists, national delegations from UN agencies, representatives from Inter-Governmental Organisations and selected Non-Governmental Organisations, private foundations, industries and mass-media establishments, to discuss the challenges to be faced by science in the 21st Century.

Although we participated in many of the debates raised in the conference, it was with the group of Young Scientists that we were the most active. This group distributed a statement resulting from the International Forum to national delegations, and met with the Director-General of UNESCO on two occasions: (1) to present the Young Scientists statement, and (2) to propose concrete steps for a follow-up to the conference. The establishment of the International Forum for Young Scientists (IFYS) as a permanent structure, supported by UNESCO, was petitioned. Young Scientists were encouraged to apply for UNESCO funding to create this Network and further steps have been taken in this direction. It was also suggested that the MCFA apply for a UNESCO medal.

The MCFA was widely mentioned as a very active Association, and reported as leading the establishment of the IFYS Network, which

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was one of the few concrete outcomes of the conference (see <http://helix.nature.com/wcs/2diary/30-2c.html>).

## Women and Science: *Networking the Networks*

The MCFA participated in this two-day event in Brussels, in July, along with representatives from 69 networks for Women in Science. The meeting had two objectives:

- to establish links with networks of women scientists in order to increase their participation in the Fifth Framework Programme
- to find ways to sustain and optimise the efficiency of networking

Participants at the conference produced a *Declaration of Networks Active in Europe* after four parallel workshops on the rationale for, and the means of, networking, the link between women scientists and gender specialists, and the value brought by a European dimension.

Gender equality is an important current debate in the scientific community. It is of interest to many MCFA members, in light of the European Commission's objective to increase the participation of

women in Marie Curie fellowships to 40%.

Participation in the conference enabled the Association to promote MC fellowships and to further develop its networking opportunities. Mutually beneficial links were established with other associations, for example with the Association for Women in Science (AWIS) and the International University for Women (IFU). The need for more statistics on gender issues, at all levels, was reported in several sessions. The MCFA database of members was identified as a rich resource and could, in the future, provide information and feedback about the difficulties encountered by women scientists, in the context of mobility of researchers.

Thanks to the international reputation of many of the invited speakers and the professional status of the majority of participants, these events were both intellectually challenging and an excellent networking opportunity for the MCFA. In each of these events, an MCFA presentation and/or an information stand promoted the Association and numerous leaflets were distributed amongst the participants.

The MCFA is now increasingly recognised in the international scientific community as an interdisciplinary association of European researchers becoming more visible in major, current, scientific debates. At present, it is mostly known as an association of young scientists given that the majority of fellows are still in the early stages of their careers; in time, this image is expected to evolve as the MCFA represents fellows at all stages of their careers.

More information on these events can be found on:

### Salzburg Seminar:

<http://www.salsem.ac.at/>  
<http://www.salsem.ac.at/libarch/sslislist.htm>

### World Conference on Science:

<http://www.wcs.budapest.hu/>  
<http://helix.nature.com/wcs/links.html>  
<http://www.cfd.nl/science/news/>

### International Forum for Young Scientists:

<http://www.phd.hu/ifys.html>

### Women and Science:

[http://www.cordis.lu/improving/src/women\\_net.htm](http://www.cordis.lu/improving/src/women_net.htm)

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(Chair of the MCFA) L.Ledoux@uea.ac.uk carried out her Marie Curie fellowship in the Environment Department, at the University of York where she developed a hydrological economic model of water management in a Mediterranean wetland. She now holds a research post at the Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment at the University of East Anglia, working primarily on biodiversity and the interface of science, economics and policy.

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## Reports from the MCFA Board

# A Visit to the "Virtual" Association

by Jörg Heber

The Marie Curie Fellowship Association was founded in 1997. Two years later there are more than 1,800 international members, lively national groups and committees with, as this newsletter shows, lots of activities.

Imagine for a moment that the Association had been founded thirty years earlier in 1967. How would it have been then, without modern tools of communication? No e-mails; no WWW; the entire Internet was just about to be developed as a military communication project. The fax machine had not yet been

invented and international communication between scientists relied mostly on letters that took days or weeks to arrive. Nevertheless, 30 years ago in 1969, Mankind realised a bold vision and sent two astronauts to the surface of the moon, without any knowledge of these electronic tools; in spaceships with on-board computers only as powerful as modern mobile phones.

At that time, our vision of setting up an international association of young scientists, would have been impossible to realise

in such a short time. It would hardly even have been possible just five years ago so, in that respect, the MCFA is a child of our times. We extensively use the most modern Internet communication tools at the very roots of our activities.

However, just using these modern tools is not enough, as we often do not know how to use them most efficiently. What we need is a good information management strategy to deal with our electronic tools. This strategy has to consider which tools we use, how they are used and what gets published by them, and all this in relation to the users of our information services – current and alumni fellows, alumni, the scientific world, industry, governments, media, the general public – and their expectations of the MCFA.

The users are the most important aspect of any information

strategy. They are the people we interact with, they are the people we exist for: whether it is our members, or the general public who wants to be informed about our activities, and how we spend the money. All the information we present has to consider the user it is designed for, in order to provide the best information in the right place. Of course, this requires a variety of quality considerations, such as: including regular updates of the information provided, accuracy and completeness of the information, and rapid feedback, to name only a few. Very important here, is efficient, immediate communication through the right channels.

The tools we currently use, as these channels, have been designed for optimum communication and delivery of information to our users. They are e-mails, mailing lists, Web pages (including on-line members area and

databases) and the discussion forum. These tools should have a minimum of overlap with respect to the tasks they are designed for. Public discussion takes place only on our mailing lists, whereas public information is provided by our World Wide Web pages; for communication restricted to our members we have the discussion forum and so on.

These elements of our information management, as outlined here, have one ultimate goal: to serve the MCFA and its representative. The MCFA information strategy to create a better, more efficient structure that helps us to achieve the aims of our Association. After all, we do not want to end up as an entirely virtual association but

as a strong network of European scientists, based on virtues rather than virtuality. In that respect the purpose of the MCFA information strategy is to provide a guideline and support and for all those involved with the MCFA, our members and users.

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## Reports from the MCFA Board

### Developing partnerships

By Marco Valentini and Jennifer McClarey

The MCFA is currently engaged in creating and developing partnerships with a small number of European companies at the forefront of scientific research and development. This was already envisaged at the foundation stage of the MCFA as a mean to establish links with the world of industry. In addition, acquiring substantial sponsorship funds, starting from the second year of the Association's activities is a term of the contract between the MCFA and the EC.

These new partnerships will provide the MCFA with the necessary funding to carry out its activities and to strengthen the links between academia and industry. They will enable the MCFA to fulfil its aim to establish an effective interface between MC fellows and the world of research and industry; the partner's image will reflect the MCFA's standards of scientific excellence, innovation and ethical integrity.

A contract was signed in May 1999 with a small consultancy firm in Brussels; its mission is to

find suitable sponsors for the Association. The appointment of an external consultancy company was motivated by the need for a professional, continuous, coherent and organic approach to sponsorship. Despite the personal initiative and commitment of individual MCFA members, a successful campaign could not be guaranteed by individuals who were available only on a part-time basis.

Our consultant, Ave & Partners, also acts on behalf of other prestigious and well-known clients in Belgium including Médecins sans Frontières, two Brussels Universities, the Brussels Opera House, Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, Fédération Royale Belge de Tennis, the Brussels Millennium Celebrations. This is a very positive relationship for the MCFA as this client list includes a range of important Belgian-based scientific, cultural and sporting organisations. Ave & Partners liaise with the Board through the Secretariat.

International companies engaged in high-quality, innovative, scientific

and technological research and development are among the most suitable partners for the MCFA as their activities reflect the Association's commitment to scientific and technological innovation and excellence. Since the MCFA image will be linked to, and conditioned by the partner's image it has been agreed that the scientific, technical or commercial partner's image has to be of highest professional and ethical standard; it has been decided to exclude *a priori* from the range of possible partners, those companies whose activities are clearly against consumer health and safety.

Ave & Partners' strategy is based on finding a number of Gold, Silver and Bronze sponsors, attracting each year, for the next 3 years, 3 Gold sponsors, 6 Silver sponsors and an unspecified number of Bronze sponsors. The goal for the first year is to find a Gold sponsor from the chemical and pharmaceutical industries and the third from either the food, telecommunications or energy sectors of industry.

The sponsors will be able to choose to fund a specific activity of the MCFA such as a scientific meeting, the Annual General Meeting, publications etc. or to be an overall contributor to the Association's running costs. The

Bronze sponsors will represent small companies which would like to support the Association but do not have the financial resources to act as a main sponsor, or they will offer services to the MCFA.

The level of interest from companies has been high and we are now visiting potential partners with the director and researcher of Ave & Partners. Some companies are keen to sponsor major scientific symposia in collaboration with the MCFA and we intend to give a regular update in the forthcoming issues of the newsletter.

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## MCFA local groups

### Report of the First National Co-ordinators Meeting

By Cord Hockemeyer

The first MCFA National Co-ordinators' meeting took place in London during a sunny June weekend with 27 participants, including 5 Board members, from 13 countries. Winfried Meining planned and organized the meeting and Oliver Schwickerath reserved a wonderful meeting place at The London Goodenough Trust.

Laure Ledoux gave a short overview of the Board's activities and the workshop, which was organised into the following four sessions, got under way:

- National Groups: Current States
- What are the Benefits of Membership of the MCFA?
- External Relations

## • National-International Interfaces and Responsibilities

The complete minutes of the workshop can be found at: [http://www.mariecurie.org/src/asoc/Loc\\_Grp/london-m.html](http://www.mariecurie.org/src/asoc/Loc_Grp/london-m.html)

This is my personal summary of the workshop, from a result-oriented point of view.

The traditional tasks of the national groups, i.e. questions regarding contracts, taxation, and social charges, or support for new fellows, are becoming less significant as Marie Curie fellowships become more established; the problems which still exist should be further reduced with the development of Welcome Packs for new fellows. We agreed to finish a first draft in early August to circulate for comments among the national groups.

A central issue of the workshop was the question of identity of the MCFA and – strongly connected to this question – the problem of motivating fellows to engage in the MCFA and its activities. Olaf Böttger raised three questions in his introduction to the External Relations session which focused on this problem :

Who are you ?  
Where are you going, i.e. what are your goals?  
What are your next steps, i.e.

how do you want to achieve these goals ?

In subsequent discussions, the slogan **MCFA is a European Interdisciplinary Network to Advance Science** was suggested. Being the human (intellectual) capital of Europe and the voice for young scientists were identified as central goals. The next steps were considered under the



Participants in National Co-ordinators Meeting

headings Scientific Excellence and Media.

The creation of a research database containing relevant information on each fellow was suggested. Also mentioned were creating a **How to do research** booklet describing academic career patterns in the different European countries and using the MCFA as a voice for young researchers influencing, e.g., funding policies.

The suggestion of organising scientific conferences started intensive discussions about the MCFA discussion board.

The first issue of the MCFA News was published shortly before the meeting; several topics for the next issues were suggested. The **Annals of the MCFA** has received many submissions such that a

of their documents. Additionally he asked MCFA members to be aware of the different means of electronic communication and their suitability for different purposes.

In the session on National-International Interfaces and Responsibilities, more autonomy and responsibilities for national groups were requested, and preliminarily agreed upon, by the participating national coordinators and Board members. A main issue was transparency, in financial issues as well as in communication procedures. On the other hand, however, it was also agreed that these decisions could harm the international character of MCFA.

In a feedback session the participants agreed that the meeting was only a first step in making abstract ideas concrete. The opportunity to connect faces to names and E-mail addresses was seen as an important aspect of the meeting.

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## Interview

# Marie Curie Fellowships in the 5th Framework Programme

Maziar Nekovee interviewed Dr Barry McSweeney, head of the Marie Curie Fellowships Programmes

### **What are the main objectives of the Marie Curie Fellowships Programme within the 5th Framework ?**

The key objective for the Marie Curie Individual Fellowship scheme is to provide advanced training through research for the best of Europe's young

researchers with a view of these fellows becoming Europe's leading researchers. This objective clearly underlines the high prestige that the Community attaches to these fellowships.

The objectives of the Marie Curie Host Fellowship schemes vary depending on the type of Host Fellowship. The Marie Curie

Industry Host Fellowship scheme has an objective to provide young researchers with the opportunity to carry out research in an industrial or commercial environment and also to stimulate co-operation between industry and academia.

The objective of the Marie Curie Development Host Fellowship scheme is to help develop high level research capacity in research institutions in the Less-Favoured Regions of the Community - the postdoctoral fellows will be the persons transferring this knowledge and technology and will gain valuable experience and training through this process of technology transfer. The objective of the Marie Curie Training Sites scheme is to

provide young researchers pursuing their doctoral studies with the possibility of undertaking part of their studies at a Marie Curie Training Site.

### **What is the total budget available for Marie Curie Fellowships within the 5th Framework, and how many fellowships will be funded through this programme ?**

The budget for Marie Curie Fellowships and Research Training Networks combined is 858 million € compared to the total of 1280 million € (budget of the Human Potential Programme), and approximately half of this amount will be for fellowships. This will result in approximately 8000 fellowships

(2000 Individual Fellowships and around 6000 through the Host Fellowship schemes).

**How does this compare with the figures in the Fourth Framework Programme ?**

The Fourth Framework Programme funded 3200 Marie Curie fellows.

**What are the major changes in the Marie Curie Fellowships Programme, as compared with the 4th Framework Programme ?**

Undoubtedly, the major change in the 5th Framework Programme is the expansion from Individual Fellowships to a greater "menu" of fellowships. However, let's not forget that the Marie Curie Fellowships are centred on the Individual Fellowship scheme.

**Another major change has been the ending of the Individual Fellowships for PhD students (category 20 fellowships). Are there any other opportunities for PhD students to apply for funding within the Improving Human Potential Programme ?**

The Commission will continue to fund fellowships for PhDs under the Industry Host Fellowship scheme. It is also possible for individuals to receive funding for their PhDs through the Research Training Networks. These two sources of funding possibilities will actually provide PhD fellowships for about twice the number of postgraduate (category 20) fellowships that were funded through the Marie Curie Individual Fellowship scheme under the 4th Framework Programme.

In addition, we expect to fund around 5000 fellowships for stays of PhD students at Marie Curie Training Sites. In fact, the Commission has increased the opportunities for PhD students and, bearing in mind that our programme has a key objective of trans-national mobility, increased the number of fellows who are trans-nationally mobile during their PhD studies.

**Fellowships for experienced researchers are awarded to scientists with at least 10 years**

**research experience who have worked for at least 5 years in the same Institute. Doesn't the above criteria exclude many senior researchers who do not have permanent posts ?**

Your interpretation of the regulations for Experienced Researchers is not quite accurate. While the person must have at least ten years post-doctoral research experience, he/she should also have been employed by his/her institution for the last five years or have a work contract of at least five years. The person could therefore be in his/her first year of a five-year contract. We do not believe that these criteria are such that they expressly exclude senior researchers from participating in this scheme.

**How are the experts who evaluate the research proposals for individual Marie Curie fellowships selected ?**

For the Individual Fellowships, there are seven panels of experts. The experts are chosen from a database of approximately 26,000. They are chosen on the basis of their relevant experience. As you can imagine, they are of high standing, taking into account the large competition for places in evaluation. There were approximately 250 evaluators involved in the first round of Marie Curie Individual Fellowships. The process was run as a standard peer review process with additional monitoring built in to ensure consistency in marking.

**At present there are still large differences in the implementation of the fellowship contracts (e.g. the division of money allocated to the institute and to fellows) in different countries, or even within the same country. This can lead to situations where some fellows are left with little or no money to attend conferences, or visit research collaborators. Many fellows have expressed the need for uniform contracts, at least within each country, to avoid such situations. Is the European Commission investigating this possibility?**

There has been steady improvement in the standardisation of fellow-host agreements within a country. Naturally, it is not possible to have the same model of agreement in different countries due to differing national laws. Some National Contact Points are currently preparing model contracts to be used throughout the country. With regard to conferences, the host institutes are aware that necessary conference attendance should be financed by the hosts as part of the training of the fellow. The contract staff of the Commission is continuously monitoring the contract implementation situation. However, they do not have evidence of significant numbers of complaints at present. Having first discussed a problem area with his/her host institution, the fellow should then get in touch with the National Contact Point for our programme in the country of his/her host, whose job it is to deal with these matters.

**The MCFA is growing steadily and soon will represent a significant body of European scientists who all have received funding from the EU. How do you see the role of the MCFA in providing feedback on the implementation of the fellowships ?**

The Marie Curie Fellowship Association represents valuable input to the Commission in its monitoring of programme implementation and for its planning for future programmes. In particular, we also see the Marie Curie Fellowship Association playing a key role in the tracking of fellows throughout their career. A long-term impact assessment methodology for Marie Curie Fellowships is under design. It is intended that the Marie Curie Fellowship Association will be centrally involved in the implementation of this methodology.

**What is your feeling concerning the future employment prospects of young Marie Curie fellows ?**

I am very optimistic about the future for such fellows. The fellows have undergone an extensive selection, have carried out training in some of Europe's finest research facilities and are

internationally mobile at a young age. These are the very ingredients that are likely to yield young scientists capable of becoming Europe's future scientific leaders, as is the stated aim of the Marie Curie Fellowship activity. While employment/unemployment rates vary throughout the Community, it is very important that all employers realise the prestige and value of Marie Curie Fellowships, hence the Commission's support for the Marie Curie Fellowship Association and its key objective of raising the prestige of the fellowships.

**Dr. Barry McSweeney joined the European Commission in 1995 as Head of Division for the Fellowship activity of the TMR Programme. He is now responsible for the fellowships of the IHP Programme and for co-ordinating the Marie Curie Fellowships in the 5th Framework Programme. He is a clinical biochemist and has spent much of his career in the international pharmaceutical/ healthcare industry. Prior to joining the Commission, he was the founder and Chief Executive of BioResearch Ireland.**

**More information on Marie Curie fellowships programmes is available at [www.cordis.lu/improving](http://www.cordis.lu/improving)**

**MCFA Careers**

**Useful career information is available at the following Web sites:**

**MCFA Career mailing list:**

**[www.mailbase.ac.uk/lists/mcfa-career](http://www.mailbase.ac.uk/lists/mcfa-career)**

**Database of job openings:**

**[www.mariecurie.org/career/openjobs.html](http://www.mariecurie.org/career/openjobs.html)**

**Research focus****The Annals :  
research by MC fellows**

by Moisés Canle López and Marco Valentini

Many of you may have heard of the forthcoming MCFA publication, the *Annals of the MCFA*. *The Annals* was established as an interdisciplinary, annual journal, representing the fields of knowledge of MCFA members; it will publish review papers on research projects, devised and carried out by Marie Curie fellows, thus providing them with an opportunity to publicize their research to a wide audience.

*The Annals* is intended to be read and understood by educated non-specialists. The goal is not to compete with other well-established and prestigious scientific publications, but rather to present the most outstanding achievements of MC fellows: therefore helping to fulfil some of the MCFA's aims as stated in the statutes:

- help the advancement of science in Europe
- create a clear and visible identity for MC fellows
- promote and increase the reputation of MC fellowships

- develop and foster the international dimension of MC fellowships

*The Annals* was born from an idea dropped in an MCFA mailing list during the summer of 1998, amongst an enormous circulation of other mail related to bureaucratic and practical matters. In those very early days of the Association, the flow of scientific information between fellows was minimal; this did not help to create a scientific network, nor to interface with the world of academia and industry. Having recognized this we decided to create a publication that could demonstrate the excellence of some of the research projects, the scientific reputation of the MC fellows as high-level researchers, and to draw attention to EU funded research.

We wanted to demonstrate our support for the widely-held opinion in the scientific community, that the EU-research programmes (MC fellowships) are of

a very high standard. The same is true regarding the scientific proficiency of MC fellows themselves. The MCFA needed to develop an activity to emphasize and reinforce these opinions.

An *Annals* Editorial Board was formed and later approved at the MCFA Annual General Meeting. Many people devoted a lot of time and work to the project and to the creation of the necessary documents: guidelines, evaluation and selection criteria, working documents, a web site, etc. (see <http://www.mariecurie.org/annals/> for more comprehensive information). The Editorial Board is composed of panel editors according to the TMR program categories.

It was decided to limit the number of selected papers to two or three per panel with a special section reserved for those papers having an interdisciplinary character. A main criteria established for the publication of papers is that they should be written so as to be easily understood by educated non-specialists, while maintaining at the same time the appropriate scientific rigor. This is a challenge for the authors, but we hope they will manage to fulfil this condition.

The call for abstracts was published in May and more than 120

abstracts were received. After initial, internal refereeing and scoring, the authors of the selected abstracts were invited to write up their papers, which will then undergo a second review before publication. The first issue of the *Annals* should be ready for the AGM in November.

The *Annals* has already attracted attention at various levels, including at the European Commission and in the editorial world. The project was referred to this year by Science's Next Wave (see <http://nextwave.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/1999/06/03/4?>). Such exposure is certainly very encouraging for the future of the *Annals*. Let us all keep working to achieve a big success for the *Annals of the MCFA* !

**Moisés Canle López is the co-ordinator of the editorial board of the Annals. He is a lecturer in Physical Chemistry at the Universidade da Coruña (Spain) and he spent his MC fellowship at the MPI für Strahlenchemie, Mülheim an der Ruhr, Germany. Marco Valentini is the MCFA Board member responsible for the Annals**

**Careers in science****Living as a Post-Doc in the USA**

by Stefan Clemens

'Welcome to the United States'. This advertising slogan can be found at many US airports and indeed, having passed Immigration Control, visitors are free to move and to explore the country. However when entering the USA one year ago as a post-doc, and no longer as a tourist, I found myself in -virtually speaking- another world. I knew, or so I had been told, that Americans have a different lifestyle.

Nonetheless, having already spent several years as an MC fellow abroad, I did not expect that life would be so different when compared to Europe.

There are, for sure, differences in the way one will experience living in America, depending on where you go and your activities, and therefore I will try to focus on those points that I think are important for anyone coming

from Europe who plans to stay here for quite a while. I will not deal with problems that may arise prior to your arrival (Visa application, what kind of Visa, etc.), but try to summarize what you should do when you arrive here. The first steps you should take are 1) apply for a Social Security Card, 2) open a bank account, 3) apply for a US-Driver's licence and 4) get yourself installed as quickly as possible to be able to ask for a phone number.

The Social Security Card is (along with the Driver's licence) virtually the only means to identify yourself towards anyone (employer, banks). This card is issued by local authorities and you should

be able to obtain sufficient background information from your employer when filling in the forms.

You will need a bank account here in the US, because nearly all financial transfers and payments are executed with checks; bank transfers, which are nowadays quite common in Europe, are virtually unknown. You will have to use personal checks to pay for monthly household bills and expenses, as well as for shopping. It is often difficult to find a bank willing (or able) to wire money from, or to, Europe. Additionally, even with credit cards issued from European banks, you may be refused a credit card from your local bank,

due to 'missing financial background information'.

The US-Driver's licence is your ID card. It is not essential for driving (you may use your European licence for some time), but when you buy and insure a car, it is obligatory. The easiest way to cope with this is to apply in Europe for an international licence, which you exchange, after a small test, for a State Driver's licence (valid throughout the US).

Finally: the telephone. What struck me most when I arrived was the abundant use of the phone and the phone number as an additional proof of identity! Contracts are established by phone; you claim and inform

yourself by phone; orders and payments can be made by phone. Today I still have no idea how 'secure' those calls are (and hence never try to pay via credit card by phone), but what concerns me most is the absence of paperwork. For instance, you have to call a phone company to establish a phone line (in itself a clear catch 22), but, you will never get any written proof of a contract. The same applies to utilities and, more importantly, medical insurance or work contracts. Even if you ask, in writing, for changes to something, you might not get any reply. Despite this, your claim may have been changed accordingly. Therefore, the most important advice I would give to someone coming to the US is that you try

to inquire about everything, and in a persistent manner. People here in general do not deliver information voluntarily; you have to ask or even urge them and sometimes the information may be unreliable.

Concerning medical insurance, it is true that health care is quite expensive although most insurance companies have so-called 'plans' which large entities like universities can subscribe to. If your company or university has such a plan, you may join the scheme and pay much less than to subscribe to a personal health plan. Within such a plan there are reasonable options; the monthly fees range from \$30 for an individual up to \$100 for a family.

Eventually, when you have become used to these changes and managed to survive the first difficult months, then living in America may become a dream that has come true.

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## Discussion Forum

# Biological Research and New Ethics

By Georgios Karavanas

A few months ago, the American journal Science, voted for the 10 most significant discoveries of the previous year. Seven of them involved the science of biology. The evolution of biology during the past few decades has been impressive.

Often however, biology has come into conflict with current human values - what we call ethics. Most people, so far, have tried to avoid the emerging dilemmas posed by recent research, as they prefer to leave the responsibility of managing this new knowledge, with the scientists who produced it. In other words scientists, they say, should be ethical, and avoid getting involved in bad research. Although it sounds logical, this solution is undemocratic, as well as practically impossible. Undemocratic, because it gives a few individuals the means of applying something that affects the lives of the many; impossible, since it presupposes the existence of a universally accepted system of principles.

Let's not forget, for example, that eugenics is an acceptable logic in

Chinese civilisation. It is unfair, as well as naive, to expect a solution to philosophical dilemmas from those who just happen to have the relevant and necessary technical knowledge. These questions refer to the social conscience that every citizen - scientists included - should possess. No single scientist or other individual has the right to block research, which is the product of a global effort. In contrast, the duty of scientists is to fully inform society, and society in turn should present its position through its elected representatives.

This is where the problems start: research should not be considered either good or bad. Only its different applications can be good or bad -which, by the way, may significantly delay the results. Therefore the production of new knowledge can stand independently, as well as absolutely safely, as long as it stays within the limits of a laboratory. In such cases, any prohibition reflects simply the fear of the unknown. Such sentiment is justifiable and strong, but not stronger than the

desire for knowledge and curiosity, which finally dominates, if we consider human history.

In the case of biology however, many seem to have forgotten this and there is an international rush to create laws against the research itself and not against its eventual bad application. Because the application of modern biology refers to subjects on which public opinion is still divided, it is much easier for governments to stop the trouble at its root: cut off the head to prevent the headache. The technique of cloning is such an example: the US quickly forbade (and Europe soon followed) research which could be used for the cloning of human beings. In other words we condemn the research and not its supposedly bad application.

Mastering cloning techniques could however, provide many benefits by its application to human tissues or animals. But even complete human cloning may be interesting! Let's take for example the case in which a young couple are the victims of a traffic accident: the man dies, his pregnant wife survives but loses the embryo she's carrying. That embryo has the potential to become a unique human being, a genetic combination of his parents. The embryonic tissues could be preserved, exactly the way amputated arms or legs

are now preserved following accidents. Wouldn't it be interesting to clone and re-implant this embryo into its mother a few days later? Would something like this be unethical? This is not an easy question to answer although it is probable that one day we will consider such an application of cloning as good and another as bad. The prohibition of research involving human embryos takes away our possibility to choose.

A few years ago, the first test-tube babies challenged public opinion whereas today they are common place. The same tends to happen with surrogate pregnancy (a pregnancy where a woman is implanted with an embryo of which she is not the genetic mother). That is because ethics is changing although a lot more slowly than science. So, in principle, all truly innovative research is potentially unethical for its time and where cloning is concerned we should also remember that nature often does the same thing: it produces identical twins.

Opponents of cloning underline the right of every human to uniqueness and the danger of producing human copies although they forget that identical twins are no less unique nor more replicas than other humans and that people also become unique, through their experiences and education. Identical twins who grew up in

## Diary of events

The **MCFA UK Group** will meet in Leeds 23-24 October ; details at <http://www.mariecurie.org/uk/com/meet/meet.htm>

The **MCFA Dutch Group** will meet on November 5th at University of Utrecht, The Netherlands to discuss the welcome packs, the tax situation and problems with fellows' contracts; guests from DG XII will attend. Contact Dr Olivier Sparagano **O.Sparagano@vet.uu.nl**

MCFA 1st Annual Thematic Conference  
**Challenges And Opportunities For Young Scientists In Europe**  
Brussels 12-13 November 1999

Conference for MC fellows, scholars and public figures to address the situation of young scientists in Europe and their future in the 21st Century. Four plenary sessions on:  
*Public understanding of science, Science and ethics, Interdisciplinary training, Gender equality and The situation of post-doctorates.* Guest speakers from the

EC and other international institutions, including the European Science Foundation. Open to MCFA members and the general public.

Register at : <http://www.mariecurie.org/src/meet/challenges99/>  
Or contact:  
MCFA Secretariat  
**Mcfai@mariecurie.org** or  
**mcfaz@mariecurie.org**

**MCFA Annual General Meeting**  
Brussels 14 November 1999

The AGM will follow the Thematic Event and report on the year's activities. Members will be invited to elect a new board and to discuss MCFA issues in parallel workshops.

Register at: <http://www.mariecurie.org/src/meet/agm/02/agm2.htm> or contact the MCFA Secretariat as above.

**Munich Symposium on Key Technologies, Products and Patents**

17-18 November 1999 at Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, München.

different environments developed completely different personalities; in contrast, we can observe much higher similarities in individuals who had similar experiences and education, without having any kinship.

Those who are really worried about the creation of human clones should focus their attention on the educational opportunities each country has to offer. The examples of various systems- even within the divisions of otherwise democratic societies- which create cloned opinions, are many. A society with an approach, which does not teach right and wrong but instead teaches

us to search and understand, has nothing to fear from any kind of scientific discovery. Research just provides the choice.

**Georgios Karavanas**  
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is a current Marie Curie fellow at the **Institute of Molecular Genetics in Montpellier, France.** His main areas of research interest are the **biology of retroviruses and the application of gene transfer techniques to gene therapy.** Georgios is one of the co-ordinators of the MCFA group in France.

A series of sessions providing a broad overview on new and innovative research, particularly in the fields of Biotechnology and Information Technology, and on the protection of intellectual property rights. Organised in collaboration between the MCFA, Max-Planck Gesellschaft and European Patent Office. Marie-Curie fellows are invited to present their research results in light of the transfer of scientific results into innovative products.

Information at: **iprsymposium@vossnet.de** and **www.mariecurie.org**

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Letters may be shortened and edited for clarity. Please include a full postal address in your e.mail and mention as subject "MCFA News".

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Contact Jennifer McClarey [mcfaz@mariecurie.org](mailto:mcfaz@mariecurie.org) at our office in Brussels

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## What is the MCFA ?

The Marie Curie Fellowship Association (MCFA) is the representative body of all former and current holders of a Marie Curie fellowship. Marie Curie fellowships are research and mobility training grants awarded to scientists from EU countries by the European Commission. The Association was initiated in November 1996 by the European Commission, in recognition of the enormous potential of Marie Curie fellows as future scientific leaders, and in acknowledgement of the need for an interdisciplinary European network of young scientists.

The MCFA is a non-profit organisation, governed by an elected administrative board, with national groups in all EU member states. MCFA members span the biological, physical, and social sciences and are represented in both acad-

emia and industry. The major aims of the Association are to:

- help advance science in Europe and increase the appreciation and understanding of science by the general public
- create a clear and visible identity for Marie Curie fellowships
- establish a structured interface between fellows and the world of research and industry
- develop and foster the international dimension of Marie Curie fellowships

### Membership benefits :

- national and international scientific meetings
- an electronic careers network and an interface between the members and potential employers
- assistance and advice for current fellows on issues related to their fellowships and integration in the host country

- feedback to the EC on the implementation of the fellowship programmes
- a strong voice for young European scientists within the scientific community

If you are a current or former holder of a Marie Curie fellowship, you are eligible to join the MCFA; your registration details can be completed and submitted electronically on our Web site.

### Further information

For further information consult the Association's Web site: (<http://www.mariecurie.org>) or contact our European office:

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