

Marie Curie Fellows Association



Letter to Members

September 2007

Dear MCFA Members,

Welcome to this first issue of the MCFA Letter to Members after the summer holidays. Among other important news about the life of the Association, you will find a report of the General Assembly that took place in London last month. You will also find the reports for meetings in which MCFA had an active participation.

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Life of the Association

MCFA Annual General Meeting in London

Every year the MCFA organises its Annual General Assembly (AGA). This event is intended to be a moment for MCFA members to discuss about the Association's life and to make decisions, according to our statutes (please, see them on our website: <http://mcfa.eu>, About us, Statutes).

This year the AGA was held in London on the 22th of September. After a quick presentation of the participants, the Vice-Chair Vanessa Diaz presented the activity report of the current year.

She described the main successes and challenges the Board faced during the past months.

In brief, during this year, the Association has been active in Science Policy: a paper in response to the Green Paper on the European Research Area (ERA) has been produced (see article below) and a collaborative statement with EURODOC is being prepared. Moreover, some workshops were proposed for ESOF2008 and a collaborative project with the National Contact Points (NCP) has been prepared. An interesting collaboration has been established with Nature which is likely to be successfully continued.

A working group stood out for its activity: the Women in Science group, involved in the study of women working conditions in Science.

Our Letter to Members seems to have been successful: it looks very informative and able to reach and interest many people.

The Association has been provided with new IT infrastructures: the new website has been launched in March. It is now almost finished, although some problems are still to be solved. Each active National Group has its own Blog from April on. Blogs are supposed to substitute the National Group web pages which are old and outdated. Unfortunately, a problem remains as until now, only few of them are being used.

A difficult issue is actually represented by the MCFA Annals: the EU has decided to withdraw its financial support for their publication, so we are trying to find possible editors.

But the main challenge for the Association is reaching new Fellows and keeping the “old” members interested.

After this presentation, the Treasurer, Natalia Balcazar, presented the financial report, also providing an estimation for next year expenses. The transparency showed has been very much appreciated.

These two presentations were followed by the elections: votes were collected from people present. These ones were added to the 26 votes from the online voting. The quorum was not reached and new elections are to be called during an Extraordinary General Assembly (EGM) that will be organized soon (see below).

The afternoon session was devoted to a discussion with Mike Rogers, from the EC Directorate-General for Research, and a report will be presented in the next Letter to Members. After this discussion, some time has been dedicated to listen to feedback from fellows present there. People felt very informed and appreciated the meeting. Some fellows expressed their will to get involved in the Association.

Just a few final words to remind you this is also (mainly, I would say) your Association: you can actively participate in the Association’s life. The more we are, the more we can do! And there are so many things to do...

Maria Antonietta Buccheri

Reports online

The activity report, the financial report and the minutes of the AGM are available online in the Members section of <http://mcfa.eu>: log in as a member (at the top right of the page), and then go to the Members menu, choose Member area, and click on Internal Documents.

Result of the vote

The 35 valid votes are spread as following:

	Yes	No	Abst.
Discharge of present board	29	2	4
Christos Christoglou	29	2	4
Eric Buchlin	29	2	4
Guggi Kofod	28	2	5
Natalia Balcazar	31	1	3
Giovanna Avellis	27	3	5
Maria Antonietta Buccheri	28	3	4

Extraordinary General Meeting

However, as the quorum has not been reached during the ordinary AGM, an *Extraordinary General Meeting* shall be called soon. We kindly invite you to participate to this event: it is a chance to better know how the Association is running, to meet people you can share your experience with, or simply to meet new friends. We also invite you to put your candidature for being part of the new Board. Details about the date and venue will be announced shortly on the MCFA mailing-lists.

Secretarial support

University of Potsdam has confirmed that it will offer secretarial support, in the person of Diana Zoi, to MCFA. This has been made possible thanks to the action of Guggi Kofod. This will surely help the Board managing the everyday tasks for running the Association. Many thanks to Guggi and to University of Potsdam!

A word from our treasurer

Dear MCFA members,

As you can see from the activity and financial reports, the number of paying members in our Association has decreased in the last years.

First of all I want to thank all the "MCFA full members", i.e., all the MCFA members that are supporting the Association (not only but also) by paying the annual membership fee (40 euros). Thank you for your support, because through your engagement and your financial support you are helping us, the Administrative and Advisory Boards, to get ahead with a lot of activities that are beneficial for all the MCFA members. Your financial support helps us provide a limited financial contribution for the participation of MCFA members as the voice of Marie Curie Fellows in several conferences and meetings with the European Commission, the maintenance of our website, as well as the IT platform of the Association that allow us to answer your questions... in concrete: the whole run of the Association.

It is important for you to know that every single Marie Curie Fellow is, only because she/he has got this fellowship, member of the MCFA. But the MCFA can only support you with your personal and professional issues if we have

enough finances to keep going. Therefore, herewith I want to make a call to you, all MCFA affiliates, to take into consideration the possibility to *become a full member of the MCFA* and

to pay the annual fee soon. If you are a current Marie Curie Fellow, you are allowed to pay your membership fee from your grant, as this is an eligible cost. More information in this issue is available from this link: <http://mcfa.eu/site/public/joinTheMcfa.php>.

By becoming a full member, not only you support the MCFA financially, but you could get involved in the MCFA by presenting yourself as a candidate for the the Administrative Board or by participating in the Advisory Board or the National Groups more intensively. Working for the MCFA is very rewarding in terms of experiences and personal contacts that you won't get in the lab!

With my best wishes

Natalia Balcazar, MCFA Treasurer

Pictures from the AGM

People working hard for the Association!
(pictures taken by Natalia during the discussion with Mike Rogers)



National Groups

National Groups are the backbone of the Association, as these are the MCFA structures which can keep in touch with Fellows in every single country.

In June the Board announced a call in order to finance National Meetings to be held this autumn. Four National Groups participated by submitting their projects: Germany, Italy, Slovakia and Spain. All of the four projects are going to be financed by MCFA. Besides the specificity of every single project, in each case some time is planned to discuss about main Fellows' concerns and for social networking. Moreover, the presence of a person in charge of the National Contact Point is also scheduled for each meeting.

The German Meeting took already place in Postdam. Please, read the report below!

More details on dates and programmes of the other National Meetings will be presented as

soon as they will be fixed. It is most likely that they will be held in November or at the end of October.

The National Meetings will be advertised, amongst other, on the International Mailing List. If you did not subscribe to it until now, please take a few minutes to do it: on the Website (<http://mcfa.eu/>), you can click on the “Communication” button and then “International Mailing List”.

Meanwhile, if you wish to participate and help the Coordinators in organising the meeting, feel free to contact us at office@mariecurie.org.

Maria Antonietta Bucchieri

Local meeting of the German National Group in Potsdam

The National Group for Germany of the Marie Curie Fellows Association (MCFA-DE) organised a local meeting in the North-East of Germany bringing together current and past MC fellows from the “new countries”. The meeting took place on Friday August 10th and was held in Potsdam, Germany. It was hosted by the University of Potsdam and its hospitality is kindly acknowledged by the organisers.

Our meeting started with an open session featuring a presentation by Joanna Mastalerek (Kowi – the liaison office of Germany to the EU Commission, Directorate of Research – Bruxelles) on the FP7 funding schemes. The FP7 presentation, despite being too long, was really interesting and, very importantly for us foreigners here in Germany, it was in English! The organisers would like to thank Mrs. Mastalerek and Kowi for participating in our meeting.

After lunch, we discussed several topics of interest to MC Fellows focusing (as usual) on contract implementation and taxation. We started by a short social networking session during which each participant introduced himself/herself and his/her background. Then, continuing on the FP7 presentation, we had a short session on funding schemes in Germany. Mrs. Kerstin Schweigel (University of Potsdam, Junior Researchers Unit) made a short presentation on the available sources of research funding in Germany which were then explored further through our discussions.

Unfortunately, the tax advisor who had originally agreed to come to our meeting did not show up. Instead, Dr. Regina Gerber (University of Potsdam, EU Cooperation Unit) presented statistics of the EU projects currently hosted by the University as well as the fiscal treatment that MC Fellows receive at the University of Potsdam.

During subsequent discussions, we realized that host institutes treat the Fellows they host quite differently. One example of particular importance was the Allowances other than the living allowance, which at some hosts would be deducted with tax and social contributions before payout, and at others would be paid out in full (as recommended by the Commission). It is highly interesting that, even in the same country, there are more than one fiscal treatments to the MC allowances. As a result, we came up with a statement calling EU and German authorities to come up with clearer solutions. A draft of the document follows (see below). Since our meeting we have forwarded the statement to the NCP for Germany and Kowi. We have received rather positive feedback and they have promised to channel our statement to the appropriate decision makers in Germany and Bruxelles.

Finally, we discussed the draft of the MCFA-DE Welcome Pack. Several suggestions were made which are currently being incorporated into the earlier draft. We expect that a final draft of the document will be available later this year.

We finished the meeting with a walk to the Sanssouci Park and Potsdam city centre. The programme of the meeting, photos as well as copies of two presentations can be found at <http://www.aip.de/People/skitsionas/MCFA/>. There were 11 participants of all sessions and 12 additional participants during the FP7 presentation. We believe that it was a very interesting meeting, at least this is the feedback we have received from participants. We would like to thank the MCFA Board for the financial support of this meeting.

*Spyros Kitsionas, AIP, Potsdam
Guggi Kofod, University of Potsdam*

Statement of the meeting

We would like to express that we are pleased with our Marie Curie Fellowships, all taking place at German host institutions. Most Fellows have good professional and personal experiences with

their positions. However, several Fellows have experienced practical problems with respect to the management of their employment contracts and with obtaining adequate institutional support.

We call upon the German Tax authorities to clarify, through discussions with the European Commission, the taxation schemes for Marie Curie Fellows in Germany. This should establish best practices, supported by the appropriate German authority, which must then be implemented in the contracts between Marie Curie Fellows and their host institutions. The European Commission strongly recommends that only the monthly Living Allowance should be subject to taxes and social security contributions, whereas the Mobility, Travel and Career Exploratory Allowances should not. We have established within the group of Signatories that the current practice at most host institutions is to wrongly deduct taxes and social security contributions from the Mobility, Travel and Career Exploratory Allowances.

Such deductions have a large impact on the welfare of Marie Curie Fellows in Germany.

We encourage the European Commission and the EU member states to implement transferable pension schemes within the EU. This is a fundamental issue affecting all mobile researchers within the European Research Area, and influencing the choices of individual researchers when planning their careers. We acknowledge that there are ongoing discussions on the implementation of such schemes in order to address the problem, and we implore Germany to take an active role and to rectify the relevant national legislation.

The following signatories are all current Marie Curie Fellows working in Germany: Spyridon Kitsionas, Guggi Kofod, Raquel Fernandez, Francisco de Castro, Chara Sermpetzoglou, Carlo Belardinelli, Tamas Juhasz, Robyn Schofield, Rui Guimaraes, Georgios Kararigas.

The Speaker's Corner: Impressions from the AGM

I stumbled upon the announcement about the Annual General Assembly just two weeks before the meeting. It took some effort to get my British visa ready and to make all the travel arrangements in such a short time. But it did pay off!

The Meeting turned out to be quite a small-scale event, which I liked because I just hate huge conferences. But, nonetheless, it was surprising because I knew that there were at least several hundreds of current Marie Curie Fellows in Europe and I expected a much bigger attendance. Why were people reluctant to come? I think that is because non-scientific meetings are often not taken seriously by scientists or it turns difficult to justify travel expenses for this sort of events.

I made a lot of interesting contacts with other fellows on the meeting, in a very friendly and personal atmosphere. Sometimes it is important to talk just about life in a scientific community, discuss problems and aspirations, share frustrations or excitement. I got to know the people on the Administrative Board of MCFA — the young and energetic team that keeps the Association working. The activity report for the year 2007 presented by the Vice-chair Vanessa Diaz introduced us to current successes and challenges of the Association. We also had a fruitful discussion with a represen-

tative from the European Commission, who is responsible for implementation and assessment of the Marie Curie Activities, about tighter cooperation between the EC and the Association that would be beneficial to both parties.

I think that the choice of date and venue for the meeting was very fortunate, because it was preceded by a career workshop organized by NatureJobs the previous day just a few blocks away. The information presented and discussed at the workshop was exactly what Marie Curie Fellows need when trying to envision their scientific future beyond the fellowship. For me it was extremely useful because I'm now in the middle of drawing up my Career Development Plan, and I need to know what career paths and opportunities are available.

Yegor Domanov

Please send your email to office@mariecurie.org (Subject line: "Speaker's corner") to be published in this section in the next Letter to Members.



Publications and Communications

Response to ERA Green Paper

A few board members lead by advisory board member Raffaella di Sante have prepared a 16-page document about the position of the MCFA on the European Commission Green

Paper on the European Research Area. The MCFA position paper is http://mcfa.eu/site/public/documents/MCFA_response_GP_2007.pdf and the Green Paper is available from http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/consultation-era_en.html#greenpaper.

Past Meetings with MCFA Participation

The Source Event Career Fair

The MCFA was an event ambassador of the Source Event, the career fair organized by Nature Jobs and London First, on the 21st of September 2007. Vanessa Diaz, the MCFA Vice-Chair was an invited speaker for the round table at the end of the afternoon, summarizing the discussions held during the day. The Source Event turned out to be a huge success: more than 2000 people attended and another 1000 people were unable to attend, because of over-subscription. John Bothwell, from the National Research Staff Association UK (NRSA) presented his view on the lack of a structured career path for post-docs and the need for action at different levels: at the post-doctoral base, institutional level and government level. A complete and detailed program of the event can be found at <http://www.thesourceevent.com/>.



Mobility was an aspect highlighted many times during the day. Geographical, inter-institutional and intersectoral mobility, were mentioned as a 'must' in a researcher's career. The position of the MCFA was very clear: mobility should be a choice, not an imposition and certainly not a 'must' step in any career. Each individual has unique circumstances and each one must analyze his needs and wishes with respect to his/her own life and career. There is no 'recipe' for success. The MCFA voiced its concern about the lack of information available for post-docs and stressed the need for researchers to get information about the different career options for scientists in Europe. Obstacles to mobility were also mentioned

during the discussion: nepotism, difference in salaries, pension schemes, etc, that present mobility as a difficult choice for many researchers in Europe. Quite a few Marie Curie Fellows attended the event, with some Fellows coming from other countries in Europe, such as Germany, Portugal, Italy and Finland. The MCFA received 2 proposals for collaboration during the event and will pursue these issues further. Nature Jobs has proposed a meeting with the MCFA Vice-Chair, Vanessa Diaz, in London, to develop other projects or collaborations.

EqualITEC conference in London

Gianna Avellis actively participated to the London EqualITEC conference, namely Knowledge and Skills for a Digital Future, at the Institute of Engineering and Technology (IET) in London, 6-7 September 2007. The Conference was sponsored by IET, EqualITEC (EQUAL project), and ESF/UK.

http://www.equalitec.org.uk/equalitec_main/images/67SepFlyerEbook.pdf

Gianna presented some self-running PowerPoint slide shows of MCFA and m-WiSET at the conference exhibition, and distributed the leaflets of MCFA and m-WiSET Objectives and Current Activities. Gianna also took with her some WIDEMAP project synopsis, which she prepared also for past conferences, and did some lobbying for the 7th FP project on Women in Decision-Making Processes (1 M€ budget), presented last May at the Community and which has already passed the first step of evaluation.

To this end, during the Conference, held on the second day, Gianna contacted the European Commission invited speaker of the Conference

Nancy Pascall, Information and Media Directorate General. Nancy addressed in her talk Policies, Best Practices and Initiatives for Even Gender Distribution, in particular she presented a video on the initiative taken at European level on "Shadowing Days", consisting in arranging 14-16 year-old young women to spend a day in Industry, showing several cases of visits from Nokia to BT, and many others including the Commission itself, namely a day with Commissioner Vivian Reading. Nancy also participated to the final theme, "Innovating for a Digital Future" of the conference on Skills for Innovative Economy and Sustainable Technological Advancements Discussion Panel, together with Peter Whitehead, Editor of Financial Times Digital Business, David Rajan, Director of Emerging Business, Oracle, and Michael Bowkis, Dialogic and Microsoft.



By presenting some measures which can work for women and employers, Gianna also participated to the workshop on "Addressing the Needs of Women Returning to Industry", lead by the Daphne Jackson Trust with participation of UKWS, EPWS and MCFA. In our association, MCFA, we have several examples of women returning to industry after a period of scientific mobility in Europe and abroad. Many of them found it very difficult to return to industry for several reasons. Based on this experience, Gianna pointed out some factors that worked most for them and their current employers:

1. *Reintegration problem - Changing the working environment and performing the involved training very often stimulates women to better reintegrate in the home institution.* Many of us realised that to fully develop our potentialities both as a researcher and as a women, we need to make an ethical choice and return to our roots to care for our people/our country besides work. The reintegration problem after a period of scientific mobility abroad is much related to the gender issues as being a woman makes it difficult to integrate with other researchers that hardly accept the new competences of the fellows gained during the period abroad, especially if the fellow is a women. This happened in many SET laboratories, where there is a very competitive working environment because their know-how was put under question, and in particular by a women

researcher. Being a woman in an environment of basically male researchers was quite hard also at universities, which should have been more open ended, and less competitive.

Changing the working environment can be a solution as well as performing the required training. Many of us had to face problems with the management of their home institution, mainly a male management. And many, faced a bad period of work related stress and moved to another department. Changing the working environment allowed us to fully reintegrate in our companies. In fact, this did not prevent us to apply the know-how and research results developed abroad to the new field and get relevant publications also in the new field.

2. *Employers should set up more flexibility and different working scheme to attract women in Industry.* We believe that teleworking is very important to achieve a good work/family balance, even if very often teleworking is given to women as a favor instead of a promotion, which is a very bad and discouraging practice currently in use in industry.

3. *Last but not least, the employers should set up some mechanisms to facilitate the women to achieve decision-making positions in the industry when they return, which is currently very difficult to realise* (this is related to the glass ceiling problem). In order to stimulate women to return to work to industry it is necessary to achieve women's full participation and representation at all levels of decision-making in the industry, there must be gender equality across a range of decision-making levels.

To this end, Gianna mentioned the work done in m-WiSET (Mobile Women in Science Engineering and Technology), the working group of MCFA aimed mainly at promoting and encouraging mobility amongst women scientists, and the proposed FP7 project called WIDEMAP (Women In Decision Making Processes) which addresses this issue by monitoring and analysing the current situation and positive action schemes adopted in United States, Canada, and Australia with the help of world-wide leading expert organisations in this field, and by comparing and transferring the best practices from these countries to Europe.

Gianna concluded by pointing out that it is necessary in our view to raise awareness on the con-

ditions that facilitate women's representation in decision-making processes in Industry, in order to adopt policy recommendations to advance women's participation in this area, especially when they return to industry after a career break. She stresses that without a right level of representation of women in decision making positions in industry, is not possible to introduce the right measures that really work for women returning to industry and their employers.

The conference was very interesting for the results showed by the ending EQUALITEC project EQUALITEC (<http://www.equalitec.org.uk>) and even if the participation was mainly English-focused, it allowed a wide exchange of ideas and issues of promoting SET and ITEC (Information Technology Electronics and Communications) to young women, and addressing fully the problem of women returners to industry.

Upcoming Events

ESOF 2008

The EuroScience Open Forum (ESOF, <http://www.esof2008.org>) is an open platform for debate and communication for the science community of Europe and the world promoted by Euroscience. It presents and profiles Europe's leading research trends in the sciences, humanities and social sciences.

The MCFA has submitted 3 proposals for

workshops in the "Careers Programme" of ESOF 2008: a first workshop, on project management, a second workshop on careers for scientists, in industry and beyond and a third one on mobility of women scientists.

The detailed proposals are available from http://mcfa.eu/site/public/documents/MCFA_Proposal_ESOF_sessions2008_final.pdf.

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

The MCFA Board