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Introduction

Dear members,

We are pleased to present the seventh issue of the Marie Curie Alumni Association newsletter. As you will read, summer has been fruitful for the association and new Working Groups and Chapters have been created. We hope that you'll join them and get involved in your association!

- **MCAA General Assembly:** find where and when it will take place!
- **MCAA call for awards:** Members are invited to fill in their application until the 8th of November for an award due to take place on the upcoming MCAA Conference in Venice.
- **A promising autumn with the MCAA:** find out what's planned for the association in an article by the Chair.
- **Latest news from the association:** we have met the Chairs of the ASEAN, Czech, Estonian and Scottish Chapters, as well as the Chair of the Financial Affairs working group. Find out what activities are planned!
- **My Marie Curie Action changed my life:** Meet Roy Someshwar, who tells us what he got out of his grant.
- **My host country was the United Kingdom:** tips and advice from a Fellow who is currently working in London.
- **I benefited from a Marie Curie Action:** IAPP in the spotlight: three Fellows share their experience of this Marie Curie Action.
- **Five top tips on reviewing an article:** advice on how to review an article efficiently.
- **“As the ERC celebrates grant 5 000, let us not forget the MSCA”** – this article was penned by Calum MacKichan, the most recent winner of the MCAA editorial prize.
- **Keep in touch...what's coming up in the next newsletter?**

Yours,

The MCAA Team



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MCAA General Assembly: Venice, March 2016

The MCAA Board has now made its choice amongst the various excellent proposals made by different member groups for the hosting of the 2016 MCAA General Assembly. The event will be held across two days in Venice, Italy on 4th and 5th March 2016. The winning proposal was put together by the North Italy Chapter, in cooperation with various local partners, in particular the Ca' Foscari University.

The MCAA Board wishes to thank the other member groups and sponsors who put together a number of excellent alternative proposals; we hope that some of these exiting offers can be re-submitted for the 2017 MCAA General Assembly in due course.

Please make a note of the dates in your diary. More details on the programme, venue, travel and accommodation arrangements will be published soon.

Date: Friday, 4 March, 2016 to Saturday, 5 March, 2016, 09:00 - 17:00

Location City: Venice, Italy



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MCAA call for awards – Application now open!

The MCAA has published on its web portal its annual call for awards. Members are invited to fill in their applications electronically until the 8th of November for an award due to take place on the upcoming MCAA Conference in Venice.

Two calls are open for members:

- **Profile for the MCAA Outstanding Contributor.** The aim of this Award is to identify, highlight and promote outstanding contributions to the Marie Curie community, in general, and to the MCAA, in particular. The award will be offered to a member of MCAA who has performed significant activities to promote the Marie Curie Programme and the MCAA, and to ensure wider outreach of the implemented activities.
- **Profile for the MCAA Career Award:** The aim of this Award is to recognise outstanding career achievement of a MCAA member. The application shall describe the member's career achievement and explain why it deserves to be recognized by this award. Such career achievement can take different forms, such as scientific excellence, innovativeness of the research approach, or outstanding contribution for the overall research community.

Calls and application forms can be consulted here: <https://www.mariecuriealumni.eu/mcaa-awards>

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A promising autumn with the MCAA — Snežana Krstić, Chair of the MCAA



In 2015, after a very successful first year of work, the MCAA continued growing and working towards the association's objectives. We are proud of our members' activities and of the 22 Chapters and 9 Working Groups which have actively contributed to the work of the MCAA, launching many new initiatives.

In the first half of 2015, alongside to our regular work, the Board was predominantly occupied with the strategic planning and preparation of the Plan of Activities for period 2015-2020. This is necessary to ensure future development of the MCAA and funding after May 2016, when the current contract with the EC expires. We have developed a framework of fruitful activities which provides MCAA members with greater opportunities for networking and professional development.

In the second half of this year, part of our work will be related to the development of new structural elements to support the accomplishment of our goals and the realisation of several planned activities. We are proceeding already with the structural profiling, which will make possible closer interactions among MCAA members sharing the same professional interests. We are also actively involved in the preparations for the MCAA General Assembly, which is planned for March next year.

As you can read in the MCAA Forum, our Chapters and Working Groups are planning many events for this period. At the initiative of our Chapters and in cooperation with external partners, in September we are going to be involved in Researcher's Night, Expo Milan, EURAXESS Links workshops and many other remarkable events.

We will also be focusing on ESOF 2016, where we foresee active participation and visibility for the MCAA community at this very important science event – the largest in Europe (it will be held in Manchester in July 2016). In cooperation with the ESOF team we will again organise an MCAA poster stand for young researchers, where our members and young researchers from around the world will be able to network and present their achievements to the large and respected audience.

The Board Members regularly participate in and organise events. In September I will be honoured to speak at a conference organised by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, and then at the plenary session of the World Science Forum in November. I am sure there will also be other events that MCAA Board Members will have opportunity to attend to represent the association.

Finally, for those of you waiting for an update on the micro-grants for career development – we haven't forgotten! We are planning to launch a new call for micro-grants by the end of the year that will provide new opportunities for our members within limits of the budget available. We are also considering inviting volunteers to assist us with the evaluation process and other tasks.

This autumn seems quite promising with regard to activities planned and I am cordially inviting both new and old members to join forces and bring their positive energy and creative thinking to existing or new activities, in line with their availability and professional interests.

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MCAA ASEAN Chapter



Dr Someshwar, you coordinate the Asean chapter. Can you tell us about its creation?

The ASEAN Chapter is a regional chapter of the MCAA and the prime point-of-contact for all Marie Curie Fellows and Alumni in Far East Asia. It encourages local networking, recruits and attracts new members to the Association, and generally enhances the image of the MCAA within the oriental Asian region.

How many members are you targeting in this Chapter?

The Asean Chapter covers a vast region. It is the second biggest MCAA chapter and only next to African Chapter in terms of area. So the potential is huge. We are targeting at least 500+ members and to achieve this target, we are going to launch a promotional campaign across the region.

What activities are you planning?

- 1) We are planning to launch a promotional campaign entitled ‘Why Research in the EU?’ In the framework of this campaign, we are planning to organise MSCA and MCAA promotional events across different universities within the region.
- 2) Design a Logo for the Chapter Contest – we want members to design a “local flavoured” logo that symbolises the vision and mission of the Chapter.
- 3) MCAA – Fame Lab Contest: explain your research in 2 minutes! The aim is to encourage members in science communication.



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What would you tell members to encourage them to join?

One should join the chapter for the following reasons (to name a few):

- 1) To grow their professional network;
- 2) To develop transferrable skills like science communication;
- 3) To keep themselves updated about different opportunities in the EU;
- 4) To participate in the upcoming contests and win cool prizes;
- 5) To give back to the community that has given us so much by helping Marie Curie Fellows.

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Latest news from the association MCAA Czech Republic Chapter



Dr Acosta, you coordinate the chapter. Can you tell us about its creation?

The Czech Chapter emerged from a workshop organised by the MCAA in Brno (the Czech Republic) in late spring. Some of the participants of the meeting liked the idea of getting together to create the Chapter in order to promote networking among the MCAA members in the Czech Republic, enhancing cooperation and supporting new synergies in the region, and of course reaching out to the MCAA community.

How many members do you have and how many are you targeting?

The Czech Chapter currently has nine members. We are from different countries, of course Czechs dominates, but we have a couple of foreigners from India, Hungary, Cuba and Bolivia among us, who are MC fellows in the Czech Republic. In the future, we would be very pleased if the Czech Chapter counted at least 15 – 20 members.

What activities are you planning?

As I mentioned before, the main plans of the Czech Chapter are to promote networking among the MCAA members, also to provide a strategic contact point in Central-East Europe that might attract not only Czech members but also MC Fellows/Alumni from Slovakia, Austria and Poland, which could in due course encourage the establishment of new Chapters in Slovakia and Poland.

We are planning three workshops for the working period 2015-2016. The first will be focused on the way the Chapter and the MCAA should be promoted and will evaluate the opportunities for collaborative work among the Alumni.

The second will be a training workshop for the preparation of MC projects, focused on writing Marie Curie Actions project proposals, including: choosing optimal structure, layout, terminology, language and style of writing.

The last one will address MCAA promotion events at national level that seek to bring more active members to the MCAA and to promote dissemination activities of the MCAA Czech Chapter Member.

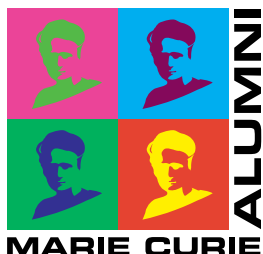
What would you tell members to encourage them to join?

There are a lot of very good reasons to join the MCAA Czech Chapter, one of them is the great advantage of networking, which will open new opportunities for cooperation among members in addition to other opportunities. Our motto is *“Let’s not be alone, come among us and join the Czech Chapter”*.

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MCAA Estonian Chapter



Dr Herrmann, you coordinate the Chapter. Can you tell us about its creation?

The idea of an Estonian MCAA Chapter originally came from my colleague Dr Ira Didenkuloova. She learned about the MCAA during a meeting in Brussels, when she contributed to the evaluation report about the Marie Curie programme. We thought that it was sad, that the MCAA was not more known and better utilised. Both of us are Alumni of the German Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, which has a very good Alumni network.

When she found the call for new chapters, we decided to apply and contacted some colleagues who we knew are Marie Curie Alumni and encouraged them to join the MCAA.

With the Estonian Chapter, we hope to transfer our good experience with the Humboldt network to the MCAA.

How many members do you have and how many are you targeting?

We have seven members, including six founding members. Currently there are 14 Estonians registered in the MCAA, so obviously we are targeting those, plus the foreigners spending their fellowship in Estonia or those who have chosen to move here after their fellowship. With Estonia being a small country, the number of members will stay relatively small. The Humboldt club in Estonia has about 30 members, and we can probably achieve a similar number. Over time, we are also open to welcoming members of other Baltic states.

What activities are you planning?

We are planning several meetings; families will also be invited to some of these to encourage not only professional connections, but also personal interaction. To find new members, we plan to present the chapter at EURAXESS events, which are attended by many foreign researchers in Estonia. Also, we present posters and distribute flyers at different conferences in the Baltic States. Additionally, we’re using social networks to raise awareness of our activities.

What would you tell members to encourage them to join?

While Estonia is a small country and everyone seems to be reachable and many people know each other, sometimes there also seems to be an unfortunate lack of communication. We would like to change this. Joining the Estonian Chapter is a great way to exchange experience, find new collaborators and friends.

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MCAA Scotland Chapter



Ms Ferro, you're the organiser of the Scottish chapter. Can you tell us about its creation?

The idea of a Scotland chapter was born within the PhD programme in which I am currently studying: PHOQUS is a Marie Curie doctoral programme training 13 PhD students based at the University of Dundee. Thanks to these almost unique circumstances, in which all the people involved are situated in the same region, we experience all the advantages typical of networking, like being part of a multicultural and multidisciplinary environment. We were aware that Scotland, has well established networks such as the Scottish Universities Physics Alliance (SUPA) and the Scottish Universities Life Sciences Alliance (SULSA) that create a vibrant environment full of opportunities for networking and outreach. But it was still a pleasant surprise to receive so many positive answers offering support, participation and new ideas for the chapter when we contacted other MCA alumni within the region. For this reason, I would describe the formation of the chapter as a community creation, involving all of its members, and therefore representing a great start for the year to come.

How many members do you have and how many are you targeting?

At the moment, there are 23 members actively participating in the chapter. I have counted roughly another 20 members subscribed to the MCAA and currently located in Scotland. We hope to catch their interest through the activities we will carry out this year. Nevertheless, I think that reaching 23 members is already a great result for a newborn chapter.



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What activities are you planning?

For this year, we are focusing on the creation of an efficient network that can collaborate to organise activities addressing both chapter members and the general public. We are planning a “Chapter Opening Night”, with short talks from the members to introduce themselves and their experience, and to give them the opportunity to meet each other.

In addition, we would like to stimulate collaboration among members through a short series of seminars open to the public, with the title “The science of Sci-Fi Movies”. We believe in researchers engaging in outreach activities, and we think it is fundamental for the MCAA Association to reach society, and to share what research is and what benefits are obtained through Marie Curie projects. The topic, Sci-fi movies could be of interest for academics, for high school students, for families, and for undergrads enrolled in any field, from art to the humanities and science. We will start with questions raised by many sci-fi movies, like time travel, artificial intelligence or genetic modification. Possibly with the help of audiovisual content, we will then present what research has already achieved, which in some fields is getting really close to what 10 years ago seemed to be just fantasy, and in others has already overtaken it. We expect it to be a very intense year, but at the same time very exciting.

What would you tell members to encourage them to join?

The MCAA Scotland Chapter is a great chance for people from every background. Being part of a network of enthusiast researchers and academics, passionate about their work, can lead to personal growth as well as professional growth. The more people in the Chapter, the more opportunities will arise and the more benefits each member will see. I really hope everyone gets on-board for this adventure, and enjoys the opportunities it has to offer.





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Latest news from the association MCAA Financial Affairs Working Groups

Drs Someshwar, Sznitman, Haque, you're the organisers of the Working group. Can you tell us about its creation?

The Financial Affairs Working Group (FA-WG) is one of the MCAA's strategic working groups. Its prime focus is on building external cooperation (corporate relations), thereby attracting external projects and financial resources for the sustainability and future needs of the MCAA.

What activities are you planning?

We are planning to organise two contests to raise awareness about this Working Group with the aim to recruit active volunteers for three themes, namely – Business Development, Corporate Relations and Sponsorships.

Through these contests, we also aim to source some of the best ideas that can be incorporated within the MCAA.

1. “Self-Sustainability of MCAA – An International Alumni Association”

A Business Plan competition

2. “Fund-Raising – Taking Cues from Non-Profit Organisations”

A Case-Study Challenge

What would you tell members to encourage them to join?

The MCAA Financial Working Group is on a hiring spree! If you are thinking of a career outside academia and hence looking for some real-world experience then here is your chance. We are looking for active and motivated members for the following three designations – Business Development Officer, Head of Corporate Relations and Director of External Sponsorships.

We expect you to invest approximately five hours every week. You will be recruited after a Skype Interview. Please note however, this is a voluntary position that comes with no remuneration but with the following perks:

- 1) An official certificate of experience
- 2) A letter of recommendation
- 3) For any external sponsorship that you may bring, we will pay you 20% of the tax-deducted amount.

Interested? Drop us an e-mail at **finance (at) mariecuriealumni (dot) eu**

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“My Marie Curie Action changed my life” – Meet Roy Someshwar



Roy Someshwar (from India) is the treasurer of the MCAA and is also involved in the ASEAN Chapter as well as the Financial Affairs Working Group. Intrigued by this very active member, we decided to ask him whether his Marie Curie Action changed his life. See his answer below. And prepare to be inspired!

1. Where and when did you hear about the Marie Curie Actions for the first time?

Marie Curie is a well-known brand for budding young scientists aspiring to do their research in Europe. So it was always clear to me that if I decided to do a PhD, I would do it with a Marie Curie Fellowship, which offers research independence, quality training and maximum possibilities for all-round career development to prepare you for post-PhD life.

2. Do you have special memories of preparing your application?

Oh yes, I do! One should take special care while preparing the application package for any prestigious fellowship. The Marie Curie fellowship is highly competitive with a single-digit success rate where one small mistake in the application can cost you the opportunity.

I remember my research proposal went through 10 iterations with my mentor and thesis supervisor to ensure it was absolutely perfect and flawless. That is the level of commitment and patience required to win such fellowships.

3. What was your Marie Curie project about?

My Marie Curie research project was in the field of Human-Robot Interaction (HRI). It was an interdisciplinary project involving three partners from three countries with expertise in three different fields, namely, Umea University (psychology aspects) [Sweden], Ben-Gurion University (engineering aspect) [Israel] and Space Application Services (industrial application aspect) [Belgium].

4. When you started your Marie Curie project, what were your expectations?

I knew I’d learn a lot of new things and I was excited about it. I was also really looking forward to all the new experiences that awaited me during my planned stay in three different countries with climates as varied as -25 and +25 C ☺. Research-wise, I was expecting the extensive exposure that is needed to grow intellectually and professionally into an established researcher in the field.



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Thanks to the Marie Curie Fellowship's mobility allowance, during the 3 years, I had the opportunity to participate in 25 international events including top-tier conferences, workshops, summer schools, training and meetings around the world. Where in the world can you get such level of exposure?!

5. How would you sum up your Marie Curie experience?

My friends and colleagues from the USA call my Marie Curie experience my "Honeymoon Days" 😊 because it's too rosy and colourful for them to believe. I would call it the most rewarding experience of my life, which groomed and nurtured me into a well-trained scientist.

6. Did this experience change your life? If so, how?

Whatever I am today, all credit goes to the experience and exposure I received during the fellowship. Today, I am as confident in starting my own start-up as I am in continuing in academia. This mixed blend of industry-academia readiness is due to the all-round training received during the fellowship.

7. If you had to choose the most memorable moment during your project, what would it be?

The most memorable moment would be the first day of my PhD journey in the Dept. of Psychology at Umea University, Sweden. Umea is a small city, 450 km from the Arctic Circle and it was minus 25 degrees (C) during that period. I felt like my office was in the middle of Narnia 😊

8. What have you done since your project? Could you have followed this path without your Marie Curie experience?

I have had a mixed blend of an industry-academia career post Marie Curie experience. I co-founded a tech start-up "Smart Tag" (later rebranded as Lupo) in the field of the internet-of-things. My next venture is in the field of Social Entrepreneurship. On the academia side, I am currently working in the field of Robotics, specialising in the area of Human-Robot Interaction.

9. Your advice to a researcher who would like to apply for a Marie Curie Action?

Winning a Marie Curie Fellowship is not a one-night or a one-month game. You need to build on your CV over time, adding concrete achievements in terms of training, international experience in reputed labs, relevant skills and publications. An inter-disciplinary background and/or exposure are also plus points.

Last but not the least; you need to put in equal effort and sincerity in preparing the application package, which needs to be flawless. So start early!



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10. You have been the treasurer of the MCAA for almost two years (since November 2013). What have you learnt during these two years?

It's an honour to receive the opportunity to serve the international Marie Curie Community of 6 000+ members as an Executive Committee Member (Treasurer) of MCAA. This is also a position that came with huge responsibility and 100% accountability for the efficient management of the MCAA annual budget, which amounts to hundreds of thousands of Euros of EU public money. These are the two key qualities I have learnt over these two years.

11. Do you envisage continuing your involvement in the association after your mandate ends? If so, how?

Yes, I would continue to support the aims and objectives of the Association and help it grow by offering strategic advice, training and guidance to the Board as and when needed.

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During my Marie Curie Project, my host country was... the United Kingdom



Daniel Powell

Daniel Powell is originally from the United States, but spent a few years in Canada before moving to the United Kingdom to work on his Marie Curie project. If you could be interested in following in his footsteps, take a look at his impressions and advice, especially if you come from the USA!

Thanks to his Marie Curie Action (Initial Training Network), Powell works as an Early Stage Researcher on a project which aims to understand social editing and how digital technologies are changing the ways we produce, re-use, and disseminate knowledge in collaborative ways. *"I study projects like Wikipedia, Stack Overflow, collaborative authorship platforms, and so on. Basically I research the intersection of social media / digital connectivity platforms and the production of scholarly knowledge,"* he explains.

For the past year, he has been based at King's College London, together with 11 other Early Stage Researchers. His project will run for two more years.

Visa, administration and exchange rate

"As a non-EUnational and a non-UK citizen, I had to provide a great deal of documentation, paperwork, and money to eventually enter and work in the UK," says our Fellow. To obtain his Tier 2 Skilled Migrants General Visa, Powell had to be sponsored by his host institution, which had to send a separate letter of sponsorship to the UK Border Force. *"The visa process was quite arduous for the UK. It ended up costing about £3 500 – £4 000, although much of that was (I later found out) able to be reimbursed by the ITN that I am part of. That was welcome!"* He adds.

Powell highlights the British border controls: *"I had to provide fingerprint scans on application for my visa, and have to get scanned every time I re-enter the country."*

In addition, our Fellow had to provide bank statements illustrating that he had a set amount of funds to cover around three months of expenses.

He describes the exchange rate as also pretty high: *"If you are coming from the US or Canada, be prepared for complete sticker shock at the exchange rate of the British Pound Sterling, as well as the costs that come with applying for visas."*

Freedom in research

When he started working on his project, Powell was struck by the difference in levels of supervision between the UK and the USA/Canada *"PhD training in the humanities and social sciences usually involves coursework, set reading lists that you are then tested on ('comprehensive exams'), a dissertation prospectus, as well as multiple second and third language tests."* Nevertheless, he enjoys this freedom and decides for himself how to conduct his research.



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A vibrant research culture and a central location

To Powell, being in London to work on his Marie Curie project offers a lot of advantages: *“There is a vibrant research culture here, involving many of the institutions that are part of the University of London, including King’s, University College London, Birkbeck, Queen Mary, etc.”* He highlights the diversity of events, symposia and workshops that he could attend.

What’s more, there are many opportunities to network in neighbouring cities, like Oxford and Cambridge, and also beyond the UK’s borders. *“Our ITN holds training and research-sharing events throughout Europe, as we have partners in around a dozen EU nations, and getting there is always easy!”* he adds.

General feeling before the referendum about EU

Powell stresses the difficulty of re-entering the UK when he has to attend external meetings or workshops: *“I have to pass through Border Force screening on the way back into the country, which wears thin!”*

According to our Fellow, continuing as a researcher benefiting from EU funds could be tricky in the future due to the current political situation: *“It is also distressing to know that the UK is holding a referendum to exit the EU next year (two years into my three years of EU funded research!).”*

Come to the UK and to London!

Powell is happy to conduct research in London, mainly because of the density of academic and intellectual activity: *“I regularly work in the British Library, have access to the entire University of London library & research system, and can easily travel elsewhere as needed.”* Nevertheless, he describes other places as attractive for researchers, like Oxford and Cambridge, as well as Edinburgh and the northern English cities like Sheffield and Liverpool.

He admits thought that it would be hard for him to leave for anywhere else in the UK!

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I benefited from a Marie Curie Action – Industry-Academia Partnerships and Pathways in the spotlight (IAPP)



Javier Calles



Geoffrey Gregson



Ruttachuk Rungsiwiwut

Javier Calles (from Argentina), Geoffrey Gregson (from UK-Canada) and Ruttachuk Rungsiwiwut (from Thailand) benefited from Industry-Academia Partnerships and Pathways. They told us what makes this grant different from others, and gave their reactions to whether the opportunity has boosted their industry-academia credentials.

About our Fellows

Javier Calles' project is called "3D-NET". A European network of industry and academic partners exchange knowledge, people and expertise to enhance the discovery and development of drugs that target more effective treatments to halt or reverse eye diseases leading to blindness.

Geoffrey Gregson's project "Eco-business" sought the scientific, technological and business knowledge necessary to devise innovative techniques for the design and development of the first Multi-Agent Digital Business Ecosystem (MADBE). The system is designed for use by European small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Ruttachuk Rungsiwiwut worked on the project "Comparative embryonic stem cells research in mammals" which involved differentiation of human embryonic stem cells into neuronal lineages under two- and three- dimensional culture conditions.

What are Industry-Academia Partnerships and Pathways (IAPP)?

The Industry-Academia Partnerships and Pathways (IAPP) are open to experienced researchers (at the time of recruitment and secondment) as well as to early-stage researchers (at the time of secondment).

The action aims to enhance industry-academia cooperation in terms of research training, career development and knowledge sharing, in particular with SMEs, and including traditional manufacturing industries.



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Projects must involve one participant from academia and one from industry. Those participants have to come from at least two different EU countries and/or Associated countries.

Projects are classified into: chemistry, economic sciences, information science and engineering, environment and geosciences, life sciences, mathematics, physics, social sciences and humanities.

What did our Fellows learn?

How did they get info about IAPP?

Interested in learning more about European culture, Rungsiwiwut heard about Marie Curie programmes during his first stay in Hungary, when he was working under the supervision of Professor Andras Dinnyes, a Hungarian researcher with expertise in cloning and stem cell research. *"I am personally interested in European culture and also wanted to travel and work in Europe,"* he says. After having completed his Ph.D, our Fellow received an invitation from his supervisor to continue working with him thanks to an IAPP.

Gregson was also contacted by his industry partner and was already aware of the Marie Curie opportunities.

Calles simply discovered Marie Curie scholarships when surfing the Internet!

At which point in their career did they apply?

Two of our Fellows, Calles and Rungsiwiwut, were finishing their Ph.Ds when they started working on their project, whereas Gregson obtained this grant five years after having completed his Ph.D *"I was an early to mid-career academic,"* he says.

How did they choose their host organisation and country?

Our Fellows selected their host organisations and countries for different reasons. Rungsiwiwut already knew his supervisor, whereas Gregson's university already had experience of working with the industry partner. *"I was interested in working across disciplines,"* he explains. Calles chose his research group because of the lines of research it was following.

How did they prepare their application?

Calles was lucky enough to complete his application in around a week, while the process was much longer for our two other Fellows. *"The application lasted approximately 12-14 months, from the time we scoped out the project to when the contract was finally signed between the parties,"* says Gregson. Rungsiwiwut explains: *"Due to the project proposal being related to the use of human embryonic stem cells, it had to be strictly reviewed by the Institutional Review Board Committee of Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University. Thus, it took more than six months to prepare the application."*

How did they organise their work?

IAPP projects have a few particularities, as they gather partners from industry and academia. According to Rungsiwiwut, it is essential that the industrial partner clarifies some aspects at the beginning of the project: *"The most important thing for me is a clear com-*



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munication with the industrial partner prior to starting to work together. Some information could be confidential for the industrial partner, so, knowing how much knowledge sharing is acceptable allows us to avoid excessive interference.” Gregson echoes this sentiment: “IAPP projects are very much focused on knowledge transfer between the academy and the industry partner”.

Nevertheless, be prepared to adapt your plans should you encounter problems along the way: “Some modifications were made due to changing circumstances as the project progressed,” Gregson explains.

For Calles, the organisation process has been quite smooth: “We have a well established network between academia and industry. Some industry partners provide us new drugs and we test them in our in-vitro models.”

What obstacles did they encounter?

According to Gregson, the IAPP can be difficult to comprehend “The first obstacle was related to understanding the nature of the IAPP process, and various project and reporting requirements, which were somewhat different than other European projects in which we participated.”

He mentions other obstacles in understanding the requirements for university researchers in terms of relocation expenses and salaries. “A final challenge related to the commercial viability of the industry partner in seeing the project through to completion. Our partner, MicroArt, was a small, highly innovative company that unfortunately struggled in its market towards the end of the project. This resulted in the final phases of the project not being completed,” he says regretfully.

Did the funding cover all their needs?

Rungsiwiwut and Calles are happy to confirm that the IPAA covered all their needs, whereas the funding was a bit tight according to Gregson: “One factor of difficulty was related to the currency exchange between Pounds Sterling and the Euro as well as differing salary scales for researchers with different levels of experience,” he explains. “There was little funding to support the Principal Investigator either, so this might not provide much incentive for some universities to become involved in such projects,” he muses.

Is it worth it?

For Rungsiwiwut, benefiting from an IAPP was fruitful: “IAPP really boosted my career in two respects. Firstly, it opened up my vision to other grant opportunities in Europe. These opportunities are not only beneficial for myself, but also benefit my students and staff. Secondly, I received good recognition from my institute and also from Thai researchers.” According to Gregson: “The IAPP provided valuable experience in managing knowledge transfer projects and collaborations between academic and industry partners.” Calles is still working on his project but he is confident that this opportunity will help his career.

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Five top tips to review an article



Ferran Macià

One of my colleagues has decided to reveal his name for all reviewing processes in which he is involved because he considers removing anonymity raises his own consciousness during his reviews. I believe the reviewing process, on the contrary, must be anonymous to prevent biased acceptance criteria and favouritism based on friendship. However, I find it instructive to write my evaluation reports as if I was going to put my name on them.

Reviewing is an important way to contribute to the academic community. The interaction between authors and reviewers during the publication process determines the final quality of the publications and thus whether or not we give credit to who deserves it and whether or not we award works of good quality. Reviewing an article is an opportunity to learn about a different field or, simply, to learn how others approach a problem similar to ours. Reviewing is a difficult job and we must take it seriously and remember that the reviewing job is meant to help authors improve their work. Here are five tips that could help in writing a reviewing report efficiently.

1. Read it all over

A first read of the whole text, not too fast and not too slow, should be enough to give us a summary of the key results. It will also give us a first impression of the material we are reviewing and help to reply to basic questions: Did we understand it? Are the title, abstract, and conclusions clear and informative? Is the paper well organised and clearly written? Are the figures and tables (if any) clear and useful? Is all the material included necessary or is there any missing information?

2. Check the originality of the results?

All journals demand that an accepted work is original and of interest to the community; we must pay special attention to this and provide well-justified arguments, either against or for, before publication recommendation. We may use references to justify the novelty of the work — or the inappropriate repetition of already published material. We are chosen as experts on a certain field and we may provide a “big picture” of where the presented work fits. It does not mean that we provide a forecast on what the impact of the presented work would be without fail, but we must say instead whether the presented work is a significant advance on previous knowledge, and we must provide a justification for our decision based on previous published material.

After a thorough bibliography check we should comment on the appropriateness and adequateness of references with respect to related and previous work.



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3. Review data and methodology

Besides how clear the results are presented and described, we (as researchers) may judge the validity of the approach and the choice of methodology used. We ought to comment on the quality of the data and also on the appropriateness of data analysis, use of statistics, or consideration of uncertainties.

In most cases it is time-consuming to reproduce calculations or data analysis (from experiments) presented in manuscripts but we may check whether all steps required to do it are clearly described so others can reproduce them.

4. Suggest improvements

Let us remember again that our reviewing job has the aim of helping authors improve their work. We may thus suggest improvements; in particular, we may provide specific comments on what would make the presented work better: new experiments, different or additional data analysis, considerations and possible new interpretations, and also which technical details could be helpful, such as the presentation of figures, or suggestions on whether to expand or shorten a certain manuscript section.

5. Journal publication criteria: talk to the editor

Finally we need to know the acceptance criteria of the journal we are reviewing for in order to submit our final decision. However, acceptance or rejection is a decision that belongs solely to the editor — we just need to provide a technical report.

We may use the opportunity to talk directly to the editor and outline any informal or sensitive information related to the manuscript. In particular, we may give our thoughts on why the manuscript fits or does not fit the journal criteria.



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As the ERC celebrates grant 5,000, let us not forget the MSCA

The 5,000th researcher funded by the European Research Council (ERC) was marked by a celebratory grant signing in Brussels on the 16th of June, where high-profile figures from science and politics praised the impact of the ERC since its inception in 2007.

The ERC funds individual scientists with grants of up to €3.5 million for high risk/high gain fundamental research projects based on the sole criterion of excellence. “The ERC is the best example that that investing in excellent scientists pays off”, said Carlos Moedas, the European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation.

The strong standing of the programme was evident earlier this year when a slice of its budget was threatened by EC President Jean-Claude Juncker’s Investment Plan. High-level political clamour saved the ERC from cuts.

It is easy to see why. The ERC’s forward thinking blue-sky philosophy makes a sexy package and is proving an excellent way to sell fundamental science to policy makers. Importantly, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) has also been spared from cuts and both are expected to continue as planned.

Europe can be proud that it is bold enough to fund its most promising scientists with generous grants for risky projects. In many cases, such grants would not be possible from national funding bodies. This is even more important as other parts of Horizon 2020, the EC’s budget for RTD, have become much more focused on applied rather than fundamental science.

But as we celebrate this milestone, we should also play devil’s advocate. The ERC by itself cannot support the scientific needs of a diverse and sometimes fragmented continent.

There are some downsides. While the strive for excellence is critical, the ERC’s policy of funding an elite few with large grants inevitably creates a disparity, in which the top talent congregates at the top institutions and the gap between weaker and stronger nations widens.

The balance is restored, in part, by other parts of the EC’s RTD budget, such as MSCA.

The membership of the Marie Curie Alumni Association demonstrates the career progression of thousands of scientists from all backgrounds, and plays a role in the creation of a “European Research Area”, opening the continent up for collaboration. This seems much closer to the European ideal of unity in diversity.



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While it is hard to imagine a lavish celebration in Brussels for the signing of an MSCA grant agreement, we cannot forget the need for mobility and training opportunities and the funding of collaborative fundamental research.

Young scientists are equally talented everywhere, even if they may not be equally privileged. The path of Marie Curie herself is the testament to that.

Calum MacKichan



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Dear MCAA Members,

Thank you to all the Alumni who contributed to this issue, and especially the Chair, for her overview of the activities planned for the coming months.

In the next edition, we will bring you news of the future MCAA events, so please keep in touch!

The MCAA team