



Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Guidelines on Supervision

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
Directorate C — Innovation, Digital Education and International Cooperation
Unit C2 — Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions

E-mail: EAC-MARIE-SKLODOWSKA-CURIE-ACTIONS@ec.europa.eu

*European Commission
B-1049 Brussels*

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021.
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PDF ISBN 978-92-76-19887-1 doi: 10.2766/508311 NC-03-21-167-EN-N

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Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Guidelines on Supervision¹

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) are the European Union's flagship programme for the mobility and training of researchers, as well as the development of doctoral programmes, with a strong structuring effect on participating institutions.

The MSCA contributes to the achievement of the European Research Area and the European Education Area, building on its core objective of promoting the training and career development of excellent, creative and innovative researchers.

One of the essential elements of successful research is supervision. Good supervision contributes to creating a supportive environment for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers and staff to conduct their work and is of high importance for their career advancement: guiding, supporting, directing, advising and mentoring are key factors to enable a researcher to embark on a promising career path or to re-start a career in research.

The MSCA promote effective supervision. In line with the principles set out in the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (Charter and Code)², MSCA beneficiaries must ensure adequate supervision or mentoring and appropriate career guidance.

The MSCA Guidelines on Supervision constitute a set of recommendations to be adopted on a best-effort basis by participants in the programme – both individuals and institutions – in order to help institutions and supervisors in guiding MSCA researchers.

These guidelines are without prejudice to the Grant Agreement, which constitutes the legal framework for the relations between the European Commission and the beneficiary.

The guidelines are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive and can be complemented by other initiatives; they should be implemented taking into account different possible situations, disciplines and levels of experience of researchers. They should be considered as complementary to the institution's guidelines where such guidelines exist.

Any issues that should arise relating to supervision should be discussed and addressed with the host institution through the established "conflict resolution" procedures within the institution.

1. Scope

These guidelines are addressed to participants in the MSCA, both individuals and institutions, whether from the academic or non-academic sector. They should serve as a reference for host institutions and supervisors to ensure that researchers are adequately supervised throughout the duration of their research project.

The use of the terms "supervisor/supervision" is to be understood in a broad sense and reflects the term used in the MSCA Grant Agreements.

¹ Version: 1, Date of release: 12.04.2021

² Euraxess. *The European Charter & Code for Researchers*: <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter>

The use of the term “researcher” in this document refers to MSCA-funded researchers under Doctoral Networks, Postdoctoral Fellowships and MSCA Cofund.

Some of the guidelines listed below may also apply where relevant to MSCA Staff Exchanges secondees.

The degree and form of supervision may vary according to disciplines, researcher’s experience, type of programme or personality/skills factors.

2. Guidelines

2.1. Role of the supervisor

2.1.1. General principles and integration of the researcher

- Follow the principles of the **European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers** ([Charter](#) and [Code](#)).
- Raise awareness on existing Code of Ethics or conducts such as the [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#)³.
- Facilitate access to research equipment, resources, facilities and/or fieldwork.
- Facilitate access to background and results needed for their research activities.
- Facilitate access to all necessary information for researchers at the beginning of their MSCA-funded fellowship (e.g. contacts for the relevant institutional services/help desks).
- Ensure equal treatment of researchers with special needs, providing them with equal opportunities in the research field.

2.1.2. Research support

- Encourage the researcher to acquire academic, technical and transferable skills.
- Provide support, guidance and constructive feedbacks to the researcher on the nature of research and the standard expected.
- Monitor and assess the progression of the research and regularly provide feedback on it.
- Develop jointly with the researcher, regularly review and promote the implementation of a career development plan throughout the fellowship, as required under the Grant Agreement.
- Provide the conditions to enable the researcher to reach autonomy and gain management experience.
- Encourage the researcher to follow the principles set out in the MSCA Green Charter with a view to reducing the environmental impact of the research.

³ All European Academies. *The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity*, 2017: <https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/>

2.1.3. Career development

- Provide counselling and support on career development and information on different career paths or ensure the researcher has access to this support.
- Actively support the researcher in defining a current and prospective work plan to match future research and professional ambitions.
- Support the networking opportunities, inside and outside academia, enhancing the researcher's access to global knowledge, experiences and key scientists in the field or other relevant players.

2.1.4. Mentoring and wellbeing of the researcher

- Serve as a role model for the researcher by performing research with integrity and high ethical standards.
- Support the researcher in overcoming possible hurdles and suggest alternative solutions to the problems.
- Direct the researcher towards institutional/social support instruments (such as counselling) when necessary.
- Raise awareness on the need to safeguard the wellbeing of the researcher, explaining the possible problems that may arise during the different stage of the research career and informing the researcher about available support systems, including for mental health.
- Encourage the researcher to dedicate time to personal well-being and to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

2.1.5. Communication and conflict resolution

- Ensure a regular, clear and open communication, providing clarity and consistency as regards mutual expectations (e.g. frequency of meetings).
- Ensure a coherent and complementary approach in joint supervision cases (e.g. Doctoral Networks).
- Agree with the researcher, from the outset, on a common approach in case of disagreements or conflict between them and inform the researcher about existing institutional conflict resolution mechanisms.
- Refer the researcher to the relevant communication channels in case of persistent problems or complaints that cannot be addressed or solved through the internal procedures of conflicts resolution.

2.2. Role of the researcher

2.2.1. General principles

- Follow the principles of the European Charter for Researchers ([Charter](#)).

- Perform research with integrity and high ethical standards according to the [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#).

2.2.2. Research

- Manage and sustain progress in accordance with the agreed research plan and follow-up their career development plan.
- Follow the principle set out in the MSCA Green Charter with a view to reducing the environmental impact of the research.

2.2.3. Wellbeing

- Raise as early as possible with the supervisor any concerns, uncertainties and problems whether research related or of personal nature.
- Commit to preserving a healthy work-life balance and personal well-being.

2.2.4. Communication and conflict resolution

- Ensure a clear and open communication with the supervisor, providing clarity and consistency as regards mutual expectations (e.g. frequency of meetings).
- Keep the supervisor informed on the progression of the research, providing relevant information and data related to it.
- Make use of the relevant communication channels in case of persistent problems or complaints that cannot be addressed or solved through the internal procedures of conflicts resolution.

2.3. Role of institution

2.3.1. General principles and integration of the researcher

- Commit to adopting and ensuring the implementation of the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers ([Charter](#) and [Code](#)).
- Provide all necessary information to researchers at the beginning of their MSCA-funded fellowship (relevant services, training availability, help desks for administrative questions, local networks, communication rules and local/national social rules and welfare).
- Raise awareness of existing documents or Codes of Ethics and Research Integrity in the institution.
- Inform the researchers about their rights and obligations under the Grant Agreement, including in terms of publications of results and intellectual property rights.
- Provide a safe, equitable and constructive work environment for researchers.
- Ensure access to research equipment, resources, facilities and/or fieldwork.

- Ensure access to background and results needed for the research activities.
- Uphold the highest standards for diversity and inclusiveness, and continuously work towards achieving gender equality.
- Ensure equal treatment of researchers with special needs, providing them with equal opportunities in the research field.

2.3.2. Research support

- Provide training for researchers on transferable skills and recognise these skills.
- Provide the researchers with the opportunity to acquire interdisciplinary knowledge that supplements the value of the research performed.
- Where possible, offer access to institutional training programmes to the researchers.
- In case of secondment, ensure the researchers are familiar with and engaged within the PhD awarding university, while they are located at their premises.
- Enable the researchers to follow the principles set out in the MSCA Green Charter with a view to reducing the environmental impact of the research.

2.3.3. Career development

- Provide adequate career services for researchers, as well as information on career paths, inside and outside academia.
- Support the networking opportunities, inside and outside academia, enhancing the researchers' access to global knowledge, experiences and key scientists in the field or other relevant players.

2.3.4. Mentoring and well-being of the researchers

- Consider designating a mentor, alongside the supervisor, to provide the researcher with advice, mentoring, guidance (not necessarily scientific), in cases where the supervisor does not already perform that role.
- Provide support and counselling mechanisms and services for researchers and supervisors.
- Implement policies that encourage researchers to dedicate time to personal well-being.
- Create a healthy environment for all researchers to conduct their work and encourage their integration in the research group and community.
- Safeguard a healthy work-life balance (e.g. working hours).
- Raise awareness on the growing problem of mental health issues for researchers, properly monitor them and address potential issues.
- Provide peer-to-peer support services and community building opportunities (e.g. PhD buddy programmes).

- Provide inclusive, high-quality services and take into account all aspects of accessibility and adjustments required for researchers with special needs.

2.3.5. Supervision management and conflict resolution

- Encourage the use of joint supervision and co-supervision in those schemes where this option is not already mandatory (Industrial Doctorates and Joint Doctorates).
- Recognise the work of the supervisor, and take that work into account in his/her assessment.
- Develop and sustain anti-discrimination procedures and training for supervisors and mentors.
- Ensure continuity of the supervision in case of prolonged absence of the supervisor.
- Ensure transparent procedures for conflict resolution.
- Provide the researcher with the relevant communication channels in case of persistent problems or complaints that cannot be addressed or solved through the internal procedures of conflicts resolution.

2.4. Training and professional development for supervisors

The host institution should ensure high quality continuous professional development and resources for supervisors adequate to their responsibilities in working with researchers, such as pedagogical styles, harassment, ethics in research, mentorship, communication, and career advice. Such trainings should:

- Be highly recommended at the start of supervisory practice and then regularly updated on the base of the new developments and methodologies. Such trainings should be seen as investments to develop support measures, and not as an additional/mandatory workload.
- Have a wide focus on project management, communication, interpersonal skills, and awareness of mental health issues.
- Include peer-to-peer support in which supervisors themselves can ask each other for help or in which they can share specific questions they may have.
- Raise awareness of supervisors on research integrity issues, including measures to avoid misconduct and procedures for possible misconduct investigations.
- Provide space for mentoring new supervisors by experienced supervisors.

Specific training should be provided on a case-to-case basis and depending on the field of research.



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