

Testimony of a Global Fellowship recipient

Benny Borremans

PhD Biology 2015 (UAntwerp, FWO)

MSCA Global Fellowship

outgoing: University of California, Los Angeles
(Prof. James Lloyd-Smith)

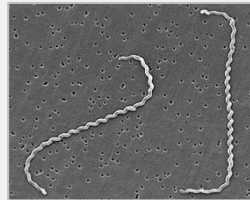
return: UHasselt (Prof. Niel Hens)

Why MSCA?

- Good conditions
- Flexibility
- Mobility
- 2/3 years
- Fellowship = freedom

- One of a few options for international individual fellowships
 - FWO Pegasus - 3y
 - EMBO - 2y
(European Molecular Biology Organization – www.embo.org)
 - AXA Research Fund (2y)
(AXA – www.axa-research.org)
 - BAEF - 1y
(Belgian American Education Foundation – www.baef.be)

Spillover of Leptospira in island populations of the Channel Island fox



Outgoing phase (1+2y):

- Data collection + existing data
- Collaborations
- New skills



Return phase (1y):

- Specific analyses
- New skills



Tips:

1. **Strong project**
 - Innovative
 - Ambitious yet achievable/credible
 - Build on expertise of all partners (fellow + supervisors + collaborators)
2. **Gather information**
 - Excellent documentation available
 - MSCA website
 - University websites
 - Previous applications (colleagues)
 - University research managers
3. **List keywords/topics** to be addressed, and address ALL of them
(e.g. *knowledge transfer, multidisciplinary, international networking, career prospects, result dissemination, and many more...*)
Help reviewers tick their checklist points

Strengths

- The project is multidisciplinary as it includes methods and concepts from a range of different disciplines such as human epidemiology, disease ecology, conservation and island ecology.
- The outgoing host supervisor is very experienced as an ecologist and disease modeller and has a very good publication record, has secured research funding from key funding bodies and has extensive experience in supervision, mentoring and training. The supervisor in the returning phase is very experienced as a biostatistician and mathematical modeller and also has a good publication record, experience of training researchers and participation in collaborations. Therefore, the quality of the supervision is very high.
- The hosting arrangements are clear, detailed and organised very well in order to support the researcher. The planned schedule of meetings between researcher and supervisor is very well organised and described in a good level of detail. Also, a career development plan will be created for the researcher.
- The researcher demonstrates a good publication record for stage of career and also demonstrates good experience of leadership and fieldwork.
- The researcher demonstrates strong motivation to take up challenges.
- Overall, it is clearly demonstrated that the researcher has the capacity to reach a position of professional maturity in research.
- The transfer of knowledge in wet- and dry-lab research techniques is adequately described.
- A detailed training plan for the applicant (including courses and research activities) is provided.

Weaknesses

- Insufficient information is provided about training in complementary skills.
- The proposal fails to clearly demonstrate the scientific relevance of the project objective to obtain novel data.
- The innovative nature of the project is not properly demonstrated, although a possible change in paradigm is mentioned. The project seems to be confirmatory to the host's previous research work.
- The plans to reintegrate the researcher at the incoming host are not described in sufficient detail.
- The capacity of the researcher to reach a position of professional maturity is compromised by a relatively weak publication record.

CV/expertise

Fellow + supervisors

Career stage taken into account

This proposal:

1m before PhD, 17 publications, 43 cit, h-index 4

Also successful:

2y after PhD, 4 publications (IF<5), 42 cit, h-index 2

Not successful:

6m after PhD, 11 publications (incl. Nature co-authorship), 39 cit, h-index 4

“weak publication record”

Strengths

- The project will have a positive impact on the researcher's career perspectives and help to realise his potential in research as it will provide training in new skills and also offer the opportunity to work outside the EU in a very vibrant research environment and to establish new networks and collaborations.
- The project describes extensive, focused and detailed plans for communication of the project outcomes to the public both in the USA and in the EU.
- A clear and good quality plan for dissemination of the project results to the scientific community is provided.
- The researcher will acquire knowledge in a multidisciplinary environment.
- The researcher provides a detailed plan for communicating the actions of the project using different approaches and web-based methods. Public engagement activities are well described and satisfactory, with very good opportunities through both supervisors.
- Dissemination of research results to the scientific community is described adequately using standard methods.

Weaknesses

- Exploitation of IP is not addressed in sufficient detail.
- The potential impact of the fellowship in enhancing research- and innovation-related human resources, skills, and working conditions to realise the potential of the applicant and to provide new career perspectives is not strongly demonstrated.
- The possible impact of the project results is mentioned but not adequately supported. The impact is overestimated.

Strengths

- The outgoing and incoming host institutions and laboratories have excellent infrastructure and facilities needed for the project to be successfully implemented.
- Financial management is satisfactory with good support from the host.
- The work plan is high quality and described very well. The project plan is sub divided into two work packages, each with distinct aims. The deliverables and milestones are achievable and realistic and the whole work plan is coherent and should be effective in delivering the project outcomes. The Gantt chart demonstrates appropriate allocation of time and resources and includes both the outgoing and return phases.
- The management structures are high quality and appropriate to ensure effective management of the proposed project.
- Quality management, in terms of progress monitoring, is described well and the outgoing host institution will assist with the financial management.
- An appropriate risk analysis has been carried out and a mitigation plan has been created for each risk identified.
- The institutional environments and infrastructure are appropriate and sufficient information is provided to demonstrate that high-quality facilities and infrastructure will be made available to support the researcher and the project.
- The host organisations have been selected carefully in order to ensure that the aims of the project can be achieved and the partners complement each other well. Each possesses the required skills, competencies and experience for the project and the commitment of the outgoing host has been demonstrated by a letter of support.

Weaknesses

- Exploitation of IP is not addressed in sufficient detail.
- The researcher's tasks are not clearly outlined. WP description does not allow to accurately evaluate who will directly take the responsibilities. The researcher will often follow the work of others.
- Difficulties in finding sufficient high quality samples are not properly considered.
- The low frequency of meetings between supervisor and researcher does not indicate a careful supervision plan.

Luck!

Only 3 reviewers

Expert in your field?

Friendly relations with applicant/supervisors?

Stressed?

For example:

- 79% score, but received EMBO fellowship (~ success rate)
- 96% score, but no BAEF fellowship (much less competitive)

Power in numbers

Learn from rejections, but never let them lose your motivation!

Proposal revision \neq judgement of personal quality