GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS
USAL4EXCELLENCE-MSCA-COFUND
1st CALL 2021

Valid only for the **COFUND EDITION** of USAL4EXCELLENCE Fellowship Programme

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University of Salamanca

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1. DEFINITIONS

Europe: EU Member States (MS), including their outermost regions, the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) linked to MS and Associated Countries (AC).

The Academic Sector refers to public or private higher education establishments awarding academic degrees, public or private non-profit research organizations for whom one of the main objectives is to pursue research or technological development, and international European interest organizations.

The Non-Academic Sector refers to any socio-economic actor not included in the academic sector and fulfilling the requirements of the Horizon 2020 Rules for Participation Regulation (EU) No. 1290/2013. This includes all fields of future workplaces of researchers, from industry to business, government, civil society organizations, etc.

The Beneficiary is the legal entity established in a MS or AC that signs the Grant Agreement and has the complete responsibility for the proper implementation of the action. It contributes directly to the implementation of the research, transfer of knowledge and training activities by recruiting, supervising, hosting or training a MSCA-funded researcher.

The Partner Organisation contributes to the implementation of the action but does not sign the Grant Agreement.

The Experienced Researcher (ER) must be, at the date of the call deadline, in possession of a doctoral degree or have at least four years of full-time equivalent research experience.

Research Experience is a period of activity in research proven by e.g., a work contract, a scholarship, a study certificate.

Full-Time Equivalent Research Experience is measured from the date when a researcher obtained the degree entitling him/her to embark on a doctorate (either in the country in which the degree was obtained or in the country in which the researcher is recruited), even if a doctorate was never started or envisaged.

The Supervisor is the scientist appointed at the beneficiary to supervise the researcher throughout the whole duration of the action.

The Mentor is the person providing support and guidance for the personal and professional development of researchers, motivating them, and contributing to reducing any insecurity in their professional future.

The Project Manager (PM) is the person assigned to the implementation of the project (full-time). PM works closely with Project Coordinator and the Management Team and

coordinates the project activities with all actors involved, including Human Resources, Financial Services, Training and the Communication Office.

The Management Team (MT). This committee is led by the PM and consists of 3 members of the International Project Office (OPI, USAL) and 3 members of the Research Management Unit (AGI, USAL). The main role of the MT is to carry out administrative issues.

The Project Coordinator (PC) is the Vice Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Transfer at USAL. PC is responsible for the overall leadership of the project and is a central figure for conflict resolution and decision-making, enabling consensus building.

The Research Ethics Committee (REC). This committee consists of 3 members from the Ethic Committee of USAL, and is responsible to assure that any projects involving all possible ethical aspect: research on humans, the use of personal data or human biological samples, experiments on animals or the use of biological agents genetically modified organisms, environmental ethics, data protection, etc. This committee also oversees the general supervision of the ethical aspects of USAL4EXCELLENCE.

The Quality Assurance specialists (QAS). This committee will consist of 3 personnel evaluation experts from the Agency for the Quality of the University System in Castilla y León (ACSUCYL), which is the external body for the evaluation of the University System of the Region. They will assure that the selection of IEs is according to the aspects they have to evaluate and complies with COFUND programme policies, processes and procedures. It should be stressed however this committee will have no role in evaluating the proposals. This committee will also be in charge of the general USAL4EXCELLENCE project quality supervision.

The Equality and Inclusion Committee (EIC). This committee will be made of 3 members of the USAL Equality Unit. Their main role will be to ensure equal opportunities during all stages of the selection process of the ER candidates. They will also be involved in the selection of committee members (IE, QAS, REC), providing the guidelines to maintain gender equality, and they will also give briefings to evaluators on avoiding unconscious gender-bias.

The Career Development Plan (CDP) is a document that will guide the fellow to achieve his/her scientific and career development objectives. It will be elaborated by the fellow jointly with the supervisors (at USAL and the Partner Organization) and a mentor.

Short visits are characterised by the type of activity rather than by a specific number of days. A period can only be considered as a short stay if the researcher did not reside or did not have their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country during that period (such as holidays or participation in conferences).

2. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAMME

The “University of Salamanca Programme to Foster Research Excellence'' (USAL4EXCELLENCE) is an initiative of the University of Salamanca (USAL), which aims to attract 40 Experienced

Researchers (ERs) positions for 30 months in two calls of 20 positions per each, in order to build a critical mass of scientific leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge to develop and implement research projects that will aid European sustainable socio-economic development. USAL4EXCELLENCE attempts to achieve this purpose by fostering international collaboration in research, and by enhancing knowledge and technology transfer between academia (in the fields of Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences, Medicine, Science and Engineering) and industry.

2.1. OBJECTIVES

Thanks to funding from the European Commission's Marie Sklodowska-Curie COFUND action, USAL is in a unique position to offer the best conditions for a fellowship programme, based on the principles of the European Charter for Researchers[1] and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers[2] (guaranteed by the HR award that USAL[3] received in 2019).

Through USAL4EXCELLENCE programme, USAL will reinforce the development and broadening of the research competencies of experienced researchers (ERs), with special emphasis on personal and career development through training in a wide set of transferable skills, along specific training in research skills.

The objective of this programme is to foster excellence in researchers' training, mobility and career development, and spreading the best practices of Marie Sklodowska-Curie actions.

The specific objectives of USAL4EXCELLENCE are summarized in the following list:

- Improving ERs career development
    - Increase their research and transferable skills, leading to improved employability and career prospects (in and outside academia).
    - Promote worldwide cooperation between ERs and their networks.
    - Improve their research maturity and leadership skills, enable them to develop a sustainable research career and enhance their competitiveness in writing international R&I projects.
    - Facilitate R&I output, ideas converted into products and services through intensive collaboration with industry.
    - Enable ERs to become responsible research leaders through training in Responsible Research and Innovation.
- USAL & Participating Organizations sustainable socio-economic development
    - Develop high quality human resources. USAL4EXCELLENCE will support USAL alignment to the EU Charter and Code for Researchers, having been acknowledged with the distinction "HR Excellence in Research'' in July 2019.
    - Boosting Research & Innovation capacity among participating organizations, with research outcomes carried out in collaboration with participating organizations' researchers.
    - Enhance cooperation and transfer of knowledge between sectors (business and academia) and disciplines.
    - Strengthen international collaborative networks.
- European sustainable socio-economic development

[1] https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter/european-charter
[2] https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter/code
[3] https://investigacion.usal.es/es/estrategias-investigacion

- Promote research mobility in Europe.
- Improve employment and working conditions.
- Deliver high quality training and career development opportunities.
- Promote Europe's attractiveness as a leading destination for R&I with an attractive fellowship programme focused on mobility and the ER's career development and future perspectives.
- Contribute to Europe's competitiveness and growth by providing possible solutions to major challenges of our society.

3. FELLOW CONDITIONS

3.1. GENERAL CONDITIONS

Bottom-up approach: Applicants can choose their research topic freely within all academic areas and may involve (but not limited to) USAL's Interdisciplinary Research groups[4], Centres[5] and Institutes[6].

Duration: Each fellowship will last 30 months, assuring proper project implementation.

Host Institution: Fellows will be hosted at USAL[7] and they will have the opportunity and freedom to choose their destination for two secondments. Thus, fellows will have a mandatory period at USAL during the first 24 months (except for a voluntary secondment which should be started at least after 6 months at USAL), and a mandatory secondment during the last 6 months of the fellowship, as indicated below.

Voluntary secondment (secondment 1): Fellows will be encouraged to undertake a stay in a Partner Organization for a period of up-to 6 months, which could be split into shorter periods (neither of them may be shorter than 1 month).

Mandatory secondment in industry/organizations of interest (secondment 2): Fellows will spend up-to 20% of their fellowship in a non-academic entity (large company, SME, non-profit institution, museums, libraries, hospitals, etc.) for a more market-oriented period, lasting for a minimum of 3 months and a maximum of 6 months.

Supervisors & mentors: Applicants will be assigned a suitable supervisor and mentor if they are successfully admitted to USAL4EXCELLENCE. The ER will set up a Career Development Plan (CDP) after 3 months with the assistance of the supervisor and the mentor at USAL and the supervisor at the Partner Organization in which the mandatory secondment will be implemented.

Training: USAL4EXCELLENCE will offer tailored support that will help ERs understand and adopt best practice in research. All ERs will be expected to attend relevant courses (on-line training, face-to-face training or events) as part of their overall CDP. Many of these courses will be delivered at a local level by departments, faculties and institutes, both as part of the USAL teaching programme and as standalone courses. All these courses will be available at the following link (https://investigacion.usal.es/en/node/128).

[4] https://investigacion.usal.es/es/empresas/gir
[5] https://www.usal.es/centros-propios
[6] https://www.usal.es/institutos-investigacion
[7] https://www.usal.es/

Salary: Each fellowship includes funds for travel, reasonable research expenses as well as competitive salary. The total cost of a fellowship is 4.855 €/month and the net salary of the ER will be around 3.500 €/month. The net salary results from deducting all compulsory (employer/employee) Social Security contributions as well as direct taxes (e.g., income tax) from the gross amounts. Additionally, the remunerations may vary annually depending on the Social Security rates. The rate indicated above is for researchers working full-time.

3.2. THEMATIC FIELDS OF APPLICATION AND DESCRIPTORS

The applicants should choose their research topic freely within all academic areas:

- Chemistry (CHE)
- Social Sciences and Humanities (SOC)
- Economic Sciences (ECO)
- Information Science and Engineering (ENG)
- Environment and Geosciences (ENV)
- Life Sciences (LIF)
- Mathematics (MAT)
- Physics (PHY)

NOTE 1: In their online Application, the applicants should choose only one research topic from this list. Please be aware that during evaluation process, applications will be grouped according to selected research topics (for more details about the criteria for fellowship assignment, please refer to section 6 of this guidelines)

NOTE 2: In their online Application, the applicants should also choose at least three descriptors (MSCA-List of Descriptors, Annex 1) carefully, and in order of importance, since this will guide the Management Team in the selection of experts for proposal evaluation (for more details about the application process, please refer to section 5 of this guidelines). Selected descriptors may be associated with different research topics.

3.3. USAL SUPERVISORS

The applicants should have previously contacted potential supervisors in relation to their research projects. A list of potential supervisors will be provided in the project web page (additional information about research fields, Departments, Centres, Institutes, Research Groups is available as well in USAL web page[8]). The applicants will be asked to list top 3 choices for project supervisors. However, the applicants must provide in their applications only a Letter of Commitment from the first USAL supervisor option.

Supervisors must ensure to meet the following requirements:

- Have a permanent teaching and research staff category, belonging to a recognized research group (GIR) as research member (doctor not collaborator) and should present the following minimum specifications:
    - Have recognized at least two six-year research periods evaluated over at least one of the last seven years.

[8] https://www.usal.es/

- Be a principal investigator or member of the research team of an ongoing National or International funded project or with positive provisional resolution at the time of the call deadline for the fellowships recruitment.
- Additionally, it will be encouraged that supervisors demonstrate, with hard evidence, the collective quality of the research supervisors in training of researchers, being author of scientific articles published in journals included in the Journal of Citation Reports or relevant contributions in the corresponding scientific field (articles in scientific journals, monographs or book chapters), participation as principal investigator or member of the research team of an Regional/National or International funded projects, be editorial board membership, awards, important participation in conferences, having relevant international collaborations. It will pay special attention (but not limited to) to the track-record of significant research achievements in the last 10 years.

NOTE 3: Although each supervisor can participate in more than 2 proposals, finally he/she will not supervise more than 2 candidates in the same call in order to ensure his/her commitment.

3.4. SECONDMENTS

Fellows will have the opportunity and freedom to choose their destination for two secondments[9]:

- *Voluntary secondment (secondment 1)*: Fellows will be encouraged to undertake a stay in a Partner Organization for a period of up-to 6 months, which could be split into shorter periods (neither of them may be shorter than 1 month) depending on individual project schedules. This first secondment should be scheduled between the first 24 months of the research project and the institution will be freely selected by the candidate (either within the USAL partnership or not).
- *Mandatory secondment in industry/organizations of interest (secondment 2)*: Fellows will spend up-to 20% of their fellowship in a non-academic entity for a more market-oriented period, lasting for a minimum of 3 months and a maximum of 6 months. The secondment will be scheduled during the last 6 months of the fellowship and may involve (but not limited to) Partner Organizations.

All the selected Partner Organizations for the secondments must be located in a European Union-Member States/ Associated Countries, including Spain.

Secondments of the researchers to Partner Organizations are encouraged, and they should significantly add impact to the fellows´ career development and be relevant, feasible, and beneficial for the researcher and in line with the project objectives.

Any secondment must be mentioned and justified in the project research proposal. The secondment must be meaningful and appropriate to the type of fellowship and research field.

[9] List of the Partners Organizations will be published on USAL4EXCELLENCE project website (https://usal4excellence.usal.es/). Other Partner Organizations not listed in the website but proposed by the fellows themselves could be also selected.

A letter of commitment is required for the selected partner organisation which will host ER during his/her mandatory secondment (secondment 2)

The quality and degree of involvement of Partner Organizations and the impact of the secondments will be assessed by the expert evaluators according to the evaluation criteria.

It is essential for the applicants to clearly distinguish "secondments" from “short visits” since they have a different nature and pursue different objectives:

- *Secondments* are planned in advance and are an integral part of the research proposal. They imply mobility to a partner organisation in a Member State or Associate Country with specific supervision arrangements.
- *Short visits* (for example for fieldwork) imply mobility to another location outside the physical premises of the beneficiary. However, the work done is supervised directly by the beneficiary. A short visit is not a secondment, and therefore the country where a short visit takes place can be chosen freely.

3.5. FUNDING CONDITIONS

The remuneration to be offered to fellows consists of the following items:

- Gross annual salary for the fellow:

Each fellowship includes a competitive salary with a gross annual salary (Living allowance + Mobility + Family allowance) of 58.260 €/year (4.855 EUR[10]€/month) under employment contract (Social contributions are included).

Cost categories	Living allowance EUR/month	Mobility allowance EUR/month	Family allowance [11] EUR/month	Total EUR/month
Fellowships funding	3.880	475	500	4.855

All these amounts are monthly-fixed. Please notice that these are gross contributions. The net salary (around 3.500 €/month) results from deducting all compulsory (employer/employee) Social Security contributions as well as direct taxes (e.g., income tax) from the gross amounts. Additionally, the remunerations may vary annually depending on the Social Security rates. The rate indicated above is for researchers working full-time.

- Complementary allowances to support the research, training, and the career development for the fellow:

The fellows will have access to additional expenses to support their research, participation in training activities and networking costs.

[10] Fellows without family allowance will receive 4.355 EUR/month.

[11] Family allowance will be paid in case the researcher has family obligations. In this context, family is defined as persons linked to the researcher: (i) by marriage, (ii) by a relationship with equivalent status to a marriage recognised by the legislation of the country or region where this relationship was formalised, (iii) as dependent children who are being maintained by the researcher. This allowance, regardless of the family size, amounts to EUR 500EUR/month. The family status of a researcher will be determined at the date of the call deadline and will not be revised during the lifetime of the action.

Cost categories	Travel allowance EUR/month	Research costs EUR/month	Other costs EUR/month	Total EUR/month
Fellowships funding	Included in the other costs	400	200	600

This amount of 600 EUR/month will be managed by the fellows to support additional activities for the accomplishment of their activity:

- preparation of conferences, workshops and meetings focusing on special areas of science and technology that bring experts together to discuss recent research or education findings or on-going project developments;
- costs for visa-related fees and travel expenses;
- publication costs of conference and meeting proceedings in professional journals;
- technical or lab instrumentation and equipment acquisition;
- additional costs arising from secondments (e.g. travel costs, accommodation costs for optional secondments);
- maintenance and operation required and included in the Description of Work planned by the fellow with the monitoring of the supervisor and the approval of the Management Team.

During the fellow's secondment, this amount (600 EUR/month) may be transferred to the Partner Organizations to support the expenses related to the fellows´ research in the Partner organization[12].

3.6. CONTRACT CONDITIONS

The USAL4EXCELLENCE fellows will be hired by USAL as researchers of the COFUND Programme, under a local research employment contract, compatible with all national and regional legislation, in line with the Spanish Science, Technology and Innovation Law 14/2011, and following the guidelines provided by the European Charter for Researchers[13] and a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers[14] (guaranteed by the HR award that USAL[15] received in 2019), to which the beneficiary is signatory. Foreign employees are entitled to Social Security benefits in Spain.

The working conditions of researchers, in terms of legal coverage, will be adapted to Spanish and EU applicable legislation, under the terms (regarding remuneration, social contributions, permits and paternity/maternity leave, etc.) described. Social Security contributions are included in gross annual salary: these contributions arising from employment contracts will be paid by the employer (USAL, 35% of the total annual contract cost). This will entitle the fellow

[12]This will depend on the specific agreement signed between the Beneficiary and the Partner Organization

[13]https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter/european-charter

[14] https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/euraxess/charter-code-researchers

[15] https://investigacion.usal.es/es/estrategias-investigacion

to enjoy all the corresponding rights and benefits. These include full social healthcare coverage, state pension, unemployment compensation and maternity/paternity leave of 16 weeks for women and for men according to Spanish law. When applicable, paternity leave could be joined indistinctly by the mother or the father, after week 7 from date birth.

Each candidate will be consulted about the required research infrastructure and lab space before an offer is made. An assessment of laboratory equipment needs will be made to determine suitability of available resources. All efforts are made to guarantee that the fellow's needs can be met or that alternative solutions can be found. The hosting institutes/departments offer the researchers a broad range of infrastructures and specialized services for their research. Furthermore, if necessary, selected fellows will have the opportunity to access additional research and infrastructures facilities in the network of the USAL Campus of International Excellence, Universities of the Coimbra Group, collaborations with SMEs, national and international Research Centres, etc.

Each researcher will be provided with an appropriate workplace including a state-of-the-art computer and access to the facilities, equipment and services of the hosting institution, such as laboratories, meeting rooms, etc. The Project Manager (PM) will provide special support to the fellows to comfortably settle in the area provided by participant hosting institutions in USAL. During the application phase, PM will be in charge of providing support services to applicants (described below in Section 5).

Moreover, fellows will also benefit from EURAXESS services at USAL and at national and European level: information about living in Salamanca (accommodation, banking, day care, schooling and family related issues, visa, health insurance, medical care, access to the culture/language courses), working in Spain (career development, intellectual property rights, recognition of diplomas, taxation/salaries, unemployment, work permit, pension for researchers), leaving Spain (departure conditions/formalities, job opportunities, funding opportunities, EURAXESS worldwide).

In addition, the ERs will have opportunities to assume the responsibility of teaching (optional teaching to USAL students for up to 80 hours/year) and supervising students (optional co-supervision of Master students and/or PhD students at the host institutes/departments to strengthen their supervision skills), organizing conferences/seminars, which will enrich their teaching and team working experience. These academic activities will also help the ERs to complete their skillset and obtain accreditations required for academic stable positions when desired.

Partner Organizations will act as host; therefore, fellows will continue to be employed by USAL while on their secondments. The employment contract ensures social security and risk coverage for the recruited researchers. According to the partnership agreement between USAL and the Partner Organisations, it will be agreed on the way in which the research and other costs (described below) will be reimbursed.

4. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The candidates for the fellowships must meet the following requirements at the date of the call deadline:

- Be Experienced Researchers (ERs): It is mandatory to hold a Doctoral degree or at least four years' full-time research experience by the time of the call deadline (15th February, 2022).
- Comply with the mobility rule: USAL4EXCELLENCE welcomes applicants from any nationalities but they may not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Spain for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately before the call deadline (15th February, 2022).

5. APPLICATION PROCESS

In their online application form, ERs will be asked to provide following information:

- APPLICANT DETAILS:
  - Personal information (i.e., his/her name and surname, gender, researcher ID and contact details)
  - Place of activity/place of residence in the previous 3 years immediately prior to the call deadline
  - Date of PhD certificate and/or full-time postgraduate research experience
  - Eligibility conditions to claim for family allowance, career break, disability condition and/or refugee status
- RESEARCH PROPOSAL:
  - Title
  - Acronym
  - MSCA descriptors, which best summarizes the candidate's research activity. ERs will be asked to select up to 3 descriptors from a drop-down list
  - Research area of the application. ERs will be asked to select one research area from a drop-down list
  - Research abstract (max. 2,000 characters incl. blanks), which should provide the reader with a clear understanding of the objectives of the proposal, how they will be achieved, and their relevance
  - Supervisors. ERs will be asked to list top 3 choices for project supervisors from
  - a drop-down list
  - Host-institution from the non-academic sector. ERs will be asked to provide details (name of the entity and contact person data) of the selected partner organisation which will host ER during his/her mandatory secondment (secondment 2)
- ETHICS CHECKLIST, where ERs will be asked to answer YES/NO to questions about proposed research activities that may raise Ethical Issues, indicating (if the answer is YES) the corresponding page(s) of the Project Proposal that include this information

Additional components to be uploaded during application process are as follows:

- Scanned copy of identity card, resident's card or passport currently in force (submitted as a single PDF file)
- Diploma for his/her Doctoral Degree or certificate justifying at least four years' full-time research experience by the time of the call deadline (15th February 2022). Applicants who met this last condition must provide a copy of the corresponding contracts to justify it (submitted as a single PDF file). If the PhD degree is not in English, a copy of the original document must be provided and a translation into English must be attached.

- Certificate of contract, residence, enrolment or long stays outside Spain to justify the mobility rule, which states that the applicants have not resided or carried out their main activity in Spain more than 12 months in the 3 years prior to the call deadline (submitted as a single PDF file)
- (Optionally) Certificate of proficiency in English. Applicants may upload a certificate of proficiency in English (minimum C1 level as measured by CEFR, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) (submitted as a single PDF file). Alternatively, they will have to demonstrate (only the 40 highest ranked candidates) their command over the English language through an English language proficiency test (which will not be an official certificate) run by USAL Language Centre. Although candidates may opt for this second option, all selected applicants will be highly encouraged by USAL4EXCELLENCE Management Team to have available an official English certificate (minimum C1 level) before signing their contracts.
- Scientific proposal (according to the template provided in the application supporting documents and submitted as a single PDF file), including:
    - Project research proposal, which contains Excellence, Impact and Implementation sections, and it will be limited to 10 pages
    - CV of the candidate
    - Ethics self-assessment, where those ERs who flag ethical issues in the online application form should explain them in this section. This will be neither an eligibility nor an evaluation criterion
- Letter of Commitment from USAL supervisor (according to the template provided in the application supporting documents and submitted as a single PDF file). It will only be necessary to get one letter of commitment from the first USAL supervisor option.
- Letter of commitment of the selected Partner organizations (according to the template provided in the application supporting documents and submitted as a single PDF file)
- Letter/s of reference/s (up to 3) (in English). At least one Letter of reference is mandatory (according to the template provided in the application supporting documents). Letter(s) of reference must be submitted as a single PDF file.
- (If applicable):
    - Career break application form
    - Disability certificate
    - Refugee certificate

NOTE 4: All the information and the documents to be prepared and submitted will be in English.

5.1. SUBMISSION PROCESS

Please note that the entire application process is online, and no paperwork will be allowed via other means of communication, such as mail or email. The first step will be to register as a new user of the USAL electronic platform (link available from 15th November 2021 till 15th February 2022). As it is explained in the online application user manual (available in SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS - USAL 4 Excellence), at this step there will be two options for registering in this platform: fill and submit the registration form by using a valid digital certificate in Spain (1) or register without having this digital certificate (2). After a successful registration process (following option 1 or 2), applicants will be able to login on the specific online procedure designed for this call. As it has been previously indicated in this Guide for Applicants (see section 5. Application procedure), there will be two steps that should be done

to successfully accomplish application procedure: (1) Fill out necessary fields in application form, and (2) upload all necessary files in the files upload section. After completing these two steps, the application will be validated by the candidate and finally registered. Please remember that proposals must be submitted before the call deadline (15 th February 2022). Once a proposal is submitted, the applicant will not be able to edit his/her application or submit a new one. The applicants are responsible for ensuring that the file is uploaded correctly and that the contents are legible. If the documents cannot be read properly, the candidates will be unable to submit any further appeals. For more details about the submission process, please refer to the online application user manual, which will be available in our webpage (https://usal4excellence.usal.es/).

5.2. TIMELINE

FIRST CALL (expected dates)

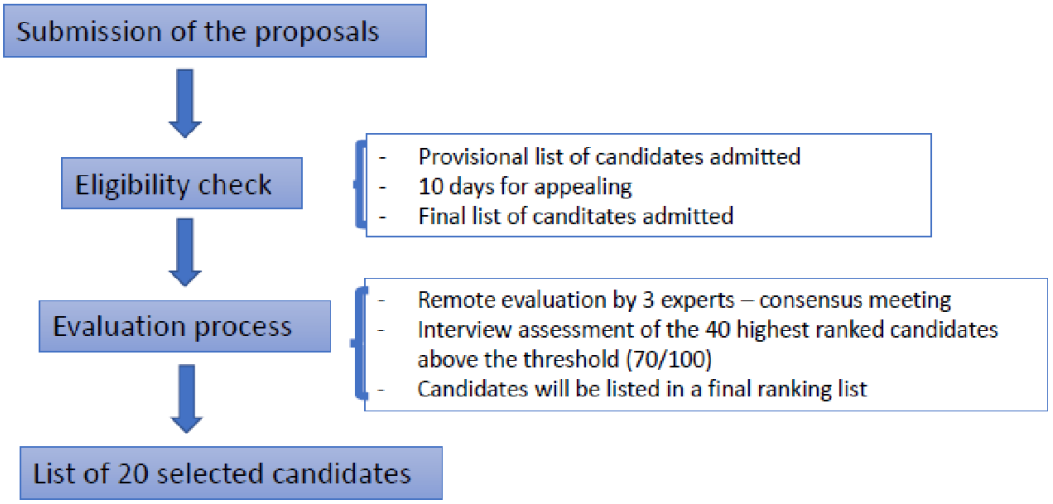
- Publication of the call: 15th November 2021
- Opening of the Application Process: 15th November 2021
- Deadline for applications: 15th February 2022
- Evaluation period: February 2022 - June 2022
- Evaluation Results: June 2022
- Start of the Fellowship: Since July 2022

SECOND CALL (expected dates)

- Publication of the call: October 2022
- Opening of the Application Process: October 2022
- Deadline for applications: November 2022
- Evaluation period: December 2022 - April 2023
- Evaluation Results: April 2023
- Start of the Fellowships: May 2023

The deadline to begin the projects and formalise the contract will be determined after the resolution of the award. Exceptionally, and previous authorisation from the Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Transfer, it could be delayed. This will not extend the duration of the project, nor the associated contracts, and the ending of the contract can never exceed the end date of the project MSCA COFUND USAL4EXCELLENCE.

6. EVALUATION PROCESS FOR EACH CALL



The evaluation process consists of the following steps:

- Receipt of the proposals: The applicants must first submit the full application through the USAL4EXCELLENCE online platform (http://usal4excellence.usal.es) according to the instructions provided in this Guide for Applicants (Section 5).
- Eligibility check: Once the application deadline has passed, the applications and the attached documents will be checked against the eligibility criteria by the Management Team (MT). Applicants may be contacted if additional documents are required, handing them in within a reasonable time (10 working days). Applicants who do not fulfil the eligibility criteria will be excluded from the selection process and informed through a formal Rejection Letter via email (after 5 working days). These applicants could formally submit a request for redress[16] considering the formal aspects of the eligibility process, not the scientific judgement (with 10 working days after the notification).
- Remote assessment: Each proposal and candidate's background will be evaluated remotely by 3 international experts according to the evaluation criteria. Each expert[17] will elaborate an individual evaluation report on the candidate.
- Online consensus meeting: The 3 international experts will examine and compare the individual reports, to check on the consistency of the scores applied and, where necessary, to propose a new set of scores. The meetings will result in a consensus report drawn by one rapporteur (one member of the group) and overseen by the MT and PM for quality reasons. The consensus report will lead to the next step, interview assessment.

[16] Please, see section 6.4 about complaints.

[17] External experts will sign a contract, including a declaration of confidentiality and absence of conflict of interest, before beginning their work. Confidentiality rules must be adhered to at all times before, during and after the evaluation.

- Interview assessment: The 40 highest ranked candidates above the threshold (70/100) [18] (see Section 5.1 Evaluation criteria) will be required to present their research project and CV in an interview through videoconference. The interview will be valued with 10% of the total score, while the other 90% will be the result of the score obtained in the evaluation criteria. Only candidates whose scores are above the different threshold will keep going into the interview assessment. (See Section 5.1 Evaluation criteria).
- Candidates' selection: For each candidate's report, the MT, IE and REC will elaborate the Final Report on the candidate. This report will be used by the MT for resolving the call, considering:
    - the applicants' scores,
    - the 8 MSCA thematic panels that will be distributed in turn in the 5 fields of knowledge established at the University of Salamanca (ARTS AND HUMANITIES; SCIENCE; HEALTH SCIENCES; ENGINEERING AND ARCHITECTURE; SOCIAL AND LEGAL SCIENCES)[19]
    - the equality (ensuring that none of the two sexes have a greater presence than 60% or less than 40%), and
    - special needs (guaranteeing a minimum percentage of 3-5% for people with special needs[20]). These quotas for underrepresented groups will be respected if the candidates exceed the minimum threshold (70/100).

  and according to the following criteria:
    - To be qualified for a fellowship, the candidate must obtain at least 70 points (70/100). Therefore, any candidate who has not obtained this minimum score will be excluded from the process.
    - For each call, 1 fellowship will be reserved for researchers with special needs, if the candidates exceed the minimum threshold (70/100).
    - For each call, 3 fellowships will be assigned to each field of knowledge up to 15, with the remaining 5 reserved for the highest scoring candidates.
    - In case after the first round, the 5 fields of knowledge have not been completed with 3 candidates each, and to award all available fellowships, these fellowships will be added to the previous pool (5 fellowships) and distributed among the candidates who obtained the highest scores. It will be considered that no more than 5 contracts may be awarded per field of knowledge, unless there are no candidates admitted to the other thematic fields.

[18] The 40 highest ranked proposals will be sent by MT to the REC (for the Preliminary Ethics Review in order to highlight possible ethical issues that have not been identified by the candidates in their proposals) and to the EIC (to identify key strategic and operational issues relevant to equality, diversity and inclusion in the proposals).

[19] Following the regulations of the USAL's internal research programmes, 5 major fields of knowledge are established, so that the 8 MSCA thematic panels will be distributed in these areas as follows: ARTS AND HUMANITIES covers a part of Social Sciences and Humanities (SOC); SCIENCE covers Chemistry (CHE), Environmental Geosciences (ENG), Mathematics (MAT), Physics (PHY) and a part of Life Sciences (LIF); HEALTH SCIENCES covers Life Sciences (LIF); ENGINEERING AND ARCHITECTURE covers Information Science and Engineering (ENG); SOCIAL AND LEGAL SCIENCES covers Social Sciences and Humanities (SOC) and Economic Sciences (ECO). A specific committee designated from the USAL Research Council and chaired by the Project Coordinator will assign the specific field of knowledge to those applications which may be included in more than one. To this end, this committee will only consider the main objective of the submitted project.

[20] If those positions are not filled, this percentage will be released into the Reserve List.

    - Final ranking will also consider that none of the two sexes have a greater presence than 60% or less than 40%. To this end, this provisional list could be modified incorporating candidates from under-represented gender (which were initially listed in the highest positions in the Reserve List) in substitution of those candidates from over-represented gender (which were initially listed in the list of selected candidates with the lowest scores).
- Finally, candidates will be listed in a final ranking. The top 20 candidates per call will be nominated as Selected Candidates and the following 10 will be on the Reserve List.
- Results communication: The Reserve and Rejection List and the Selected Candidate List. The candidates will be personally notified (through and emailed letter) from the Project Coordinator, based on the results of the final report. Additionally, candidates can complain[21] about the results of the selection process (within the next 10 working days using the redress template provided).

6.1. EVALUATION CRITERIA

The evaluation process will be conducted according to sub-criteria in line with the EU Code of conduct for recruitment[22]. There are two main scores: one from the Remote Assessment process and another from the Interview Assessment process (for those who have reached this stage of the selection process).

6.2. REMOTE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The proposals will be evaluated according to the evaluation criteria established (see table 1). Each criterion will be scored out of 5. Decimal points may be given. The scores indicate the following with respect to the criterion under examination:

- 0 (Proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information);
- 1 (Poor, the criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses);
- 2 (Fair, proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses);
- 3 (Good, proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings is present);
- 4 (Very Good, proposals address the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings is present);
- 5 (Excellent, proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor).

If there are ties, the IEs will consider the following factors, which will be published in the call for proposals and the guide for applicants:

- First, the priority of the criteria (1st Excellence, 2nd Impact, 3rd Implementation).
- Second, the proposals that address topics covered by RIS3 thematic priorities[23] will be highly ranked.

[21] Please, see section 6.4 about complaints.
[22] https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter/code
[23] See https://fuescyl.com/publicaciones/politicas-de-apoyo-a-las-i-d-i-en-castilla-y-leon/ris3-estrategia-regional-de-investigacion-e-innovacion-para-una-especializacion-inteligente-de-castilla-y-leon-2014-2020/112-actualizcion

- Third, the gender balance of personnel carrying out the research and/or innovation activities.

Table 1. Evaluation Criteria

Excellence	**Impact**	**Quality and efficiency of the implementation**
Quality and credibility of the research/innovation project; level of novelty, appropriate consideration of inter/multidisciplinary, gender aspects and RRI elements	Enhancing the future career prospects of the researcher after the fellowship	Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources
Quality and appropriateness of the training and of the two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host	Quality of the proposed measures for the exploitation and dissemination of project results	Appropriateness of the management structure and procedures, including risk management plan
Applicant's CV: The following merits will be evaluated, among others: Triple 'I' nature of candidate's mobility experience, previous experience in applying and/or managing international research funding, publications; patents; presentations at conferences; research contracts at other centres; research conducted abroad etc.	Quality of the proposed measures for communicating the project activities to different target audiences	Appropriateness of the institutional environment (infrastructure)
Capacity of the researcher to reach or re-enforce professional maturity/independence during the fellowship		
50%	**30%**	**20%**
Weighting		
1	**2**	**3**
Priority in case of *ex aequo*		
B: An overall threshold of 70% will be applied to the total weighted score		
Excellence + Impact + Implementation: 90% of the final mark		

6.3. PERSONAL INTERVIEW ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The 40 highest ranked candidates above the threshold (70/100) per call will be required to present their research project and CV in an interview through video conference. The interview will be valued with 10% of the total score, while the other 90% will be the result of the score obtained in the evaluation criteria.

The interview will be conducted by the three international and independent evaluators (who had participated in the previous selection process), the PC and one member of the Research Council appointed by the PC depending on the field of Knowledge. The interview will consist of

a project presentation (5 - 10 min) and questions (15 min). The interview will be entirely in English.

The interview assessment will be scored between 0 and 10 points and take into consideration the following criteria:

	SCIENTIFIC INDEPENDENCE AND LEADERSHIP	**COMMUNICATION SKILLS**
Evaluation Criteria	How the candidate shows evidence of emerging scientific independence and leadership during the interview	How the candidate is capable of defending a convincing project in fluent English
Weight	60%	40%
The interview assessment will be scored between 0 and 10 points		

The final assessment will be calculated as a weighted result, in which 90% of the score will be the Remote Assessment and the 10% will be the Personal Interview.

6.4. COMPLAINTS MECHANISM

All applicants are entitled to request a redress procedure during the selection process if the applicant believes that a mistake has been made during the selection process that may affect the outcome of the eligibility check or assessment process.

- Eligibility check: Applications will be considered by the Management Team (MT). The candidates will be notified by the PM of the decision concerning the eligibility of their application (up to 2 months after the call deadline). In the event of the application being unsuccessful, reasons for its rejection will be given to the candidate concerned. An ER who is notified that his/her application is unsuccessful, will have the right to appeal to the Project Coordinator (PC) (within 10 working days), whose decision on any application will be final.
- Assessment process: After receiving feedback on the evaluation of their proposal (through an emailed letter), the applicants can initiate a request for redress within 10 working days after each Provisional Resolution has been published.

Requests must be sent by email to the address provided on the USAL4EXCELLENCE website (usal4excellence@usal.es). The template will be available on the website. The candidate will receive an acknowledgement of receipt of the request. The USAL4EXCELLENCE project manager will process and examine the requests and forward them to the Redress Committee, composed by Project Manager, Management Team and Project Coordinator, they will decide and provide a definitive reply. The committee will not call into question the scientific or technical judgement of appropriately qualified experts.

The committee's role is to ensure a coherent interpretation of such requests, and equal treatment of all applicants.

Requests must:

- be related to the evaluation process, or eligibility checks;
- including a clear description of the grounds for complaint;

- be received within the time limit specified in the call.

All requests for redress will be treated in confidence.

After the appeal process, the candidates whose scores have been updated will be notified either through an Invitation or Rejection Letter.

Any interested party may lodge an administrative appeal against this competition and its conditions at the Administrative Court in Salamanca, within a period of two months from the day following the publication of the selection results. Likewise, interested parties can appeal to the Rector of the University of Salamanca against the actions of the committee within one month of having been informed of this decision. In this case, the contentious-administrative appeal may not be filed if it is not expressly resolved or the alleged rejection of the appeal for reconsideration has occurred, in accordance with the provisions of articles 123 and 124 of Law 39/2015, of 1 October, of the Common Administrative Procedure of Public Administrations.

6.5. APPOINTMENT OF SELECTED CANDIDATES

From the day after the selection committee publishes its list of proposed selected candidates, these candidates have 10 working days to present the relevant documentation to the Teaching and Research Staff Service (informing whether they accept or decline the offer) within the established period so that they can sign the corresponding contract. Candidates who fail to present this document within the established period will be regarded as having renounced the offer of a contract.

If a candidate renounces his/her appointment or if the contract is unsigned, the PC will appoint the next candidate on the list.

7. FELLOWS' RESPONSIBILITIES

Selected fellows will be required to comply with the requirements of the Grant Agreement No. 101034371 and USAL regulations, in particular:

- Any publication or other data that result from the contract must cite the funding entity or entities in the appropriate section and the reference number assigned to the funding. The support of the European Commission under the Marie Sklodowska Curie Grant Agreement No. 101034371 must be cited.
- The fellows must ensure open access (free of charge online access for any user) to all peer reviewed scientific publications and data relating to their scientific results, according to the grant agreement No. 101034371.
- The fellows will adhere to the recognised ethical practices and fundamental ethical principles appropriate to their research. The research carried out must comply with the EU's ethical principles, Spanish and international legislation applicable, as well as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. The USAL has developed the "Code of good practices in research, research training, development and innovation of the University of Salamanca'', which should be used as guidelines to ensure the best practices for excellence in research.
- When going on a secondment the fellows will be requested to fill-in "Secondment Agreement" form.

- During the whole duration of their contract, the fellows must participate in, at least, 1 outreach activity and take part in Transversal Skills Training Courses summing up at least 30 hours altogether.

7.1. CAREER DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The supervisors (one from USAL and another from the secondment organization) and mentors will support ERs career development and will set up a Career Development Plan (CDP) that will guide the fellows to achieve their scientific and career development objectives. This plan will include the following four sections:

- Self-assessment and reflection;
- career choices and pathways;
- short, intermediate and long term goals,
- and ways to achieve and implement those goals for both scientific and transferable skills training.

The supervisors and the mentor will assess the progress of the CDP giving feedback (weaknesses and strengths of it) every 3 month in on-site meetings. ERs will use their CDP to set a monthly plan of activities in and outside the institute/department that would help them to complete their project's goals, including e.g. writing first-author papers and mastering transferable and non-transferable skills in the host institution.

8. ETHICS

In the online application form, the candidate should complete an ETHICS CHECKLIST, where they will be asked to answer YES/NO to questions about proposed research activities that may raise Ethical Issues, indicating (if the answer is YES) the corresponding page(s) of the Project Proposal that include this information. If the applicants have entered any issues in this Ethics Checklist, they must perform an ethics self-assessment in accordance with the guidelines "How to Complete your Ethics Self-Assessment"[24] and complete the "Ethics Self-Assessment" form with a full explanation on how these issues will be dealt in the project (please refer to the template provided in the application supporting document, Scientific Proposal - Ethics Self-Assessment for more information about these guidelines). It is the responsibility of the applicant to list ethical issues in the table accurately; failure to do so may lead to rejection.

The 40 highest ranked proposals per call will be sent

- to the Research Ethics Committee for the Preliminary Ethics Review in order to highlight possible ethical issues that have not been identified by the candidates in their proposals (this may require changes in the project if the ethical problems are considered substantial enough), and
- to the Equality and Inclusion Committee (EIC) to identify key strategic and operational issues relevant to equality, diversity and inclusion in the proposals.

Notwithstanding the stipulations under Article 34.3 of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Grant Agreement No. 101034371, the University of Salamanca shall inform the Research Executive Agency (REA) in writing of any research project selected for funding that may involve the use of human embryonic stem cells (hESC) or human embryos (hE). Such research may not start

[24]https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/ethics/h2020_hi_ethics-self-assess_en.pdf

without the approvals of the EC ethics review and of the relevant Programme Committee completed by the communication of the explicit approval in writing from the REA to the beneficiary. If the beneficiary breaches any of its obligations regarding selected research proposals involving the use of human embryonic stem cells (hESC) or human embryos (hE), the grant may be reduced (see Article 43 of the Grant Agreement) and the Grant Agreement may be terminated (see Article 50 of the Grant Agreement) without prejudice to any of the other measures described in Chapter 6 of the Grant Agreement."

8.1. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT ETHICS ISSUES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF SALAMANCA

All the activities carried out under USAL4EXCELLENCE project and the ERs' individual research projects shall comply with ethical principles and relevant national, Union and International legislation, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union[25] and the European Convention on Human Rights and its Supplementary Protocols[26]. To clarify the different assumptions and regulations for the general knowledge of its researchers, the USAL has established one Research Ethic Committee[27].

The Research Ethic Committee will deal with the following issues:

- The Ethics on Human Research
- The Ethics on Animal Experimentation
- The Ethics on Research with Genetically Modified Organisms and Biological Agents
- The Ethics on Biosafety[28]
- Data protection

The information regarding the USAL procedure for getting the ethics approval can be found at https://evaluaproyectos.usal.es/main_page.php.

9. OPEN SCIENCE AND OPEN ACCESS

The USAL4EXCELLENCE fellows will have to follow the Open Science policy established in H2020. Open Science refers to the Horizon 2020 objective of increasing openness at all stages of the research life cycle and thus ensuring that science serves innovation and growth. Open Science guarantees open access to publicly funded research results and promotes a range of facilities for knowledge sharing. As part of Open Science, Open Access aims at providing online access to scientific information that is free of charge to the reader, focusing on access to 'scientific information' or 'research results', which refers to two main categories: peer-reviewed scientific research articles (primarily published in academic journals) and research data. The candidates' project results will be made open by default, following the Guidelines on Open Access (OA) to Scientific Publications and Research Data in Horizon 2020 published by the EC. Therefore, the Open Access in USAL4EXCELLENCE projects is mandatory. Regarding publications, the USAL4EXCELLENCE fellows will be encouraged to deliver their results to the scientific audience through publications in peer reviewed international journals (JCR/SCR)

[25] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf
[26] https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf
[27] https://investigacion.usal.es/es/comite-bioetica
[28] https://evaluaproyectos.usal.es/main_page.php

and/or congress or conferences. Following the OA policy, fellows will have 2 main routes to publish:

- 'green' (self-archiving) and
- 'gold' open access (open access publishing).

Fellows will freely choose the results to be published and where to publish them. Such costs are eligible for reimbursement during the lifetime of the project as part of the overall project budget. For gold open access publishing, open access must be granted at the latest on the date of publication. A copy should, at the same time, be deposited in a repository.

Regarding the research data, the fellows will be trained in Open Data during their training activities. The fellows will deliver a Data Management Plan (DMP) after the first 6 months of the project. This DMP will explain the different types of data generated during the project and their availability during and after the project. The DMP will need to be updated over the course of the project. Consequently, fellows will have to deliver the updates of the DMP together with the scientific reports. As a guide to make a DMP, the candidates can follow the following link: https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/oa_pilot/h2020-hi-oa-data-mgt_en.pdf

Please notice that the fellows should analyse their research results before publishing in order to first seek protection of their results. The fellows must consider the possibility of disseminating their results to exploit research results commercially, e.g. through patenting. The management of Intellectual Property Rights of each project will be managed by the Research Transfer Office (OTRI)[29] with the European IPR Helpdesk office support[30].

10.CONTACT AND INFORMATION DETAILS

Support Service will be available during the application period via email: usal4excellence@usal.es.

Contact details

Oficina de Proyectos Internacionales
Vicerrectorado de Investigación y Transferencia
Edificio I+d+i, C/Espejo, 2, 2ª Planta
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- Luis Sanz Andreu. lusan@usal.es. Ext.6558
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- Mercedes García García. mercedesgarcia@usal.es. Ext.6366
- Susana Verde Ruíz. susanaverde@usal.es. Ext.1088

Additional information available in FAQs document.

[29] https://investigacion.usal.es/es/empresas/colaboracion
[30] https://www.iprhelpdesk.eu/home

Annex 1. MSCA List of Descriptors

RESEARCH FIELDS	LIST OF DESCRIPTORS
CHEMISTRY (CHE)	C1. Inorganic chemistry
	C2. Organic, polymer and molecular chemistry
	C3. Physical and analytical chemistry
	C4. Applied and industrial chemistry
ECONOMIC SCIENCES (ECO)	E1. Economics
	E2. Economic Development
	E3. Management
	E4. Finance
INFORMATION SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING (ENG)	G1. Computer science and informatics
	G2. Systems and Communication Engineering: Electrical, electronic, communication, optical and systems engineering
	G3. Products and processes engineering: product design and control, construction methods, civil engineering, energy processes, material engineering
ENVIRONMENT AND GEOSCIENCES (ENV)	V1. Environment and society
	V2. Earth system science
	V3. Evolutionary, population and environmental biology
	V4. Food Science, Agriculture, Forestry and non-medical biotechnology
LIFE SCIENCES (LIF)	L1. Molecular and structural biology
	L2. Genetics, genomics, bioinformatics and systems biology
	L3. Cellular and developmental biology

	L4. Physiology, pathophysiology and endocrinology
	L5. Neurosciences and neural disorders
	L6. Immunity and infection
	L7. Diagnostic tools, therapies and public health
MATHEMATICS (MAT)	M1. Mathematics
	M2. Applied mathematics
PHYSICS (PHY)	P1. Particle and nuclear physics
	P2. Atomic and molecular physics, optics
	P3. Condensed matter physics
	P4. Astrophysics, cosmology, space science
	P5. Applied physics
SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES (SOC)	S1. Sociology, social anthropology
	S2. Political science
	S3. Law
	S4. Communication
	S5. Cognition, psychology, linguistics
	S6. Philosophy
	S7. Education
	S8. Literature, arts, music, cultural and comparative studies
	S9. Archaeology, history and memory