



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 101034371



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FAQ's for applicants – Call 2

Call conditions

How many calls will the programme offer? And how many fellowships are available in each of the calls?

USAL4EXCELLENCE programme offers two calls (Call 1 and Call 2), each of which is expected to finance 20 fellowships.

What is the timeline of the application process for the second call (Call 2)?

Call 2

Call opening: 14th October 2022

Application deadline: 16th December 2022

Evaluation and Selection: December 2022 – May 2023

Results: May 2023

Eligibility

I am in the final year of my PhD and want to apply for the USAL4EXCELLENCE COFUND programme. I want to know that, if the PhD degree is not awarded by 16th December 2022 (deadline for application in Call 1), but the evaluation is under process, will I be eligible to apply?

To be able to apply for this programme, you must have acquired your PhD before the call deadline or, alternatively, demonstrate at least four years' full-time research experience by the time of the call deadline.

In the application form, we ask applicants to upload a copy of their PhD certificate or copy of the corresponding contracts to justify the four years' full-time research experience. If the PhD certificate has not yet been issued, but they have passed the doctoral final examination (dissertation defence) before the call deadline, applicants must indicate this date as "date of award" and upload an official letter in English issued by their University/Institution confirming this and stating the expected date the doctoral degree certificate will be issued.

Do I need an official translation of my PhD degree?

If your PhD degree is not in English, a copy of the original document must be provided and a translation into English must be attached.

I was in Spain in February 2020 when the pandemic began. I was supposed to travel to Germany to resume my job at the University there. Because of travel restrictions I ended up working virtually and teaching to students in Germany from my home in Spain. I have a regular contract that demonstrates this. As far as the criteria on mobility is concerned, should I consider this as time spent in Spain or in Germany?

Given the pandemic crisis, if a researcher cannot be where he/she is supposed to be due to travel restrictions, but is currently working remotely, this time will be considered as if he/she was in the supposed place. Once the travel restrictions are lifted, we then expect the researchers to be where they are supposed to be.

I'm not a citizen of a European country. Can I apply to USAL4EXCELLENCE?



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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 (16th December 2022).

What document(s) can I present to prove I fulfil the international mobility rules?

The number and type of documents you can submit is very varied. The following would be valid: work contracts, permits, rental contracts, residence certificates, etc. Please note that each document you present must be an official document. And, if they are not in English, a copy of the original document must be provided and a translation into English must be attached.

The Application process

What kind of research can I propose?

You can propose any kind of research, from the most basic research to closer market/society research. But you should be aware that your proposal will be evaluated by, among other things, the novelty of the proposed research, and the adequacy and quality of the interdisciplinary, international and intersectoral dimension of the research plan.

Who submits the proposal?

The application should be submitted by the applicant, not by the supervisor.

How can I access the application platform?

The application platform is available following this link <https://sede.usal.es/procedimientos?param1=PROOPI> (link available from 14th October 2022 till 16th December 2022)

Is there a guide to help me with the application platform?

Yes, you can find the necessary information about the application process in the USAL4EXCELLENCE_Guide for Applicants, which is available in project portal (<https://usal4excellence.usal.es/supporting-documents/>)

How do I design my research project? Who can help me?

The design of your research project should be done according to your experience and CV, the background of the research group and considering the objectives and evaluation criteria of the call. You should rely on the USAL supervisor to do this work.

I have identified a possible USAL supervisor from the list on your website: can I contact the supervisor before I submit my proposal?

We have published a list of available supervisors from the University of Salamanca on our website. Applicants can get in touch with them before they submit their proposal to confirm their availability and interest in the project they want to present. Please, be aware that (1) in the application form, applicants will be asked to list top 3 choices for project supervisors, although they will only have to attach in their applications a Letter of Commitment from the first USAL supervisor option; and (2) supervisors cannot and will not be involved in the selection process, at any stage

I cannot find a supervisor among the list on your website. What should I do?

Candidates should choose a supervisor among the list of supervisors provided in the project web page.



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How many fellowships are awarded in this second call (Call 2)?

In this second call, twenty fellowships will be awarded

Which is the duration of the fellowship?

The fellowships awarded through the USAL4EXCELLENCE programme will have a duration of 30 months, so proposals shall be drafted considering a duration of 30 months for the proposed projects.

How can I contact a USAL supervisor?

At USAL4EXCELLENCE web page (<https://usal4excellence.usal.es/meet-our-supervisors/>), applicants can find a list of USAL Researchers (including their contact details and research fields), who have shown their interest in hosting researchers through USAL4EXCELLENCE.

How many applications may I submit?

You may submit only one application per call.

Can I configure my secondments with other entities that do not appear on the USAL4EXCELLENCE website?

Yes of course, If you know any entity that wants to participate with you in your project, we encourage you to invite them to do so. It is not necessary to restrict yourself to the entities that appear in our USAL4EXCELLENCE web page.

Can any type of organization participate in the USAL4EXCELLENCE Fellowship Programme to host secondments?

Yes. Any academic or non-academic (industry, hospitals, NGOs, public bodies, libraries, museums, national archives, other entities) organization established in an EU Member State or Associated Country can participate hosting the applicant to do a secondment at their facilities.

Can the proposal include collaborations with entities not included as Partner Organizations?

Yes, your project can involve entities which are not hosting secondments. For example, you may need to make short visits to other institutions.

My project may have ethical issues involved. Can I apply?

Yes, you can, but you will have to deal with these aspects in the sections of the proposal (online application form and research proposal) designed for this purpose. If you are selected for funding, prior to the start of the fellowships, the applications of candidates will be submitted to an ethical review by an Ethics Committee established for this purpose. This Committee will determine whether the projects contain any relevant ethical aspect that has not been adequately addressed. For each project, the Ethics Committee will issue a binding report including, if necessary, the changes to be carried out on the ethical aspects described in these projects, of which the candidates will be notified. The candidates will have a maximum period of one month from the date of notification of the report to carry out these changes and present them to the Ethics Committee for review and acceptance.

Are there any restricted or priority research areas?

USAL4EXCELLENCE intends to cover almost all the thematic areas of knowledge. This means that the knowledge field is chosen freely by the applicants among the following: Chemistry (CHE), Social Sciences and Humanities (SOC), Economic Sciences (ECO), Information Science and Engineering (ENG), Environment and Geosciences (ENV), Life Sciences (LIF), Mathematics (MAT) and Physics (PHY). In this regard, there are no restricted or priority areas.



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What countries can I perform a secondment in?

Secondments are planned and are an integral part of the research proposal. They imply mobility to a partner organisation in an EU Member State or Associate Country with specific supervision arrangements.

Is there an official template for the commitment letters?

Yes, there are official templates. They are entitled "Reference Letter" and are part of the documents that you download when you enter the project portal and upload (once completed) in the application platform.

Can I send all or part of the documentation by ordinary mail?

No, all documents must be attached to the application made through the website created for this purpose

Do I need to include a Career Development Plan (CPD) in my proposal?

It does not have to be included in the proposal, but it will be necessary to develop this plan together with the supervisor and present it after the resolution of the grant if your project is funded by USAL4EXCELLENCE.

Can I apply for USAL4EXCELLENCE and another funding program or Fellowship at the same time?

You can apply to different funding projects at the same time. However, if you are successful in more than one, you will have to choose only one as the USAL4EXCELLENCE Fellowship cannot be held simultaneously with any other fellowship.

I applied last year for a MSCA IF and was not successful, can I apply with the same project?

It's up to you to decide the project to submit. However, considering that innovation is an important aspect of the USAL4EXCELLENCE programme, as a rule you might want to make it as topical as possible.

Can I get help with applying if I need assistance?

If you have a technical problem with the online application, yes, you can get help from the online support (usal4excellence@usal.es). If you need assistance or help with the contents of your project, unfortunately we are not in the position to give you guidance or support on this.

I've missed the deadline due to an IT problem. Can I still submit my application?

We cannot accept any applications submitted after the deadline. We therefore strongly recommend submitting well before the deadline so that we can assist you with any technical difficulties you may encounter.

I have submitted my application, but I want to make a change to it. Can I?

We strongly advise you to take the opportunity to review your application before submitting it. Once you have submitted your application, you will not be able to make changes to it

The Evaluation and Selection Process

If my application is unsuccessful, will I receive feedback?

Applicants will receive feedback after every stage of the selection process.



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When do interviews take place for shortlisted candidates?

Interviews will take place around April-May 2023. Interviews will be organised via video conference and held in English.

If I am shortlisted and can't make the date of my interview, may I be interviewed on a different day?

Unfortunately, not. Unavailability to attend the interview or absence on the interview day will be considered as withdrawal from the selection process and will result in the exclusion of the proposal from the funding.

When will I hear whether I have been awarded a USAL4EXCELLENCE Fellowship?

The results will be published on our website in May 2023.

Will CVs of USAL supervisors be considered during the evaluation process?

No. International experts will only evaluate research proposals and applicants' CVs according to the evaluation criteria. Please refer to the Guide for Applicants for more information about this.

What are the evaluation steps for proposals?

The evaluation process consists of the following steps:

- Receipt of the proposals: The applicants must first submit the full application through the following link: <https://sede.usal.es/procedimientos?param1=PROOPI> (link available from 14th October 2022 till 16th December 2022)
- 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).
- Remote assessment: Each proposal and candidate's background will be evaluated remotely by 3 international experts according to the evaluation criteria.
- 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.
- Interview assessment: The 40 highest ranked candidates above the threshold will be required to present their research project and CV in an interview, either physically or 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.
- 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 thematic field,
 - 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). These quotas for underrepresented groups will be respected if the candidates exceed the minimum threshold.

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.



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- **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.

Please refer to the Guide for Applicants and Application Forms for more information about evaluation steps (<https://usal4excellence.usal.es/supporting-documents/>)

Successful applicants

If I am successful, when can my Fellowship start?

This second call is intended for projects which can start in or around July 2022.

If I am selected, can I postpone the start date of my fellowship?

Except in cases of force majeure, the start of contracts cannot be postponed.

If I do not have Spanish nationality, who can help me with the necessary formalities to set up and work in Spain?

You can write to usal4excellence@usal.es explaining your situation.

How is my monthly salary calculated?

Your total fellowship cost is 4,865 EUR per month (if you are eligible for family allowance) or 4,355 EUR per month (if you are not eligible for family allowance). Please notice that these are contributions without deducting employer and employee social contributions.

Your remuneration after deducting employer social contribution will be approximately as follows: 3,700 EUR per month (if you are eligible for family allowance) or 3,300 EUR per month (if you are not eligible for family allowance).

Your net salary will result from deducting employee social contributions as well as direct taxes to these previous amounts. Additionally, your remuneration may vary annually depending on the Social Security rates. The rate indicated above is for researchers working full-time.

Contact Person

I have questions that do not yet figure on this FAQs. Whom can I ask?

You can contact Luis Sanz, who is the manager of the USAL4EXCELLENCE program. His email is usal4excellence@usal.es