

4 Which individual researchers can be funded by a RTN?

4.1 Introduction

An essential element of Research Training Networks is the appointment of *early-stage (ESR)* and more *experienced researchers (ER)* who will take part in the research, training and transfer-of-knowledge programme. Indeed, this is one of the most important deliverables of the contract. These researchers are defined as follows:

"As a general rule, a researcher is defined as a person active in research, including at a training level, of at least post-graduate or equivalent level."

(Work Programme section 2.5.3)

4.2 How are they appointed?

In the case of Research Training Networks, the identity of the *early-stage* and *experienced researchers* is usually not known at the time of submitting the proposal. If the RTN is selected for funding by the Commission, the research organisations will be given the freedom to choose the researchers according to their individual training needs and potential contribution to the project.

To ensure the objectives of the action are met, a number of additional criteria must be fulfilled by the organisations when recruiting using RTN funding. These criteria must be **simultaneously** fulfilled and concern:

- the nationality of the researcher;
- the location and type of the host research organisation;
- the requirement that they normally move country to take up their appointment.

Further details concerning these criteria are provided in the following sections.

4.3 Conditions of the Appointment

An important aspect of the Commission's policy towards researchers is to improve their working and living conditions while being mobile thereby opening up new perspectives for research careers within Europe. The Marie Curie Actions should act as a catalyst in this respect. The organisations will therefore be required to meet certain conditions when appointing researchers. As described in section 5, they will receive country-dependent living allowances along with mobility and travel allowances that depend on their family circumstances. In addition, provision of maternity/parental leave will be compulsory.

When making appointments within a RTN, the organisations can opt for a fixed-amount stipend or an employment contract. In both cases, compulsory social security cover under the legislation in the country of appointment is mandatory. As a rule, fixed-amount stipends should only be used for the appointment *early-stage researchers* (typically Ph.D. students). It should be stressed that **the appointment of *experienced researchers* should always be under employment contracts, unless duly justified.**

Regarding the duration of the appointment:

“The training opportunities for researchers within the coherent training and mobility scheme provided by the project may range from 3 months to 3 years.”

(Work Programme section 2.5.3)

It should enable each researcher to gain most benefit from their involvement in the network (e.g. to attend several network-wide workshops or meetings).

One should also be aware that the *early-stage and experienced researchers* will have contracts with the research organisations and not directly with the Commission:

“Eligible researchers under these schemes are “third party” beneficiaries of the Marie Curie actions. They do not sign a contract with the Commission, but benefit from the Marie Curie actions and are therefore in this way beneficiaries of Community funds”.

(Work Programme section 2.5.3)

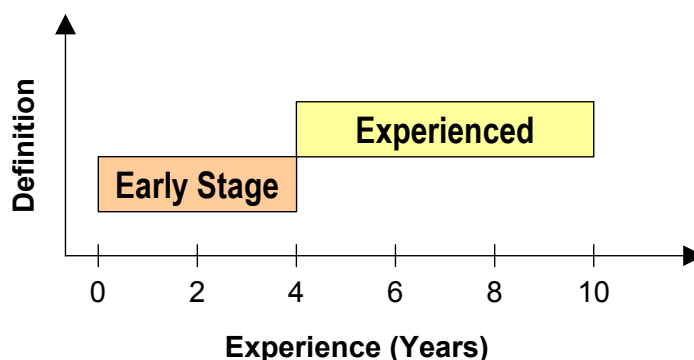
4.4 Definition of Research Experience used for the Marie Curie Actions

Under the Marie Curie Mobility Actions, the different career pathways of researchers are taken into account by the adoption of new definitions that attach more importance to their research experience than simply their age.

Once a researcher has obtained a diploma that gives access to doctoral studies in the country in which the diploma was obtained (without having to acquire any further qualifications) the “clock” starts ticking. In the event that a researcher has taken a break from their research career for whatever reason (e.g. working outside research, family reasons, etc.), then the clock is stopped and only starts once they resume their research career.

In determining the level of experience for a researcher, it is **counted at the time of appointment** by the RTN (refer to section 2.5.3 of the Work Programme). It should also be noted that the any limits in terms of experience do not apply *during* the period of appointment itself. In a similar vain, the status of a researcher does not change during an appointment (e.g. if the researcher gains his/her Ph.D. during their appointment as an early-stage researcher). Furthermore, the experience of a researcher is considered to be of the same value **independent of the discipline** in which it was obtained.

Within this new framework, there are two basic definitions of researcher: those at the *early stages* of their career and those that are more *experienced*:



4.5 Early-stage Researchers

Early-stage researchers (ESR) are appointed within RTNs as beneficiaries of the training programme. They are defined as follows and are typically those researchers who could undertake doctoral studies (but not necessarily):

“Early-stage researchers are defined as researchers in the first 4 years (full-time equivalent) of their research activity, including the period of research training.

The reference period to qualify for an early stage training activity:

- is counted from the diploma giving access to doctoral studies (the degree must entitle the holder to embark on doctoral studies, without having to acquire any further qualifications) in the country in which the diploma was obtained,

- covers the first 4 years of experience in research or the period until a doctoral degree is obtained, whichever is shorter.

Persons who have obtained a doctorate are ineligible for the early stage actions, independently of the time taken to acquire it.”

(Work Programme section 2.5.3)

Example: A researcher has graduated with a first degree in biology in 2002 and would like to start his/her Ph.D. studies in 2003. He/she could benefit as an ESR within a RTN while being registered for his/her Ph.D. studies.

Example: A researcher has already been working as a researcher in industry for two years in industry since graduating with his/her first degree in chemistry. He/she would be able to benefit from participation in an RTN as an ESR even without pursuing a Ph.D. degree.

Example: A researcher is in the process of writing up their Ph.D. after 4½ years of research and would like to apply for appointment within an RTN. While he/she has not yet gained his/her doctorate, he/she would **not** be considered an ESR due to his/her level of experience.

4.6 Experienced Researchers

In the case of *experienced researchers* (ER), their role in the network focuses upon transfer of knowledge, where required by the nature of the research project:

“Experienced researchers are defined as researchers having at least 4 years of research experience (full-time equivalent) since gaining a university diploma giving them access to doctoral studies (the degree must entitle the holder to embark on doctoral studies, without having to acquire any further qualifications), in the country in which the degree/diploma was obtained or researchers already in possession of a doctoral degree, independently of the time taken to acquire it.”

(Work Programme section 2.5.3)

Note in addition that for Research Training Networks:

“Researchers with more than 10 years of research experience (full-time equivalent), counting from the time the degree/diploma was obtained and giving access to embark on a doctorate in the country where it was awarded, will not be eligible for selection.”

(Work Programme section 2.3.1.1)

Example: Five years after obtaining their undergraduate degree, a researcher obtained his/her Ph.D.. He/she took a career break of five-years for family reasons but would like to continue their research career. He/she is eligible to take part in a RTN as an experienced researcher.

*Example: A researcher obtained his/her Ph.D. after 4 years and subsequently worked in research for an additional 7 years under three different postdoctoral positions. He/she would **not** be eligible to take part in a RTN.*

If a researcher does not comply to the above criteria it may be because he/she is at a more advanced stage in his/her research career. In that case, he/she may still be eligible to participate in other Marie Curie actions (see <http://europa.eu.int/mariecurie-actions/>).

4.7 Transnational Mobility

To ensure the European character of Research Training Networks, the *early-stage or experienced researchers* are normally required to undertake transnational mobility (i.e. move country) when taking up their appointment:

“Researchers must be nationals of a State other than that of the host organisation. At the start of their fellowship/activity, researchers may not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc) in the country of their host organisation for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately prior to the start date. Short stays such as holidays are not taken into account.”

(Work Programme section 2.5.3)

Example: A French researcher has moved to Germany for the first time and has been carrying out research there for the last six months. He/she can be appointed within a RTN team in Germany during the next six months.

Special conditions exist for researchers holding dual nationalities:

“In the case of a national holding more than one nationality, he/she will be able to carry out a period of mobility in the country of his /her nationality in which he/she has not resided during the previous 5 years. Short stays such as holidays are not taken into account.”

(Work Programme section 2.5.3)

Example: A researcher holding both the Spanish and the British nationalities has just finished his/her Ph.D. studies in Spain. He/she often visits family in the UK for holidays but has never worked or studied there. He/she would therefore be eligible to be appointed to a RTN team located in the UK.

4.7.1 Special Conditions for Nationals of the Member States or Associated States

In the case of researchers that are nationals of Member States or Associated States, an exception to the above rule can be granted if they have been active in research in a Third Country for a at least four of the last five years:

“Researchers from Member States or Associated States can, according to the nature of the action, carry out their transnational mobility in all other Member States and all other Associated States. These researchers will be considered as being eligible to benefit from a training or mobility action, including in their country of origin, if they can provide evidence that they have legally resided and have had their principal activity (work, studies, etc) in a third country for at least four of the last five years immediately prior to the start date.”

(Work Programme section 2.5.3)

Example: An Italian researcher is currently carrying out research as a post-doc in the USA having also completed his/her Ph.D. there (a total of 4½ years outside the EU Member and Associated States prior to appointment in the RTN). He/she would like to return to Europe and continue his/her research career. He/she is eligible and can even be appointed to an Italian team participating in a RTN project.

4.7.2 Special Conditions for Nationals of Third Countries

In the case of researchers who are nationals of Third Countries (i.e. those countries outside the EU Member and Associated States), they can be appointed as *early-stage* or *experienced researchers* within RTNs under certain conditions.

(a) Third country Researchers based *outside* the EU and Associated States

At the time of appointment two special conditions are to be checked for the eligibility of the researcher: one concerns the location of the destination country; the other relates to the total number of person months that the network will devote to Third Country researchers:

“Participation and funding of researchers from third countries is foreseen in all of the host-driven mobility schemes [such as Research Training Networks]...they can not carry out their transnational mobility in third countries. In the case of host-driven actions [such as Research Training Networks], a maximum of 30 % of the number of funded researcher-months can be used for third country researchers. This percentage could be exceeded in exceptional cases under the condition that the excess is duly justified as being essential to attain the objectives of the action. For multi-partner contracts [such as Research Training Networks], participating organisations must have a common selection policy in order to avoid exceeding this limit.”
(Work Programme section 2.5.3)

Note that the 30% limit defined above applies to the person-months delivered by the network *as a whole* and for the *whole project duration*. It follows from this that the appointment of Third Country researchers will have to be carefully managed amongst the network teams in order to comply with this limit.

Example: A Japanese researcher currently working in Japan would like to be appointed to a RTN team in the Netherlands. This is possible assuming that the network is within the foreseen 30% envelope of person-months for the network as a whole.

Example: A Ukrainian researcher has been carrying out research in Germany for the last two years having previously studied in the Ukraine. He/she would be eligible to be appointed to a RTN team as long as it is located outside Germany and within the foreseen 30% envelope of person-months.

(b) Third country Researchers already based *within* the EU and Associated States

In the case of Third Country researchers who have been already active for at least four years within the Member or Associated States, the following conditions apply:

“For the purpose of the Marie Curie actions, non-nationals from Member States or Associated States having legally resided and having had their main activity (work, studies etc) for at least four of the last five years at the start of their fellowship in Member States/Associated States are treated as nationals of the Member/ State in which they have resided the longest....”
(Work Programme section 2.5.3)

Such that the researcher is treated, for the purpose of the mobility rules described above, as a national of the country in which he/she has been for the longest period (i.e. he/she is assimilated to that country).

Example: A researcher from South Africa has been working in Europe for a total of seven years having spent 5 years in Germany undertaking their Ph.D. and subsequently two years in Italy. He/she would be eligible for appointment within an RTN but only at teams located outside Germany (their assimilated nationality) and Italy (due to the mobility requirement).

4.7.3 European Interest or International Organisations

In the case of European Interest or International Organisations (e.g. CERN, EMBL, ESO etc), the mobility rules described above do not apply since such an organisation cannot be associated with any one country:

“These mobility rules do not apply to the hosting of eligible researchers by international European interest organisations or international organisations. Eligible researchers may carry out their project in any eligible international organisation, whatever its location.”

(Work Programme section 2.5.3)

Example: A German researcher who has always lived and studied in Germany is eligible to be appointed at the team of a RTN based at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) in Heidelberg, Germany. He/she will not, however, be eligible for a mobility allowance.

4.7.4 Summary

The following table summarises the different possibilities for transnational mobility within RTNs in terms of the nationality of the researcher and the location of the research team.

		Nationality of Researcher to be Appointed	
		EU Member/Associated States	Third Countries
Location/ Type of RTN Team	EU Member /Associated States or International (European) Organisations	Possible	Within 30% limit of person-months*
	International (European Interest) Organisations	Possible	Within 30% limit of person-months*
	Third Countries	Only if essential for project	Not Possible

*30% limit does not apply if the researcher has been >4 years in EU Member or Associated States

4.8 Finding your way through the eligibility criteria

To make it easier for you to determine if an individual researcher might be eligible to be appointed within a RTN, the flowchart on the following page has been prepared. Please note that this chart is indicative only and one is always advised to check the text of the Work Programme.

INDICATIVE CONDITIONS FOR APPOINTMENT ON RTN FUNDING

In the following schematic, the conditions under which a researcher can be appointed within a Research Training Network are described.



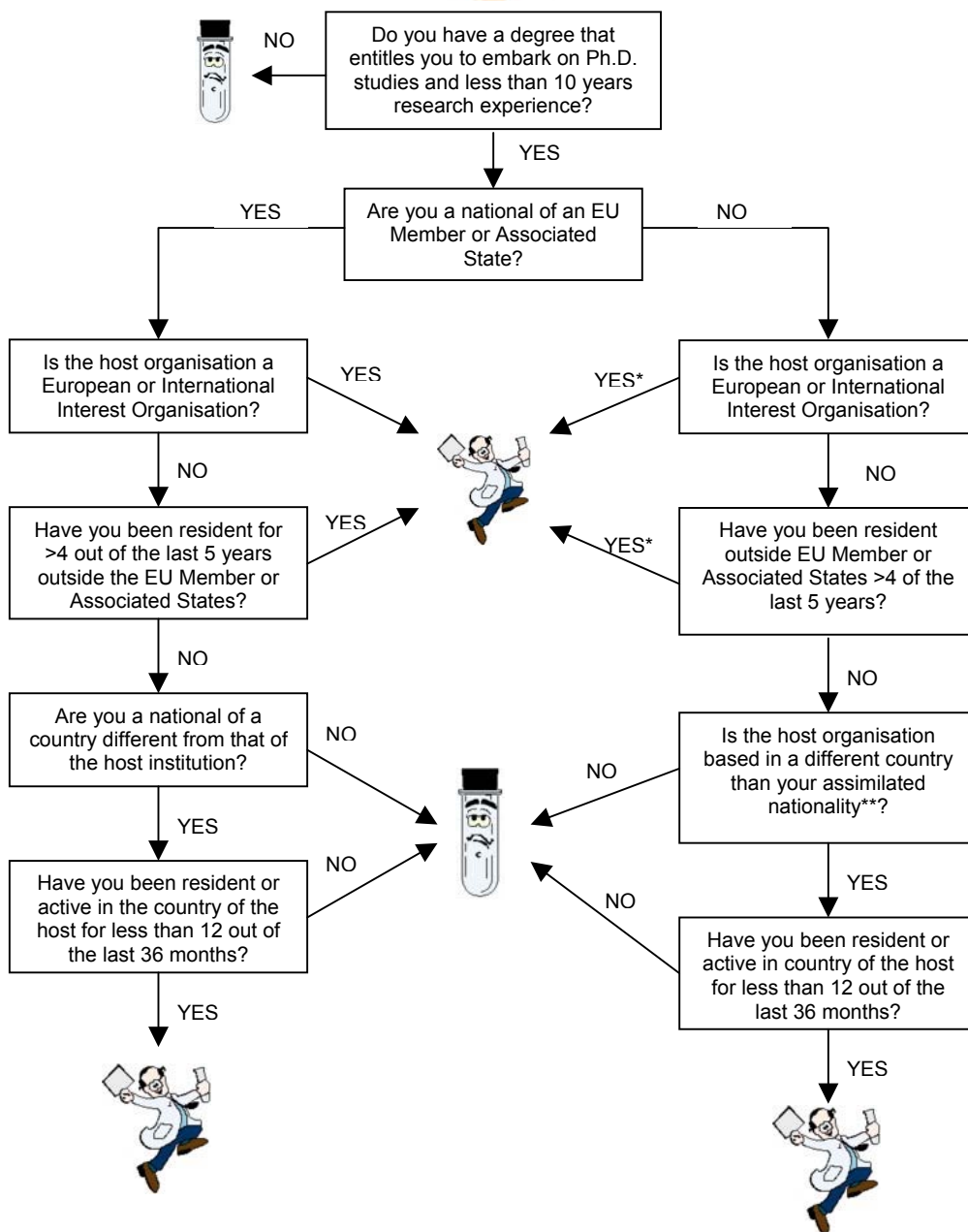
You might be eligible



You are probably not eligible



Can I apply?



*Within the 30% limit for the number of person-months for Third Country researchers.

**The assimilated nationality, refers to the nationality of the EU Member or Associated State in which you have resided the longest during the last 5 years.