Applying for European Commission funding: a guide

This guidance supplements the information on the University of Oxford Research Support website - https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/applying/howto/ec. It will be useful for Oxford applicants and departmental staff who support applications to the EC and covers the online application creation and submission process and Oxford’s application costing and approval process. This guidance is for all Horizon 2020 calls submitted through the European Commission’s Participant Portal (including IMI) https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/home.html.

Other European Commission funding schemes use different submission systems. Please refer to the Research Services European Team for advice: ecresearch@admin.ox.ac.uk

Call/topic specific information and guidance

Calls and topics are accessed through the ‘Funding opportunities’ tab on the European Commission’s Research and Innovation Participant Portal.

All standard Horizon 2020 funding is listed under ‘H2020’. If you know where your call/topic sits within the Horizon 2020 work programme click in the relevant box and search for ‘Calls with open topics’ – e.g. European Research Council (ERC). Alternatively use the ‘Advanced search for topics’ function to search by a reference term.

Note: Topics with a green ‘Open’ sign are open for application submission with specific guidance available where applicable (ERC and Marie Curie calls). Topics showing an orange ‘Forthcoming’ are not yet open and any specific guidance will be available only once the call opens. Calls can have multiple topics with different deadlines. The full current Horizon 2020 work programme (2018-20) containing all anticipated calls and topics can be accessed on the Participant Portal: http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/funding/reference_docs.html
The call topic shows whether the application process is single or two-stage, and whether the topic is a Research and Innovation Action (RIA), an Innovation Action (IA) or a Coordination and Support Action (CSA). An explanation of these terms is here: http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/wp/2018-2020/annexes/h2020-wp1820-annex-ga_en.pdf (Annex D)

Click on the topic title to access further information and the submission system.

‘Topic Description’ contains the description of the topic challenge plus the expected scope and impact of funded projects. The budget expectation is included.

‘Topic conditions and documents’ includes links to relevant information.
Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) calls have specific ‘Guides for Applicants’ and the ERC calls have ‘Information for Applicants’. Collaborative calls (RIA, IA or CSA) do not usually have a specific ‘Guide for Applicants’ document but instead refer to online guidance and background material.

The Research Services European Team produces specific application guidance for the MSCA and ERC calls on the Gateway to Europe.

Creating an Application

Step 1 – Create a user account

Information on the EC’s participant portal (including on call topics and all reference documents) can be accessed without a personal login. An ECAS user account will, however, be needed to create a draft proposal/submission or to access an application on the system.

Navigate to the ‘Register’ button (top right-hand corner) on the Participant Portal home page.

This takes you to the ‘create account’ page. Complete your details - it is recommended that Oxford Principal Investigators and researchers use their University/department email address (or a personal email address if not yet a member of the University). The system will automatically create a username. Your username or email can then be used to log-in. Department administrators, finance or Research Facilitators can use either their own University email to create an account or a shared email if the account needs to be accessed by multiple users.

Step 2 – Create proposal online

The proposal coordinator/lead beneficiary (or the ERC Principal Investigator/applicant for fellowship applications) creates a proposal.

If you are leading the proposal access the topic and click on “Start submission”.

If you a non-lead beneficiary on a proposal you, your Oxford department and Research Services will need access to the proposal - see below).

Some key required information:

*University of Oxford PIC: 999984350*. Ensure this is the PIC number used for Oxford: It is the only PIC valid for the University.

*University of Oxford short name: ‘UOXF’*

If you are the proposal coordinator add beneficiary partners using their PIC numbers – make sure these are the correct validated PIC numbers for the organisations – check with them if there is any doubt as it is difficult to correct this later.

**Note:** you do not have to complete all the fields at this stage as they can be edited later, but characters will need to be entered in asterisked sections before you can move to the next step. Follow all on-screen instructions and save the draft application.

The project acronym is the short title and is used as the main identifier of the project.

Applications are in two parts: an online section (A forms) and an uploaded Part B. Other documents may be required depending on the requirements of the call.

The word template(s) for Part B of the application should be downloaded from the submission screen. Word templates are not available from any other source.

Problems can be encountered with the online forms particularly when using a Mac or Firefox. The Commission are addressing these but generally Research Services recommends using a Windows-based machine and Internet Explorer if problems occur.
Step 3 – Edit online (A forms) and create proposal Part B

Log-in to ECAS. All proposals to which you have access appear in ‘My proposal(s)’

Click ‘ED’ (edit draft) to access your proposal.

**Note:** If you are the Oxford PI on a collaborative project but not the lead, or if you are an administrator/Research Facilitator and need to see the application, the coordinator/PI will have to give you access to the proposal on the system (you will need an ECAS account – see Step 1). The Oxford PI should be added as a ‘Main contact’ with full access.

The Research Services European Team **must** be given access as ‘Contact Person’ to all proposals (including to first stage applications for two-stage calls) involving Oxford academics/researchers. The details to use are: Gill Wells and ecresearch@admin.ox.ac.uk. Institutional approval for the application cannot be given without this access.

**Note:** For ERC projects Gill Wells, ecresearch@admin.ox.ac.uk must be added as ‘Main Host Institution contact’ (rather than Contact person).

Department administrators and/or Research Facilitators should be given ‘Contact person’ access.

Access is given under ‘Step 4 parties’ in the home-screen of the online A forms.

The proposal lead (Coordinator or Principal Investigator/applicant for ERC/MSCA fellowships) is responsible for completing the online A forms and for uploading the final Part B section(s).

For collaborative projects Part A and Part B will be completed in conjunction with the consortium members (the other beneficiary partners in the project) but the coordinator takes responsibility for finalising these before proposal submission.

Part B is uploaded as a PDF along with any other documentation required for the application. For some calls Part B is in two sections, both of which need to be uploaded.

If you are a non-lead beneficiary Part B will be completed by the coordinator: coordinators differ in the extent to which they ask beneficiaries to participate in this process. You should ensure that you are happy with the content of the proposal – and particularly with what Oxford is described as contributing. You should also ensure your details are correct in the A forms.

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Note: if the project coordinator requires a signed Memorandum of Understanding/Letter of Intent as part of the proposal process this should be forwarded to the Research Services European Team (ecresearch@admin.ox.ac.uk) for guidance and signature by Gill Wells, Head of European Team.

Step 4 – Proposal budget calculation

ERC and most collaborative project budgets are based on estimated actual costs. Oxford participation must be costed by the departmental administration or a Research Facilitator on X5. Scheme specific X5 guidance is on the Gateway to Europe webpages. The X5 costing figures should be provided to the coordinator for collaborative projects. All EC applications and subsequent awards are subject to the University’s exchange rate policy. The current University Euro exchange rate can be found in the X5 costing or via this page https://www1.admin.ox.ac.uk/researchsupport/costing/rates/oldexchange/.

Note: for the first stage of two-stage applications Research Services strongly advises that an accurate budget is produced. The EC A forms only require the coordinator to provide an overall budget figure but this figure cannot significantly change at stage-2 and therefore should be accurate at stage-1. The department should produce an X5 ‘outline’ costing and it will be on this basis that department and Research Services application approval is given. An ‘application’ X5 costing is then produced at stage-2.

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions are based on unit costs applied to the number of researcher months on the grant and budget figures are automatically generated by the A forms.

Note: for ITNs certain parts of a consortium budget can be reallocated within the consortium. Departments are strongly advised to discuss and agree the reallocation applicable to a proposed ITN with the coordinator at application stage. An element of the “Oxford” budget is likely to be retained by the coordinator to fund central administration of the project. Full details are provided in the European Team guidance documents.

The Research Services European Team produces scheme specific X5 guidance and call guidance (for the ERC and MSCA calls) and the latest versions should always be consulted when producing a new application (or outline) costing.

Step 5 – Submit X5 costing to Research Services (European Team)

X5 costing submission to Research Services is confirmation that the proposal is supported by the Department on the basis of the budget contained in the costing. For calls where additional agreement on budget with the coordinator is necessary (e.g. MSCA ITNs) Research Services asks for confirmation that the Department understands how the budget is to be allocated – this is explained in the relevant European Team scheme guidance. Please also email the Research Services European Team with full details of forthcoming applications to ensure timely completion of the approval process.

For proposals involving more than one Oxford department the X5 costing for each department must be submitted to the workflow in order for Research Services to approve the total Oxford budget.

For ERC calls a copy of the Part B Justification of resources and the budget table have to be provided to the European Team as part of submission for approval to submit. This is explained in European Team ERC scheme guidance.

Step 6 – Research Services checks and approval

The Research Services European team operates different checks depending on the call. Scheme-specific guidance (in PDF format) is on the Gateway to Europe website. As a minimum, the X5 costing budget will be checked against Oxford’s budget in the proposal A forms and any feedback/advice will be given to the PI (applicant) or department. Once checks are complete Research Services will send an approval to submit/participate email to the PI and department.

ERC calls require an Oxford signed host support letter and this is usually provided to the PI with the approval email.

Note: approval to submit/participate in a proposal will also be subject to any additional department approval, where applicable.

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**Step 7 – Proposal submission**

Only the project coordinator (for collaborative projects) or the Principal Investigator/applicant for ERC/MSCA fellowships can submit proposals. The EC’s proposal submission system allows for multiple resubmission up to the call deadline.

**Note** that if a new version of Part B is uploaded to the application the submission button MUST then be clicked. Any changes to Part A must be saved then the application resubmitted.

Proposals are only formally supported by the Department and Research Services if internal approvals have been given (this is regardless of whether and when the proposal is submitted on the Participant Portal). Before final submission the application should be checked for completeness, accuracy and compliance with EC guidance: this is the responsibility of the coordinator (or Principal Investigator/applicant for ERC/MSCA fellowship applications). The A forms do have a ‘validation’ check but this will only tell you if information is missing, not whether it is accurate.

Note: Research Services **does not** submit EC applications.

**All EC applications must be submitted by 4pm (UK time) on the date of the deadline. Proposals will not be accepted for evaluation if the 4pm deadline is missed. The EC operates no exceptions to this rule.**