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# Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Supervision Guidelines

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# Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Supervision Guidelines



The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) are the European Union's flagship programme for the training, mobility, career and skills development of researchers, with a strong structuring effect on participating institutions, particularly at a doctoral and postdoctoral level.

The MSCA contributes to the achievement of the European Research Area and the European Education Area, building on its core objective of providing opportunities for excellent, creative, and innovative researchers.

Quality supervision is a key element of the MSCA vision of excellence. It contributes to creating a supportive environment for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers and staff to conduct their work and advance their careers. In line with the principles set out in the [European Charter for Researchers](#) (2023), MSCA beneficiaries must ensure adequate supervision including appropriate career guidance.

The MSCA Guidelines on Supervision were first published in 2021. They constitute a set of recommendations to individuals and institutions, with the aim of ensuring that MSCA researchers are adequately guided and supported in their research projects and career advancement.

This revised version of the guidelines aims to expand on some key elements and key themes benefitting from best practice examples, feedback from stakeholders, policy documents, and tools for implementation by researchers, supervisors, and institutions. The document provides examples as an inspiration of good practice across the research and innovation landscape. More examples of best practices are provided separately.

This revised version builds on several European Commission efforts that have helped to promote a positive and ethical research culture. It was additionally prompted by feedback received from stakeholders during the 'Reflections on Supervision in MSCA' satellite event at the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) 2024 annual conference in Milan.

These guidelines should be considered as complementary to the Grant Agreement and employment or enrolment contract as these provide the legal framework for the relations between the European Commission and the beneficiary, and the hosting institution and the researcher respectively. They should also be used in complement to existing guidelines at the institutional level. The guidelines are not exhaustive, and implementation efforts should take into account different possible situations, disciplines and levels of experience of researchers.

# Table of Content

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Guidelines</b>	<b>7</b>
1. <b>General</b>	<b>7</b>
2. <b>Supervision in Perspective</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1. Supervision Frameworks	7
2.2. Supervision Frameworks	7
2.3. Recognising and Safeguarding Excellent Supervision	8
3. <b>Supervisory Relationships</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1. Communication	9
3.2. Setting Expectations	9
3.3. Conflict Resolution	10
3.4. Collaborative Environments	10
4. <b>Institutional Support Structures</b>	<b>11</b>
4.1. Onboarding	11
4.2. Dedicated Support Services	12
4.3. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion	12
5. <b>Training in Supervision</b>	<b>13</b>

# Introduction

These guidelines are designed to support researchers, supervisors, and institutions in ensuring effective and enriching supervision throughout the duration of MSCA research projects in a healthy research climate.

The supervision ecosystem can be envisioned as a dynamic triangle, where supervisors, researchers, and institutions collaborate around a shared mission. This mission encompasses not only the research and its outputs but also the professional development of researchers and the cultivation of a positive research culture. At the top of this triangle is the relationship between the supervisor and researcher, crucial to the success of any project. However, the institution is the key enabler, setting the frameworks of supervision and ensuring necessary resources, support and recognition. Supervision never happens in isolation; the supervision triangle is complemented by peer groups and an

extensive research ecosystem including those linked to the MSCA, the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA), National Contact Points (NCPs), Project Officers (POs) at the European Research Executive Agency (REA), and also academic and non-academic organisations in the research and innovation landscape.

Each actor—supervisor, researcher, and institution—brings unique perspectives to the collaborative research effort. These guidelines aim to facilitate this collaboration, ensuring that every interaction and effort contributes to a successful and fulfilling research experience.

We invite you to actively implement these guidelines, contributing to an MSCA environment where research thrives and careers flourish.





## SUPERVISION

In this document 'supervision' is to be understood in a broad sense and reflects the term used in the MSCA Grant Agreements at both doctoral and postdoctoral level. Supervision is the process by which researchers are guided in the development and implementation of their research project by more experienced researchers and professionals (from the academic or non-academic sector) with clear responsibilities. It is the support provided for researchers in building knowledge, skills, network, and independence that will benefit their research and career.

The degree and form of supervision may vary according to disciplines, sectors, researcher's experience, type of programme, individual personalities, or skills. While acknowledging the managerial vision of supervision as a form of scientific direction ensuring quality and timeliness of research progress and outputs, supervision equally requires a level of trust, care, and communication.

Shared supervision refers to multiple supervisors working together to support a researcher across a project. This can include structures where two or more supervisors share primary supervision, such as co-supervision (intra-institutional) or joint supervision (inter-institutional), as well as a series of supervisors taking on different duties in relation to the researcher (mentor, practitioner, etc.) or have different levels of responsibility (junior, senior, assistant, etc.). The development of shared supervision practices, both formal and informal, is encouraged. It spreads the supervision workload, mitigates challenges in supervision continuity, and allows researchers to benefit from multiple experiences, viewpoints and networks, preparing them for more diverse career trajectories. This document places emphasis on the importance of collaborative supervision environments, while keeping in mind that the primary responsibility for oversight rests with the principal supervisor.



## RESEARCHER

The use of the term 'researcher' in this document refers to MSCA-funded researchers being supervised as part of Horizon Europe (HE) Doctoral Networks, Postdoctoral Fellowships and MSCA COFUND. Some of the guidelines listed below may also apply, where relevant, to MSCA Staff Exchanges secondees. This document acknowledges the unique

characteristics of the actions and the different needs and obligations depending on the career level and experience of the researcher. Indeed, at postdoctoral level, the support level focuses more on building autonomy and the supervisor should take on more of an advisory or mentor role. Therefore, supervision should be adapted to the context.



## INSTITUTION

In this document, the term 'institution' is used in a broad sense. It is primarily focused on the organisations formally recruiting the researchers as well as on the associated partners involved in hosting secondments, outgoing phases, non-academic placements and any additional training.

Depending on the resources of the institutions involved and their familiarity with research supervision, the responsibilities taken on by different institutions may vary. For some institutions, some of the tasks considered to be part of the supervisor's role are taken on by dedicated units assigned to researcher support (i.e. career development, tech transfer, etc.).



# Guidelines

## 1. General

**All parties** must be aware of their rights and obligations under the Grant Agreement.

**All parties** must take all measures to implement the [European Charter for Researchers](#) (GA Art. 18).

**All parties** must comply with the [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#) promoting research performance at the highest ethical standard (GA Art. 14).

## 2. Supervision in Perspective

### 2.1. Supervision Frameworks

**INSTITUTIONS** should provide supervision frameworks that assure the quality of supervision, set expectations and responsibilities for all parties and provide resources for the supervisory relationship at both doctoral and postdoctoral level (e.g. supervision guides, memoranda of understanding, agreement templates, etc.). Processes should be in place for using and regularly reviewing these resources. These can be integrated within excellence strategies such as the [Human Resources Strategy for Researchers](#) (HRS4R).

**SUPERVISORS AND RESEARCHERS** should actively discuss the supervision framework to ensure adherence to the existing institutional guidelines, standards and requirements.

**INSTITUTIONS**, where needed, should provide support for virtual supervision to allow remote monitoring and guidance.

**INSTITUTIONS** must ensure access to and continuity of effective supervision throughout the project by monitoring supervisory processes and having risk mitigation strategies in place to ensure continuity of supervision in situations where supervision fails or in case of prolonged absence of the supervisor.

**INSTITUTIONS** should help researchers assess the compatibility of supervisors to their interests or projects by providing up-to-date information on research staff expertise and availability and by offering opportunities to make contact before the project starts.

The [University of Warsaw](#) provides travel funding so potential MSCA Postdoctoral Fellows can meet their intended supervisors, learn from previous grantees, and work together on their proposal in a master class.

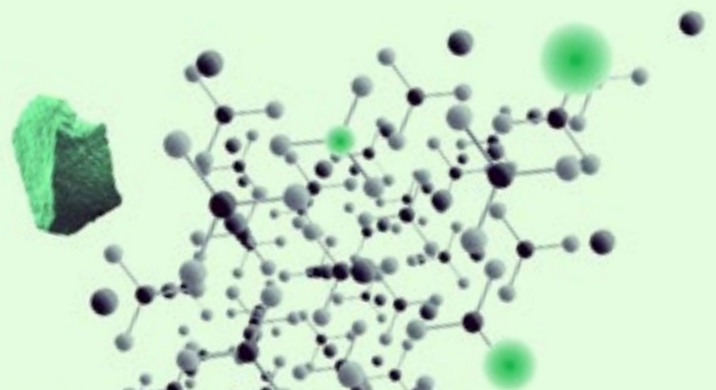
### 2.2. Supervision Frameworks

**INSTITUTIONS** should develop shared supervision models and structures that embrace different needs such as research direction, mentoring and industry experience, to provide the researcher with advice, guidance (not necessarily scientific) and support in cases where another supervisor is unavailable.

**INSTITUTIONS** should encourage adequate collaboration and communication in shared supervision through guidance and resources as part of the supervision framework.

**INSTITUTIONS** should provide assistance in bridging the gap between different supervision cultures, for example in academia and industry, by promoting guidelines for intersectoral shared supervision roles and responsibilities, ensuring clear administrative structures in accordance with local requirements, and providing infrastructures for efficient communication to ensure smooth transition.

The '[CIFRE doctorate](#)' in France is similar to MSCA Industrial Doctorates in its combination of the academic and non-academic sector. This is reflected in the joint supervision structure where researchers are assigned an academic thesis director and are supported by an experienced member of staff within the non-academic sector.



**SUPERVISORS** should ensure a coherent and complementary approach within the supervision team by clarifying roles and regularly reviewing supervision workloads among its members.

**RESEARCHERS** should maintain effective communication with the assigned supervisors ensuring regular updates on progress across the different project streams (secondments, work packages, etc.).

**SUPERVISORS AND RESEARCHERS** should be pro-active about expanding the supervision team in a formal or informal way if they see that additional support is needed to address a lacuna in the research project or in the development of the researcher's independence and career.

**The University of Copenhagen's Graduate School of Health and Medical Science has developed guidelines for role divisions within the supervisory team.**

## 2.3. Recognising and Safeguarding Excellent Supervision

**SUPERVISORS** should engage in self-reflection about their suitability to each supervision project and their capacity for taking on additional supervision workloads, balancing it alongside other research, teaching and administrative tasks, keeping in mind the need to ensure quality supervision for each individual researcher under their care.

**INSTITUTIONS** should regularly evaluate the satisfaction with and effectiveness of supervisory practices, making results available and using them to inform necessary changes.

**The Autonomous University of Barcelona organises biannual surveys of all recent doctoral graduates and their supervisors to assess the state of supervision at the university. It transparently publishes the survey templates and results on the website.**

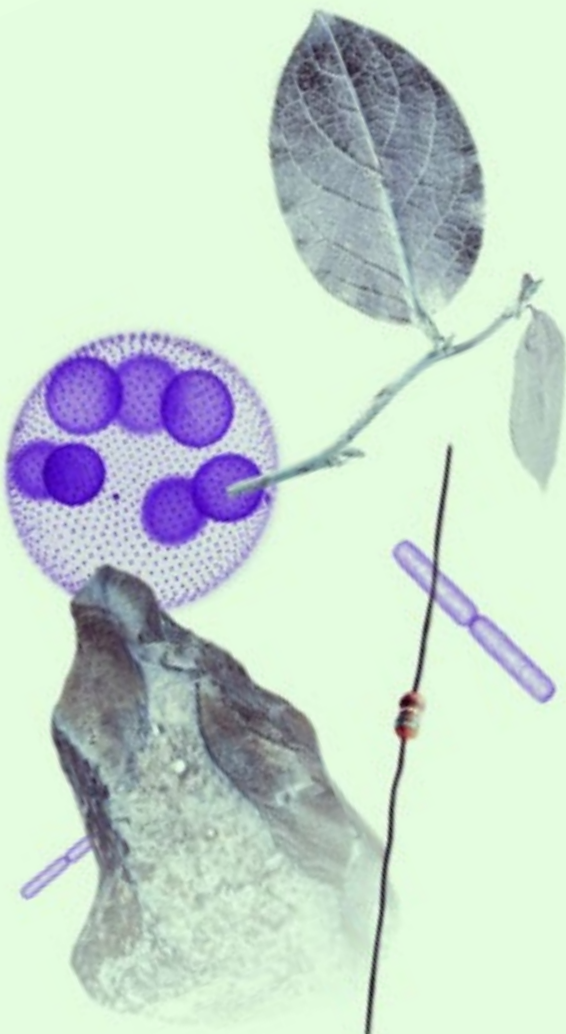
**INSTITUTIONS** should formally recognise the effort of all the members of the supervision team, including those with informal roles, and their essential contribution to the research community.

**Imperial College London formalised the position of assistant supervisor where postdocs provide day-to-day support for doctoral candidates hosted at the university. They receive mandatory training and are eligible for supervision award schemes.**

**INSTITUTIONS** should take supervision work into account in career assessments.

**INSTITUTIONS** should safeguard the quality of supervision process by monitoring workloads to ensure quality over quantity in supervision.

**The Karolinska Green Light assessment of suitability provides an external check to ensure that a supervisor is equipped to take on the supervision of an additional project. This includes whether they have had the necessary training, but also what their track record is based on supervisee feedback and whether they have the capacity to take on more supervisees.**





## 3. Supervisory Relationships

### 3.1. Communication

**INSTITUTIONS** should provide transparent structures and healthy work environments for supervisors and researchers to interact in open dialogue.

**ALL PARTIES** should clearly, openly and respectfully communicate about the supervision process, research process, training, and career development and prospects.

**ALL PARTIES** should be mindful and respectful of intersectional differences (e.g. the interplay of cultural backgrounds, seniority levels, genders, social roles, and work experiences) within the supervisory relationship, as these factors can significantly influence expectations and communication styles.

**SUPERVISORS AND RESEARCHERS** should foresee regular scheduled meetings to draft required plans (including a career development plan), discuss research and career progress and provide feedback.

**RESEARCHERS** should manage and sustain progress in accordance with the agreed plans and clearly communicate developments with the supervisors including when changes are required.

**SUPERVISORS** should follow the research and career development plans and should provide regular constructive feedback based on clearly communicated standards as well as support in overcoming hurdles and proactively addressing potential issues or delays.

**RESEARCHERS** should raise as early as possible with the supervisor and/or institution support staff any concerns, uncertainties and problems they face during their time at the hosting institution.

**SUPERVISORS AND RESEARCHERS** should set clear and healthy boundaries in the relationship and communicate them in order to maintain a positive relationship, a healthy work-life balance and personal wellbeing.

### 3.2. Setting Expectations

**INSTITUTIONS AND SUPERVISORS**, when setting expectations, should clearly inform the researchers on the nature of research, the expected standards, tasks and responsibilities.

**SUPERVISORS AND RESEARCHERS** should share expectations on matters related to communication (including meeting frequency and feedback procedures) and the responsibility for research tasks and outputs (including on co-authorship), allowing time for consistency, alignment and regular revisions as the project progresses.

**SUPERVISORS** should balance guiding and directing supervision styles in order to encourage autonomy of the researcher in line with their career stage, and to support independence.

**SUPERVISORS** should create safe, supportive and transparent space where researchers can express their needs and goals.

**RESEARCHERS** should communicate areas in which they wish to build knowledge, skills and independence in light of their desired career progression.

**INSTITUTIONS AND SUPERVISORS** should ensure the follow-up of set expectations in order to allow researchers to reflect on the skills they acquired during the process and to identify areas of growth.

**The European University Institute developed a set of guidelines for interactions between supervisors and researchers. These supplement the institution's supervision code of practice which sets out the basic framework for the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee at the EUI.**

**The Centre for Genomic Regulation runs a workshop on aligning expectations as part of the introductory PhD Course where new PhD candidates and PIs share their perspectives about supervision and expectations to set good future working framework.**

### 3.3. Conflict Resolution

**INSTITUTIONS** should have in place robust, transparent, confidential and impartial procedures for conflict prevention and resolution, preferably including an option for external dispute resolution. They should ensure that supervisors, researchers and other staff members are given equitable access and assistance.

**INSTITUTIONS** should communicate their conflict resolution procedures clearly and provide contact points at various levels.

**SUPERVISORS**, in cases of conflicts, should reflect on their own position within the power dynamic and respect the limits and priorities of researchers.

**SUPERVISORS AND RESEARCHERS** should ensure they are aware of existing internal conflict resolution procedures and channels both in the institution and in the project.

**INSTITUTIONS, SUPERVISORS AND RESEARCHERS** should, where necessary address a complaint first at institutional and project level using the internal conflict-resolution mechanisms; and in case no satisfactory solution is reached, the issue could be brought to the attention of the REA Project Officer.

**To help navigate conflict in the supervision relationship, Trinity College Dublin developed a flowchart, highlighting the informal and formal mechanisms available at the institution.**

**The Humboldt University in Berlin offers free confidential conflict consultations handled by a third party outside the university to help mediate in the case of a disagreement**

### 3.4. Collaborative Environments

**INSTITUTIONS AND SUPERVISORS** should proactively provide networking opportunities (inside and outside academia) to the benefit of the research project and to advance the long-term research and professional ambitions of the researcher.

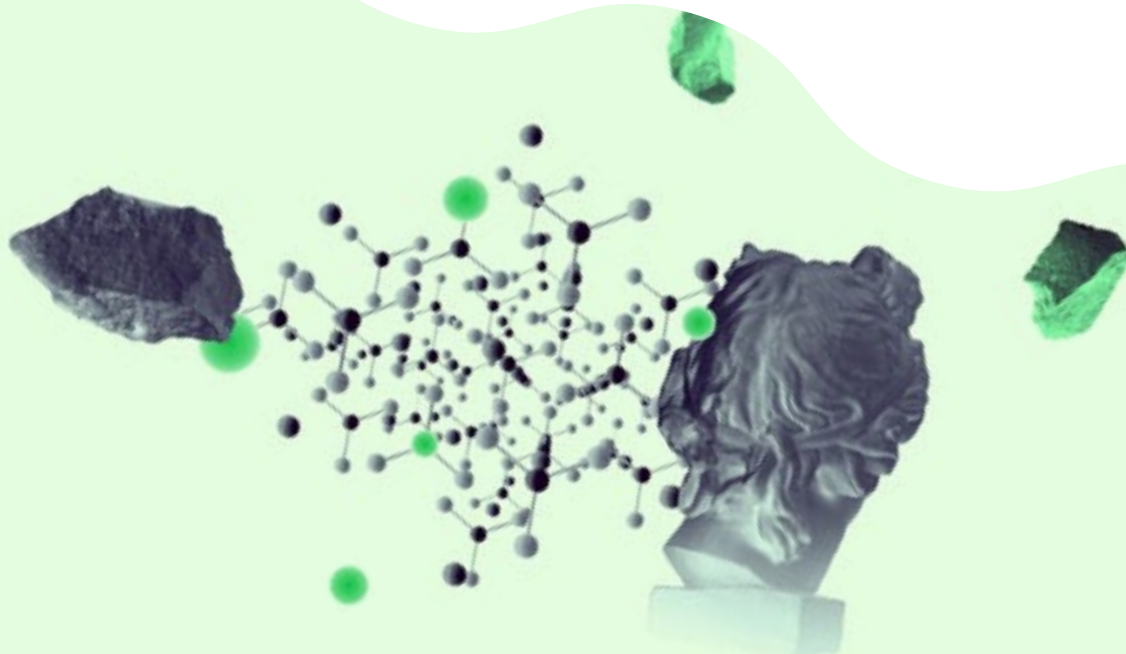
**RESEARCHERS** should be proactive and open-minded in seeking out opportunities across the networks available to them to gain appropriate experiences, skills, and knowledge.

**INSTITUTIONS** should ensure the integration of researchers in the research group and local research community to promote wellbeing, foster knowledge-sharing and enhance creativity.

**INSTITUTIONS** should provide community building opportunities (e.g. PhD buddy programmes) and enable peer-to-peer support systems to provide support networks and reduce feelings of isolation.

**SUPERVISORS** should build community among researchers under their supervision, for example by considering the potential of collective supervision models as a complement to individual supervision for facilitating collaborative learning environment and peer-to-peer support and interactions.

**SUPERVISORS** should facilitate collaborative approaches among researchers under their supervision.



## 4. Institutional Support Structures

### 4.1. Onboarding

- **INSTITUTIONS** must provide a formal and structured onboarding, giving access to all necessary information to researchers at the beginning of their MSCA-funded fellowship (contract details, relevant services, training availability, help desks for administrative questions, local networks, communication rules, local/national social rules and MSCA guidance) (GA Art. 18).
- **INSTITUTIONS** must provide a signed copy of the employment contract to the researcher. If this is not in a language spoken by the researcher, then a full translation/or a summary in English, with a preference going to a full translation of the contract into English must be given.
- **INSTITUTIONS** must provide a copy of the Grant Agreement to the researcher.
- **INSTITUTIONS** should provide the researchers with the [information package](#) for Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellows as well as the dedicated information note associated with the relevant action.
- **INSTITUTIONS** are responsible for providing clear and concise information on local legal aspects related to participation in research in the host institution(s), such as taxes, contracts, legal rights, and IPR to researchers in a language understandable to researchers.
- **INSTITUTIONS** must raise awareness of existing codes of research integrity, ethical standards, and regulations in the hosting institution.
- **INSTITUTIONS** should present the regulations in place on monitoring and supervision process, reporting requirement, publication expectations, and relevant details to ensure that researchers have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities from the outset of the project.

- **SUPERVISORS** must provide guidance concerning the available support structures within the hosting institution and should provide support with local rules and regulations.
- **INSTITUTIONS AND SUPERVISORS** must ensure access to research equipment, resources, facilities (including an office and, if relevant, lab space) and/or fieldwork.
- **INSTITUTIONS AND SUPERVISORS** should provide access for researchers to relevant opportunities including training, networking and mobility (international, intersectoral and interdisciplinary).
- **INSTITUTIONS AND SUPERVISORS** should raise researchers' awareness of researcher wellbeing and guide towards the existing social support structures such as networks, academic communities, and peer groups.

**A well-developed onboarding strategy helps new researchers quickly adapt to their new surroundings. However, such processes are not always elaborated at a doctoral or postdoctoral level. The PRIDE “Professionals in Doctoral Education” network published a [handbook with best-practice examples to help institutions set up an onboarding plan.](#)**



## 4.2. Dedicated Support Services

**INSTITUTIONS** should, where possible, establish structures and schemes to support supervisory roles such as administrative assistance, career guidance and research valorisation.

**INSTITUTIONS AND SUPERVISORS** are responsible for ensuring access to scientific networks, global knowledge, professional organisations, background and results needed for the research activities.

**INSTITUTIONS AND SUPERVISORS** should provide and promote opportunities for researchers to acquire academic, technical and transferable skills and build autonomy through tailored training, interdisciplinary collaborations and intersectoral experiences.

**INSTITUTIONS AND SUPERVISORS** should raise awareness on and adapt their tools to advance research skills and ethical practices using the following as points of reference: the [Research Competency Framework](#), the [Open Science Monitor](#), the [MSCA Green Charter](#) and the [Guidelines for the Responsible Use of Generative AI in Research](#).

**INSTITUTIONS** should provide counselling and support on career development and information on different career paths (inside and outside academia) or ensure the researcher has access to this support.

**INSTITUTIONS** should provide tools and support for supervisors and researchers to organise their work and communication effectively.

**KULeuven incorporates several professionalised centres of expertise that meet the needs of its researchers and alleviate the burden on supervisors including the [YouReCa Career Centre](#), the [Tech Transfer Office](#) and the [Research Data Management Support Desk](#). They also subsidise initiatives for community building such as their [International House](#) and [PhD Society](#).**

**INSTITUTIONS** should provide support to the wellbeing of supervisors and researchers. This can include training on wellbeing and mental health, access to internal and/or external counselling mechanisms and services as well as to peer-support communities.

**The University of Malta offers access to a full Health and Wellness Centre, including [Mental Health and Counselling Services](#) that are funded by the University and are available free of charge for all members of the University.**

## 4.3. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

**INSTITUTIONS** must have processes in place to create a diverse and inclusive workspace, ensuring equity in the treatment of researchers without discrimination.

**INSTITUTIONS** must provide a safe, equitable and inclusive work environment for supervisors and researchers.

**INSTITUTIONS** should uphold the highest standards for diversity and inclusiveness, and continuously work towards achieving gender equality, taking into account intersectionality.

**The University of Leiden developed a [Diversity and Inclusion \(D&I\) Work Plan](#). This includes the establishment of an expertise office, monitoring diversity in the community, offering D&I courses at every level, adopting D&I in recruitment procedures and offering appropriate social safety support.**

**INSTITUTIONS AND SUPERVISORS** should deploy and offer tools for monitoring, avoiding and eliminating unconscious biases and promoting cultural awareness.

**INSTITUTIONS** should have in place anti-discrimination procedures including monitoring, reporting mechanisms and training for support staff, supervisors and for researchers.

**INSTITUTIONS AND SUPERVISORS** should ensure equal treatment of researchers with specific needs, providing them with appropriate access and adjustments as well as equal opportunities in the research field more generally.

**INSTITUTIONS** should implement inclusive policies that encourage researcher wellbeing and safeguard a healthy work-life balance.

**SUPERVISORS AND RESEARCHERS** should implement and safeguard inclusive and non-discriminatory work environment and preserve wellbeing.

**At the University of Milano-Bicocca there is a dedicated [B.Inclusion space](#) where people with disabilities can receive dedicated support. While the offer is targeted towards students, the dedication to accessibility, personalization and sharing extends to all members of the university and includes specialised IT support and psychological consultations.**

## 5. Training in Supervision

**INSTITUTIONS** should ensure high quality continuous training, professional development and resources for supervisors, adequate to their responsibilities in working with researchers.

**INSTITUTIONS** should take a leading role in making sure that new supervisors develop understanding of their role and responsibilities in supervision and encourage experienced supervisors to reflect on and improve their practice.

**SUPERVISORS** should ensure they are trained appropriately to successfully perform their roles as supervisors and regularly follow training on key supervisory skills.

3 best practice training examples appropriate to different institutional capacities and structures:

1

The [DocEnhance platform](#) offers a free basic PhD supervision course that can be tailored to different institutions and covers the key skills that supervisors need as well as providing useful tools and models for supervision. The course also includes advice on the integration of mentoring and peer-learning schemes in complement to the formal training material.

2

The [Medical University of Graz](#) collaborated with experts to craft a PhD supervision training concept and have provided access to the development process including community feedback. The resulting course is a two-day program covering the key skills including giving feedback, aligning expectation, open dialogue, planning and conflict management. This is followed by an optional extension with a facilitated workshop based on peer-observation.

3

[Uppsala University's](#) unit for pedagogical development provides an intensive 15-day course that goes beyond supervision skills to include regulatory frameworks. The course is based on a combination of traditional teaching methods—like seminars, group work and reading assignments—with role-playing, supervision observation and individual case studies. In addition, the university offers follow-up workshops and free consultations for supervisors encountering particular challenges.

As for how supervisory training should be conducted, there is no 'one size fits all' approach, especially in the MSCA context which involves different systems, sectors, and levels of research. A targeted, contextualised, and tailor-made approach based on institutional expectations, as well as the needs of the supervisors and the researchers are fundamental. However, some general advice is provided below.

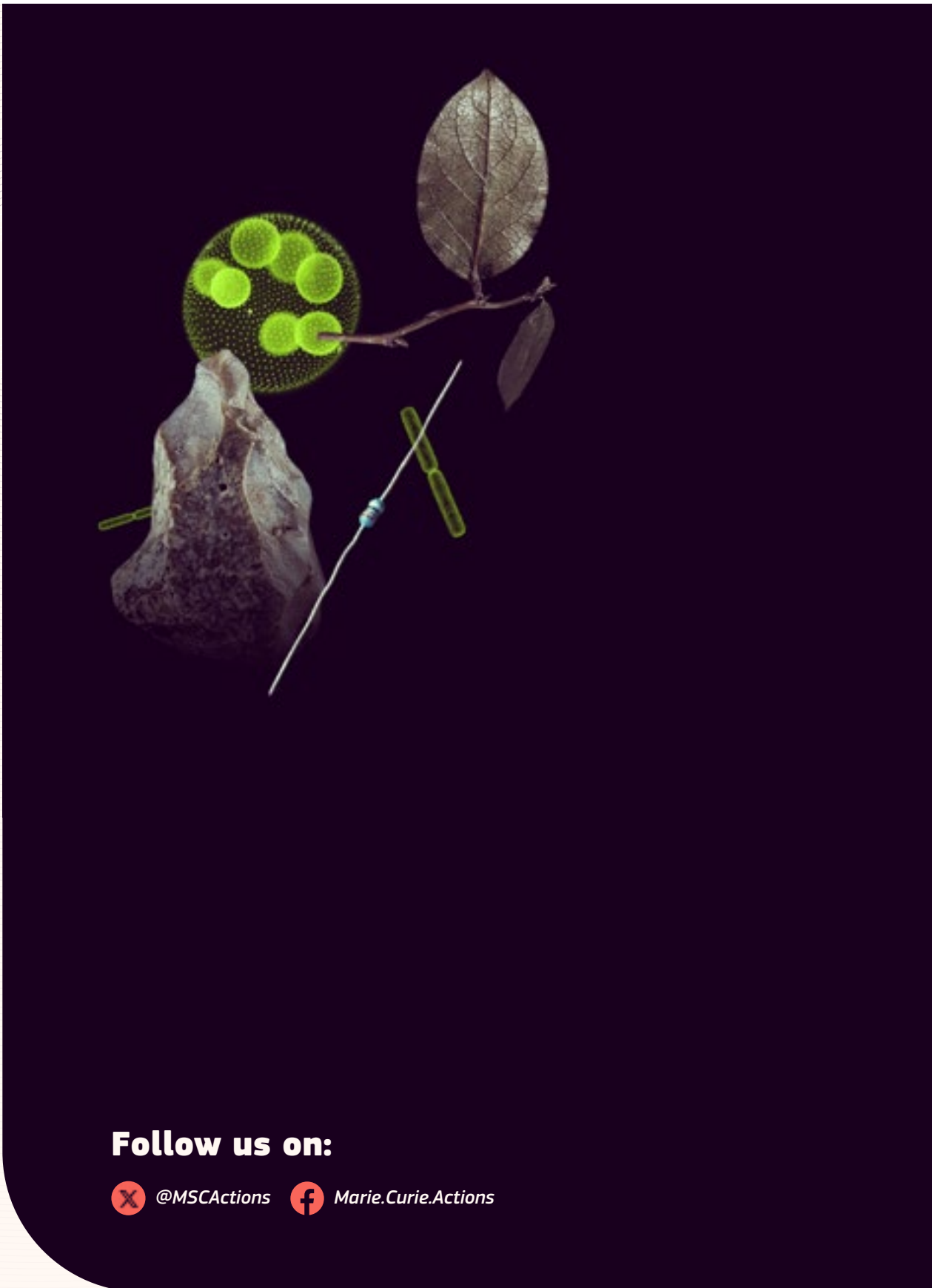
Supervision trainings should:

- Be **mandatory** at the beginning of supervision experience and then regularly refreshed through facilitated collegial discussion and/or follow-up sessions.
- Be **flexible and open**, taking into account the diverse institutional and context-specific needs and requirements.
- Cover **inclusive supervision** and **reflective practice**.
- Be seen as investments to develop support measures, and **participation should be compensated** by alleviating part of the workload for the duration of the training or through another form of compensation.
- Have **a wide focus** with foundational training on roles and relations, aligning expectations, balancing guidance and directive supervision, communication skills, rules and regulations, leadership, researcher wellbeing,

project planning and progress, writing and feedback, ethics in supervision, integration into the research environment, conflict management as well as supervisor workload and wellbeing.

- Include resources and toolkits for planning, implementing and monitoring the supervision process.
- Raise awareness of supervisors on **research integrity** issues, including measures to avoid misconduct and procedures for possible misconduct investigations.
- Provide safe sharing spaces and **peer-to-peer learning opportunities** for new and experienced supervisors in which supervisors themselves can ask each other for help or in which they can share specific questions they may have.
- Include dedicated resources and sessions on topics and rules related to particular funding programmes, such as the MSCA, for implicated supervisors and support staff in all hosting organisations.

**As part of the first consortium meeting, the [Talent4BBI](#) coordination team at the European Bioeconomy Network ensures a condensed training for all academic and non-academic project partners on supervision in the context of an MSCA Doctoral Programme.**



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