

MSCA-DN application – All About Transferable Skills

Acquiring transferable skills is an integral element of the training programmes included in Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions – Doctoral Networks (MSCA-DN) projects. Such skills are sought after in today's multi-faceted, complex, and challenging working environment, no matter the sector one ends up in. If you are planning on submitting an application for MSCA-DN, you have most likely begun thinking of, or have already defined some transferable skills' courses to include in your suggested training programme. However, just before diving deep into structuring said courses, we urge you to read this comprehensive guide detailing all you need to know about transferable skills for MSCA-DN applications.

What is considered a transferable skill?

Here are a few key insights regarding what is referred to as a "skills set", that is, an individual's range of skills or abilities in general, and transferable skills in particular:

*This article is the property of Enspire Science Ltd. and is protected by copyright law. It should not be copied nor distributed without prior consent.

- **'Hard' skills** are job-specific, acquired through formal education and training programs, clearly defined and measurable, and include the expertise necessary for an individual to be successful at their job. Examples include proficiency in a foreign language, specific computer programming languages, specific laboratory methods, etc.
- **'Soft' skills** are personality traits, habits, motivations and attitudes that are more inherent and unique to us as individuals. 'Soft' skills are less measurable than 'hard' skills and often relate to how we interact with other people, commonly referred to as "people-skills". Examples include empathy, teamwork, adaptability, confidence, etc.
- **Transferable skills**, as implied by their name, are those that can be used in many different jobs, career paths and sectors. For example, good presentation skills, critical thinking or good time management. An individual most likely possesses transferable skills from previous educational frameworks (school, college, professional courses), jobs, extra-curricular activities, etc.

While many confuse 'soft' skills to be synonymous with transferable skills, the latter can actually be both 'hard' skills, which can be acquired and are easy to quantify, and 'soft' skills, which are harder to quantify. For example, data management abilities or proficiency in programming languages, can be learned and quantified (and thus are 'hard' skills) and can be of use in different working environments (and are thus transferable).

With this in mind, let's now look deeper into what transferable skills are, what sets them apart from other types of skills, and why are such skills important for today's ever, fast-changing and challenging research and work environment.

Transferable skills – What are they?

Transferable skills, or “portable skills”, **are qualities and abilities that can be transferred from one job to another** and which are relevant and a “must-have” for university graduates and academics when planning their next academic or non-academic steps in their career path. Across sectors, employers will often look for candidates who can demonstrate a good set of transferable skills, to complement the required technical expertise. Depending on the specific context, transferable skills are also referred to as “generic skills” and “transversal competencies”. They can be **both** ‘hard’ skills, that is, skills which are teachable and easy to quantify such as being fluent in another language, coding, or data analysis, and they can also be ‘soft’ skills which are harder to quantify, such as communication, relationship building, and leadership skills. **What sets transferable skills apart** from the rest is the fact that they **can be used in multiple career fields**. For example, time management, problem-solving, and teamwork are all extremely useful in multiple fields.

Why integrate transferable skills courses in your MSCA-DN application?

There are essentially two main reasons why the integration of transferable skills courses in your MSCA-DN application is basically a must:

*This article is the property of Enspire Science Ltd. and is protected by copyright law. It should not be copied nor distributed without prior consent.

1. First, the MSCA Work Programme defines part of the “Expected Outcomes” of a doctoral network to be a contribution to “new research and **transferable skills** and competences, leading to improved employability and career prospects (of the doctoral candidates) within and outside academia”. In today’s multi-faceted, complex and challenging working environment, be it academia, industry, or any other private and/or public sectors, research skills alone, however, developed, are simply **not** enough. Supplemental skills are required in order to guarantee that doctoral candidates enter the job market as **competitive** job applicants.
2. Second, transferable skills training is one of the seven [Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training](#), endorsed by the European Commission, where it is stated that “it is essential to ensure that enough researchers have the skills demanded by the knowledge-based economy”. In general, following these principles will most likely contribute to your application becoming much more appealing to the potential reviewer.

What transferable skills courses best suit your MSCA-DN application?

This is, of course, a subjective question. It depends on several factors such as the needs of the job market and the future employers of the network’s doctoral candidates, as well as their personal backgrounds. While it is safe to say that each network’s list of transferable skills courses will vary, there are some common skills employers tend to seek no matter the sector. Here are some examples: Communication, creativity, critical and innovative thinking,

entrepreneurship, IPR management, leadership, networking, teamwork, public speaking, project management, time management, decision making, ethics in research, standardization, etc.

In any case, before diving deep into structuring said courses, it is highly recommended to first check with your network partners – fortunately, most universities offer a broad range of transferable skills courses for their students, ranging from communication skills to more general technical knowledge such as statistics. In this respect, check first with your project partners, notably the universities, what kind of transferable skills courses they offer as part of their local Ph.D. programmes. In many cases, some of these courses will even be mandatory for those research fellows enrolled in local Ph.D. programmes, so there will be no need to organize the same course at the network level.

During this structuring process, **do not neglect** your industrial/business partners. They too should be very much involved in curricula development and doctoral training so that skills better match not only academic needs but industrial ones as well.

Conclusion

As stated early on in this article, training in transferable skills is an important element of the training programmes included in MSCA-DN projects. Upon approaching your MSCA-DN (or, for that matter, any other MSCA scheme which includes training such as Staff Exchange, Post-doctoral Fellowship, COFUND), do not forget to plan ahead and include training in transferable skills in order to better prepare your recruited researchers for tomorrow's highly intricate, multi-faceted and complex working environment. Such training will most definitely lead to improved employability and career prospects within and outside academia. If you have any further questions or would like us to work with you to realize the full potential of your [MSCA Doctoral Networks \(DN\) proposal](#), do not hesitate to contact us.