



ALECS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

3rd Call

Guide for Applicants

Please read this guide carefully before submitting your application

Deadline for applications: 13th January 2020 (23:59 GMT)



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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The ALECS Fellowship Programme

Advanced Learning in Evolving Critical Systems (ALECS) is an innovative fellowship programme coordinated by [Lero, the Irish Software Research Centre](#). The initiative is co-funded by the European Commission under the [Marie Skłodowska-Curie](#) programme and by [Science Foundation Ireland](#), through Lero.

The aim of the programme is to provide training and career development to researchers through providing international mobility and intersectoral exposure. As a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellowship, ALECS offers high quality professional opportunities open to researchers of any age, nationality and discipline who comply with the programmes eligibility criteria. The programme welcomes applications from candidates who possess a PhD degree and from candidates who do not have a PhD but who have at least 4 years full-time equivalent research experience (in academia or industry).

Lero, the Irish Software Research Centre is the programme coordinator. However, a degree in Computer Science/Software Engineering (or in a related discipline) is not mandatory. Applications are open to candidates from alternative or complementary disciplines provided their proposal has received the support of an ALECS academic supervisor.

The programme will fund 26 fellowships over the programme's lifetime (2017-2022). Fellows will be recruited over internationally advertised calls for proposals. All fellowships will be based in Ireland where fellows will be hosted by their ALECS academic supervisor's university. The two-year fellowship will include an individual research project under the academic supervision of a Lero researcher and a mandatory 3 to 6 month secondment to the non-academic sector.

3rd CALL FOR PROPOSALS:

Deadline: 13th January 2020

Eligibility Check: January 2020*

International Peer Review Evaluation: February 2020*

Interview Period: March 2020*

Final Funding Decision: April 2020*

*These dates are indicative and subject to change. Check alecs.lero.ie for updates.

1.2 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and ALECS

The [Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions](#) (MSCA), named after the double Nobel Prize winning Polish-French scientist famed for her work on radioactivity, support research training and career development focused on innovation skills. Researchers at all career stages and from all disciplines are eligible for funding, irrespective



of their nationality. Awarding €6.16 billion in the period of 2014 to 2020, the initiative offers researchers attractive working conditions and fosters cross-sector and international mobility. The combination of generous research funding coupled with the possibility to gain experience abroad and in the private sector enables cooperation, helps to foster knowledge transfer and boosts researchers career prospects.

The ALECS fellowship programme is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie COFUND action led by Lero, one of the best known and best regarded software-related research centres in the world.

Candidates awarded an ALECS fellowship will have the opportunity to develop their research activities at Lero whilst availing of the long-term benefits of being part of the prestigious group of MSCA fellows.

1.3 Lero, the Irish Software Research Centre

Lero brings together leading software research teams from all seven Irish universities and from two Irish Institutes of Technology, in a coordinated centre of research excellence having a strong industry focus. The centre has raised the level and profile of Irish software research with such effect that it is now one of the best known software-related research centres in the world.

Lero interfaces with a wide range of industry, state agencies, educational bodies and international collaborators to deliver on its goals of research excellence and social and economic relevance.

The ALECS fellowship programme is coordinated by Lero, at the University of Limerick. All ALECS academic supervisors are leading Lero researchers. Fellows will undertake their fellowship in Ireland at their ALECS academic supervisor's university.

1.4 ALECS Research Themes

The ALECS research themes are associated with Lero's research remit. There are four broad ALECS research themes:

- Methods and standards for high integrity systems
- Autonomous and adaptive systems
- Software performance
- Security and privacy

Applicants have the freedom to choose their research project, provided it is aligned with the prospective academic supervisor research interests and the programme's research themes.

If you think you might be interested in applying for an ALECS fellowship, but you are unsure whether your proposed research topic falls under the programme's research umbrella, please contact alecs@lero.ie to register interest and to seek clarification.

Please check the website for:

- Participating [academic supervisors](#) profiles (click on "READ MORE" under each photo to see the supervisor's profile including their broad research interests).



1.5 ALECS Academic Supervisors

All ALECS academic supervisors are leading researchers at Lero. In order to submit an application to the programme, you must contact an ALECS supervisor to discuss your proposal and to gain support for your application. Whilst you can choose your research project, your topic must be aligned with the ALECS research themes and with the research interests of the prospective supervisor.

Please check the website for:

- Participating [academic supervisors](#) (click on “READ MORE” under each photo to see the supervisor’s profile including their [broad](#) research interests).
- Academic supervisors grouped by [affiliation](#).

1.6 ALECS Host Institutions

All seven Irish universities are participating in the programme. IT Tralee is also a host institution. The ALECS fellows will be based at their academic supervisors’ institution.

Please check the website for:

- Participating [host institutions](#) websites (click “READ MORE” under each logo) along with their location across Ireland and their ALECS academic supervisors.



2 ABOUT THE FELLOWSHIPS

2.1 General information

ALECS will award 26 prestigious MSCA training and career development fellowships over the programme’s lifetime (2017-2022). The fellowships are for researchers who hold either a PhD or who have at least 4 years full-time equivalent research experience. All fellowships will be based in Ireland. Fellows will be recruited over internationally advertised calls for proposals.



During their fellowship, fellows will undertake an individual research project and a mandatory 3 to 6 month secondment to the non-academic sector. This secondment may be outside Ireland. Applicants will have freedom to choose their research project, provided its topic falls within the programme's broad research themes and the research interests of the prospective ALECS academic supervisor.

2.2 Duration of the fellowships

The fellowships will have a two-year duration overall, which will include the research project and the mandatory secondment.

2.3 Eligibility criteria- Who can apply

2.3.1 Applicant requirements

- Applicants must be Experienced Researchers, as per the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions definition, who shall, **at the call deadline**, possess a doctoral degree (i.e. PhD degree) **or** have at least four years full-time equivalent research experience.
- Applicants may be of any nationality.
- Applicants must have working proficiency of English or must be fluent in English.

Important notes:

1. Full-time equivalent research experience is measured from the date when the researcher obtained the degree that would have entitled him/her to embark on a doctorate, even if a doctorate was never started or envisaged.
2. The deadline for the 3rd call for proposals is 13th January 2020.
3. Applicants, whose first language is not English, may be required to provide evidence of their proficiency in English.

2.3.2 Transnational mobility requirements

Transnational mobility is a fundamental feature of the ALECS programme. **All applicants must comply with the programme's mobility requirements.**

Applications are welcome from candidates who have undertaken a career break in research and from candidates seeking reintegration - i.e. nationals from the European Union (EU) Member States (MS) and EU Associated Countries (AC) who have carried out research in a country outside the EU and who wish to return to undertaking research in the EU¹.

¹ EU Member States (MS) and their overseas departments (including Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) linked to MS) and Associated Countries (AC). Associated Country (AC) is a third country which is party to an international agreement with the Union, as identified in Article 7 of Regulation (EU) No 1291/2013. Non-associated Third Countries (TC) are countries which are neither EU Member States (MS), nor associated to Horizon 2020 (AC).



| Research Experience | Application Category | Additional Eligibility Considerations | Mobility Requirement |
|---|-----------------------|--|--|
| All incoming fellows must be in possession of a PhD degree or have at least four years full-time equivalent research experience. | General | Not applicable | Applicants may not have resided or carried out their main activity such as work or study in Ireland for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately prior to the call deadline. |
| | Career Restart | In order to be considered within the 'Career Restart' category, the applicant must have undertaken a career break in research. The applicant must not have been active in research for at least 12 months immediately prior to the call deadline. | Applicants may not have resided or carried out their main activity such as work or study in Ireland for more than 3 years in the 5 years immediately prior to the call deadline. |
| | Reintegration | In order to fall within the 'Reintegration' category, the applicant must be a national or long-term resident of an EU MS or AC. | |

Table 1. Research experience and mobility requirements for ALECS fellows.

Important notes:

1. Please note that compulsory national service and/or short stays such as holidays should not be taken into account when calculating the mobility timeframes.
2. Whilst a relaxed mobility rule applies for candidates who fall under the career restart/reintegration category, there will only be one selection process for all applications (i.e. separate selection panels will not exist for career restart/reintegration applications). All applications will be assessed under the same selection process.

2.4 Secondment to the non-academic sector

The mandatory secondment to the non-academic sector must be relevant to the fellow's research project and to his/her career development. The eligible secondment hosts will be research performing non-academic organisations. The secondment duration will be between 3 to 6 months. The secondment may be undertaken in a single period or split into shorter periods. Whilst the fellows' main research must be carried out in Ireland, the secondment may be undertaken abroad.

Whilst the research project proposal must indicate a plan for the secondment with its general details such as the type of organisation, the secondment proposed duration, timing and technical objective, it is not mandatory to specify the exact secondment host/secondment supervisor at the application stage.

Assistance will be provided to fellows who have not finalised a specific secondment host at the application stage.



2.5 Researchers at risk policy

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA) enable displaced researchers moving to Europe to continue their careers through the provision of funding and support.

As a MSCA programme, ALECS will support applications from researchers who are at risk/who are displaced by conflict, or whose situation makes it difficult for them to pursue their research careers. Support will be provided on a case by case basis, both during the application process and during the fellowship programme.

Available support may include:

- Application submission by post where online application requirements may discriminate against the researcher's circumstances.
- Application of the eligibility criteria appropriately to ensure researchers who have suspended their activities whilst seeking refugee status are not disadvantaged.

For applicants who applied for or who are applying for refugee status in Ireland, the time spent in that process will not count as time resident in Ireland.

Researchers at risk are encouraged to discuss the support available by contacting alecs@lero.ie.

2.6 Ethics and research integrity issues

The ALECS programme will be carried out in compliance with ethical principles, including the highest standards of research integrity, and applicable international, EU and Irish law.

ALECS will comply fully with the H2020 ethics policy, including those reflected in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and the European Convention on Human Rights and its supplementary protocols. The programme will not fund:

- Research activities aiming at human cloning for reproductive purposes,
- Research activity intended to modify the genetics of human beings that could make such changes heritable,
- Research activities intended to create human embryos for the purpose of research or for stem cell procurement.

Prior to the start of the fellowships, all projects will require formal ethical approval from the relevant host university's ethics committee.



3 APPLICATION PROCESS

3.1 Documentation required at the application stage

Applicants must complete and submit the following documentation at the application stage. The application document templates are available at <http://alecs.lero.ie/application-documents/>.

1. A completed "Part A – Administrative Information" document.
2. A completed "Part B – Proposal" document.
3. A completed "Part C – CV" document.

The templates must be used by all applicants. The application document templates provided [here](#) must be used.

In addition to the aforementioned documents, applicants who in "Part A – Administrative Information" indicate that potential ethical issues are associated with their research, are required to submit the "Part D- Ethics Self-Assessment" document:

4. "Part D- Ethics Self-Assessment" - Applicants will have to provide additional information on how they intend to address the potential ethics issues as required by the Horizon 2020 Guidance on Ethics Self-Assessment (Version 5.2 or later)² as part of their submission.

3.2 Proposal requirements

- The research proposal topic must be in line with the programme's research themes and with the research interests of the prospective academic supervisor.
- The proposal must describe a research project that can be feasibly undertaken within a two-year timeframe.
- The proposal must adhere to the ethical standards applicable to the ALECS programme.

3.3 Additional requirements

- **Prior to submitting an application, applicants must liaise directly with an eligible ALECS academic supervisor to discuss their proposal and to gain support for their application. You can only submit an application if such application has received support from an ALECS academic supervisor.**
- Each applicant may only submit one application per call. However, unsuccessful applications will be encouraged to be resubmitted at future calls.

² http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/ethics/h2020_hi_ethics-self-assess_en.pdf



- All applications must be complete, including all required documentation, and must be submitted through the online application system before the call deadline.
- Researchers at risk, who might not be able to submit an application in the aforementioned manner, should contact alecs@lero.ie to discuss an alternative submission arrangement.
- The proposal and all application supporting documentation must be submitted in English.

3.4 How and when to apply

You must submit your application and all required documentation through the online application system before the call deadline in order to be considered for an ALECS fellowship. Only applications that received the support of an ALECS supervisor will be considered.

The online application system, accessed from the [ALECS website](#), will be live for 12 weeks and will close on the call deadline, 13th January 2020, 23:59 (GMT).

3.4.1 Before submitting an application

It is strongly recommended that you start preparing your application as early as possible. Please carefully read this guide and all application documentation available [here](#). If you have any queries, you are encouraged to contact alecs@lero.ie for support.

Applicants must contact the ALECS academic supervisor, with whom they would like to collaborate with, directly. For details on how to contact an ALECS academic supervisor and to find out about their research interests please check the supervisors profile [here](#).

Please note that it is your responsibility to contact the ALECS academic supervisor to discuss your proposal and to gain support for your application. This is important as you can only submit your fellowship application once such support has been obtained.



3.4.2 Steps on how to apply for a fellowship

Step 1:

Register interest at alecs@lero.ie.

Step 2:

Check your eligibility. Please ensure that you do have the necessary research experience and that you do comply with the programme's mobility requirements. Contact alecs@lero.ie if you require clarification.

Step 3:

Ensure that your research topic is in line with the programme's research themes and with an ALECS academic supervisors research interests. Please check the supervisors' profiles to find out more about each supervisor and their research interests. You may contact a supervisor to clarify whether your research topic falls under their research umbrella.

Step 4:

- Contact an ALECS academic supervisor whose research interests are aligned with your proposed research topic. You must discuss your research proposal with the supervisor and you must formally get support for your application prior to submitting an application. Applications without such support will not be considered.
- Prepare all application documentation. Prepare your proposal and ensure that your proposal complies with the necessary requirements.
- The templates provided [here](#) must be used.

Step 5:

- Submit your application along with all required documentation through the online application system before the call deadline.

4 THE SELECTION PROCESS

The selection process will follow open, transparent and merit-based procedures in order to ensure that applications are evaluated in a competent and impartial manner. The process will be comprised of six stages, including an international peer review and an interview stage. A standard evaluation criteria and scoring system will be employed by all reviewers and by all interview panels.

4.1 Evaluation criteria and scoring system

Three evaluation criteria will be used: **Excellence, Impact and Implementation**. Such criteria will be employed both during the international peer review and during the interview stages. The evaluation criteria along with their respective sub-criteria are set out in Table 2.



| Evaluation criteria | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Excellence | 2. Impact | 3. Implementation |
| Quality, innovative aspects and credibility of the research (including inter/multidisciplinary, gender aspects). | Enhancing research – and innovation - related human resources, skills, and working conditions to realise the potential of individuals and to provide new career perspectives. | Overall coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources. |
| Clarity and quality of transfer of knowledge/training for the development of the researcher in light of the research objectives and planned secondment. | Effectiveness of the proposed measures for communication and results dissemination. | Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, including quality management and risk management. |
| Quality of the supervision and hosting (e.g. academic supervisor, hosting academic institution, secondment supervisor and secondment host where known). | | Appropriateness of the institutional environment (infrastructure). |

Table 2. Standard evaluation criteria.

A score between 0 (very poor) and 5 (excellent) will be provided for each of the three evaluation criterion (i.e. excellence, impact and implementation) as a whole. Please note that the sub-criteria presented in Table 2 are only in place to assist reviewers/interviewers in determining the score for each evaluation criterion – they will not be required to provide scores to the sub-criteria.

The description for each score is set out in Table 3.

| Score description | |
|----------------------|---|
| 0 (Very poor) | Proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed owing to missing or incomplete information. |
| 1 (Poor) | The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses. |
| 2 (Fair) | Proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses. |
| 3 (Good) | Proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present. |
| 4 (Very good) | Proposal addresses the criterion well, but a small number of shortcomings are present. |
| 5 (Excellent) | Proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor. |

Table 3. Score description.



4.2 Weighted scores and thresholds

The evaluation criteria are weighted differently and the set of weightings shown below will be applied to the scores provided for each of the criterion. The priority outlined below will be used to rank applications that achieve exactly the same score.

| Weighting and priority | | |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Excellence | Impact | Implementation |
| Weighting: 50% | Weighting: 30% | Weighting: 20% |
| Priority: 1 | Priority: 2 | Priority: 3 |

Table 4. Weighting and priority.

For each application, at the end of the international peer review and interview stages, the weighted scores for each criterion will be added producing a final weighted score for each stage. After each of these stages, the maximum final score for a given application will be 5 (excellent).

There will be no thresholds per individual evaluation criterion. However, **an overall threshold of 70% is applicable to the final weighted scores produced at the end of the international peer review and interview stages.** Only proposals with an international peer review final weighted score equal to or higher than 3.5 will proceed to the interview stage.

At the end of the interview stage, the final weighted score from the international peer review and from the interview stages will be added – with equal weighting – producing a combined final weighted score (i.e. this will be the final mark for that application):

- The maximum final mark for a given application will be 10.
- Only applications with a final mark equal to or higher than 7.0 will be considered for funding. This will apply regardless of the number of applications received.

4.3 The selection process stages

4.3.1 Stage 1 – General eligibility check

The general eligibility check will consist of checking all applications for completeness and eligibility using the details provided in the application forms. Once the eligibility checks are performed, all applicants will receive feedback:

- Where an application is found to be ineligible, the candidate will receive an explanation for its ineligibility.
- Eligible applications who indicated ethical issues will proceed to the ethics check stage.
- Eligible applications, which did not indicate ethical issues, will proceed straight to the international peer review stage.



4.3.2 Stage 2 - Ethics check

All candidates must indicate whether there are potential ethical issues associated with their proposed research in “Part A – Administrative information” document. Where ethical issues are flagged, the candidate is also required to submit details on how such issues will be addressed in “Part D – Ethics Self-Assessment” document. The programme’s ethics review committee will review applications which have ethical issues flagged to assess whether such issues apply and whether they have been adequately addressed by the applicant:

- The committee may declare the proposal ineligible, eligible as presented or may request additional information and/or clarification from the applicant and then make a decision.
- Only proposals with ethical clearance from PERC will proceed to the international peer review stage.
- All applicants will receive feedback on whether or not they are progressing to international peer review stage.

Important note:

1. Prior to the start of the fellowships, all proposals, regardless of whether ethical issues are flagged or not, will require formal ethical approval from the relevant host university's ethics committee.

4.3.3 Stage 3 - International peer review

A standard evaluation criteria and scoring system will be employed by all reviewers. Such criteria and scoring system will be discussed with all reviewers prior to the commencement of the review process with a view of ensuring a standardised assessment across all proposals.

Please note that your proposal and your CV will be made available to the reviewers. In order to facilitate an appropriate evaluation of your application, which is solely based on the proposal merits and on your capacity to perform the proposed research, it is important that you do not include personal details and/or provide indication of gender, nationality, age and other potential sources of bias on your proposal and CV. If included, such indicators will be removed from the relevant documentation prior to making it available to the reviewers.

Each application will be assessed by a panel of three independent reviewers, who are not be directly related to Lero or to the applicant, and whose expertise is in line with the proposal topic under evaluation. Initially, each reviewer will assess the application under consideration independently of the other two panel members. They will each provide a score for each of the evaluation criterion as well as comments that underpin their score. For each evaluation criterion, a mean average will be determined of the three scores. In cases where there is significant discrepancy between the lowest and highest score (or where the final score is close to the funding threshold), the reviewers will revisit the score and attempt to reach consensus. If no consensus can be reached, a 4th reviewer may be allocated.



4.3.4 Stage 4 – Ranking of applications

The corresponding weighting will be applied to the score of each criterion and the weighted scores will be added, producing a final weighted score for the international peer review stage. This final weighted score will be used to rank the applications. In cases where applications have exactly the same score, they will be ranked following the priority outlined in Table 4.

Candidates scoring above the 3.5 threshold will be invited for an interview.

At the end of the international peer review stage, all applicants regardless of whether or not they are progressing to the interview stage, will receive feedback which will include the scores and reviewers' comments.

4.3.5 Stage 5 – Interviews

Each interview will last up to 60 minutes. Candidates will be asked to give a 10 minute presentation on their proposal. Applicants may be interviewed on any aspect relating to Excellence, Impact or Implementation of their research. The interview panel will also assess the match between the applicant, the research project and the academic supervisor/host university.

At the end of each interview, the panel will agree on a consensus score for the application. The corresponding weighting will be applied to the scores provided to each evaluation criterion. The weighted scores for each criterion will be added producing a final weighted score for the interview stage.

Important note:

1. All interviews will be conducted in English.
2. Interviews may be carried out face-to-face or via video/web conferencing. No advantage is conferred to those who attend the interview in person.
3. It is the candidate's responsibility to organise the necessary web/video conferencing facilities at his/her end.

4.3.6 Stage 6 – Ranking of applications and final funding decision

The final mark for each application will be produced by adding the final weighted score from the international peer review process to the final weighted score from the interview panel, with equal weighting - leading to a final mark between 0 and 10.

The applications will be ranked taking into account the final mark and the prospective supervisor's capacity to take in that applicant. In cases where applications have exactly the same score, the priority outlined in Table 4 will apply.

Only applications scoring above the 70% threshold will be considered for funding. Upon a favourable funding decision, applicants will be offered an employment contract from their academic supervisor's university. The remaining applicants scoring above the threshold will be placed on a waiting list and will be



encouraged to re-apply to future ALECS calls for proposals. All interviewed applicants will receive feedback which will include the final mark and comments from the interviewers.

5 THE REDRESS PROCEDURE

Candidates who feel that their application has been unjustly evaluated may submit a request for redress. However, redress requests can only be made with regard to procedural issues or perceived incorrect application of the eligibility criteria. Redress requests relating to the scientific judgments of reviewers and/or members of the interview panel cannot be made.

Applicants wishing to start the redress procedure should contact alecs@lero.ie within 30 days of receiving feedback from the selection process. Following an eligible redress request, a redress committee will be convened which will either accept the request or reject it. If accepted, a new evaluation will be conducted for that application.

6 EMPLOYMENT AS AN ALECS FELLOW

Following approval of the final funding decision, successful candidates will be offered an employment contract for the duration of the fellowship from their academic supervisor's host university. The fellow will be employed by his/her host university under the same employment conditions as other externally funded researchers employed at that university. Applicants wishing to know the terms and conditions associated with the employment contracts, should contact the relevant university. The employment contracts will be in line with Irish Law and the Terms of Employment (Information) Acts 1994 and 2001.

6.1 Visa information for non-EU/EEA researchers

Non-EU/EEA nationals require permission to work and/or study in Ireland. As an ALECS fellow, you will be able to avail of a range of services offered by the EURAXESS office in Ireland. EURAXESS provide free advice to researchers and their families coming to work/study in Ireland -information on a range of issues and areas affecting researchers, including immigration, visas, employment law, healthcare, childcare, social services, and life in Ireland are available.

Researchers may contact [EURAXESS](#) Ireland for guidance. It also operates the Irish Hosting Agreement Scheme, which is a visa scheme designed for non-EU/EEA researchers wishing to work in Ireland. Under the scheme visas are issued rapidly and traditional work permits are not required. For more details see the [EURAXESS](#) website.



6.2 Financial aspects

The ALECS fellows will receive the gross salaries (living and mobility allowance are included) detailed in table 5.

| Category | Gross salary (per annum) |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Fellow with family ³ | €45,400 |
| Fellow | €40,000 |

Table 5. Gross salaries per annum.

Please note that salaries received by the fellow will be liable for taxes and/or other deductions. Information on Irish taxation can be found at the Office of Revenue Commissioners [website](#).

ALECS will provide contributions towards the cost of conducting the research such as consumables and travel, and towards management, training and development activities.

7 CONTACT DETAILS

Should you have any queries or should you require assistance at any stage, please contact:

Email: alecs@lero.ie

Telephone: 00 353 61 233 637

³ The programme will apply the family definition as in the MSCA Work Programme 2016-2017: Family is defined as persons linked to the Fellow by (i) marriage, or (ii) a relationship with equivalent status to a marriage recognised by the legislation of the country where this relationship was formalised; or (iii) dependent children who are actually being maintained by the fellow. Qualification for this allowance is at the time of recruitment.