

PROVISIONAL

The IDEAS Work Programme

EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME

Version agreed by the founding members of the ERC Scientific Council

This provisional Work programme will be implemented by the Dedicated Implementation Structure of the ERC which the Commission intends to establish in the legal form of an Executive Agency.

(European Commission C(2006) 6843)

¹ This provisional work programme is subject to formal confirmation following the entry into force of the 7th EC Framework Programme and the Specific Programme Ideas.

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1. Introduction

The European Research Council (ERC) has a unique position as a pan-European funding organisation designed to support the best science and scholarship. It will operate at the highest level of ambition to generate the maximum benefit to European research from the activities it pursues. As a new organisation, it will not be hostage to the conventional wisdom; instead, it will take the best practice wherever it can be found.

The fundamental principle for all ERC activities is that of stimulating investigator-initiated frontier research across all fields of research, on the basis of excellence. Awards will be made and grants operated according to simple procedures that maintain the focus on excellence, encourage initiative and combine flexibility with accountability.

By using competition on the basis of excellence at the European level, the ERC will add value to other funding schemes, such as those of Research Funding Agencies operating at the national level. The ERC will also complement other research activities under the 7th framework programme managed by the European Commission, including the Marie Curie schemes, strategic basic research in support of thematic priorities, and support for European infrastructures.

The ERC will aim to create leverage towards structural improvements in the research system of Europe. For example, since many investigators who will be involved in the funded activities are likely to be working within universities, academies, research centres and similar establishments, the ERC can have a strong incentive effect on these institutions by:

- Offering greater independence to early stage (starting) investigators as an investment in the next generation and towards enhancement and sustainability of the institutions' research capacity.
- Setting quality benchmarks, allowing institutions better to judge their research performance.
- Revealing in a bottom up manner the availability of top talent in various fields and emerging areas, and thus assisting the institutions' strategic thinking and priority setting.
- Promoting interaction of European research institutions with similar institutions around the world on the basis of the participation of individual researchers from these institutions in ERC activities.

The Scientific Council² of the ERC establishes the ERC's strategy. It has full authority over decisions on the type of research to be funded and acts as guarantor of the quality of the activity from the scientific perspective. Its tasks cover, in particular, the development of the annual work programme, the establishment of the peer review process, as well as the monitoring and quality control of the programme's implementation from the scientific

² This Work Programme has been established by the founding members of the ERC Scientific Council, in advance of the Commission decision which will formally establish the ERC, including its Scientific Council. Reference in the text to the Scientific Council should be understood in this sense.

perspective including the development of the ERC's strategy regarding international cooperation.

2. ERC Grants

Two types of ERC grant will be available. These two funding streams, operating on a “bottom-up” basis, across all research fields, without predetermined priorities, are expected to be the core of the ERC's operations for the duration of the 7th Framework Programme.

- The ERC Starting Independent Researcher Grants (ERC Starting Grants). The objective is to provide adequate support to the independent careers of excellent researchers, whatever their nationality, located in or moving to the EU and associated countries, who are at the stage of establishing and leading their first research team or programme.
- The ERC Advanced Investigator Grants (ERC Advanced Grants). The objective is to encourage and support excellent, innovative investigator-initiated research projects by leading advanced investigators across the EU member states and countries associated to the framework programme. This funding stream will complement the Starting Grant scheme by targeting the population of researchers who have already established themselves as being independent research leaders in their own right.

The Grants will support projects carried out by individual teams which are headed by a single **principal investigator** of any nationality and, if necessary, include additional **team-members**³. These teams could be of national or trans-national character.

The grant will be awarded to the institution (Applicant Legal Entity) that will be engaging and hosting the Principal Investigator, with the attached **commitment that this institution will grant the Principal Investigator the independence to manage the research funding for the duration of the project.**

The ERC's funding will increase substantially over the period 2007-2013. **The first call will cover research proposals only for Starting Grants. The ERC Advanced Grant scheme will be introduced in the second call for proposals, expected to be published later in 2007.**

From 2008 onwards it is anticipated that both ERC Starting Grants and ERC Advanced Grants will be the subject of annual calls. As experience and the portfolio of funded projects builds up, the Scientific Council will be in a position to evaluate the programme achievements, adjust mechanisms and procedures as needed, and elaborate its scientific strategy as this is seen to be appropriate.

³ With the focus on the Principal Investigator, the concept of individual team is fundamentally different from that of a traditional “network” or “research consortium”; proposals of the latter type will not be acceptable under this scheme

3. ERC Starting Independent Researcher Grants

3.1 Background

A widely accepted view is that Europe offers insufficient opportunities for young investigators to develop independent careers and make the transition from working under a supervisor to being independent research leaders in their own right. This structural problem leads to a dramatic waste of research talent in Europe. It limits or delays the emergence of the next-generation of researchers, who bring new ideas and energy, and it encourages highly talented researchers at an early stage of their career to seek advancement elsewhere, either in other professions or as researchers outside Europe.

Up to now, only some relatively small scale efforts have been made in Europe to address these problems. The ERC is well placed to develop a broad, international and consistent scheme on the much larger scale that will be necessary to make a real impact on European science and scholarship.

3.2 Objectives of the scheme

ERC Starting Independent Researcher Grants are designed to support researchers (Principal Investigators) at the stage at which they are starting or leading their first research team or, depending on the field, establishing their independent research programme⁴.

Independence implies that the Principal Investigator has the authority to:

- apply for funding independently of senior colleagues
- manage the research funding for the project and make appropriate resource allocation decisions
- publish as senior author and invite as co-authors only those who have contributed substantially to the reported work
- supervise team members, including research students or others
- have access to reasonable space and facilities for conducting the research

The scheme will support the creation of independent and excellent new individual research teams and will strengthen others that have been recently created.

The peer review evaluation Panels will be empowered to conclude whether the grant and the conditions specified by the hosting institution will allow the Principal Investigator to make the transition to independence⁵.

⁴ It is recognised that in certain fields (e.g. in the humanities and mathematics), research is often performed individually, aside from guiding research students. The term “team” is used in the broadest sense, including cases where a single individual works independently or conversely in cases when several investigators are working so closely together as to constitute a single team.

3.3 Size of ERC Starting Grants

The level of the ERC Starting Independent Researcher Grants will be between €100,000 and €400,000 per year for a period of up to 5 years.⁶

The Community financial contribution shall be in the form of a grant to the budget corresponding to 100% of the total eligible and approved direct costs and a contribution of 20% of the total eligible direct costs (excluding sub-contracting) towards indirect costs.

The level of the grant offered will be determined by the peer review evaluation, on the basis of the needs of the project, judged by the panel against the requested budget of the proposal⁷.

3.4 Submission procedure and peer review evaluation

Proposals are submitted by the Principal Investigator, who has scientific responsibility for the project, on behalf of the hosting institution which is the "applicant legal entity"⁸, confirming the hosting institution's commitment to the conditions of independence set out in section 3.2. Applications may be made in any field of research with particular emphasis on the frontier of science and scholarship. Proposals of an interdisciplinary nature which cross the boundaries between different panels, proposals in new and emerging fields and "high-risk, high-gain" proposals are encouraged.

Pre-registration of the proposals is required and should be done as early as possible in advance of the proposal submission.

The Scientific Council has established, based on world-wide practice, the following indicative budget for each of the 3 main scientific domains:

Physical Sciences & Engineering: 45%

Life Sciences: 40%

Social Sciences & Humanities: 15%

A reserve in the overall budget, not exceeding 20% of the total, may be retained for funding proposals that have been judged of comparable merit but beyond the budget allocated to the

⁵ Note that the conditions of independence provided to the PI and his/her team are consistent with the "The European Charter for Researchers and The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers", C(2005)576, 11.3.2005

⁶ The level of the grant represents a maximum overall figure – payments must be justified on the basis of the amounts actually disbursed for the project.

⁷ The requested budget should reflect the Principal Investigator's estimation of the real project cost, taking account of the nature of the project and team and whether it is intended to set up a new team or add support to a recently-established team. Evaluation panels will review the proposed budget and, as appropriate, suggest adjustments using rounded figures (increments of € 10 000).

⁸ Exceptionally, the Principal Investigator may himself/herself act as the "applicant legal entity", if he/she is acting in the capacity of the legal entity in his/her own right.

specific scientific domain, and can be used to further promote frontier research and interdisciplinarity.

A two-stage application procedure will be followed. At the first stage, a proposal will be presented and evaluated, describing the project and the qualifications of the Principal Investigator. Successful Principal Investigators at the first stage will be invited to submit a more detailed proposal by the second stage deadline.

The following elements will be required:

- a) CV and a self-evaluation of the Principal Investigator's research achievements, including a succinct "funding ID" which must specify any current research grants and any ongoing application for work related to the proposal.
- b) Description of scientific and technical aspects of the project
- c) Description of the scientific environment and resources

Strict limits will be applied to the length of proposals⁹:

- Stage 1: 8 pages total (3+4+1)
- Stage 2: 16 pages total (4+10+2)

Only the material that the proposal contains within these limits will be evaluated.

At stage 1, the hosting institution must confirm its association and support to the project and Principal Investigator. At stage 2, the hosting institution must provide a binding statement that the conditions of independence, set out in section 3.2, are already fulfilled or will be provided to the Principal Investigator if the application is successful.¹⁰

The peer review evaluation for ERC Starting Grants will be carried out by means of a structure of high level Panels.¹¹ The Panels may be assisted by referees and will carry out interviews with applying Principal Investigators at the second stage of the evaluation. The assignment of the proposals to the various panels will take into account the subject of research of each proposal.

Information on the first ERC Starting Grant call for proposals is provided in Annex 1. The proposed research activities should respect fundamental ethical principles¹². Proposals must meet a quality threshold in order to qualify for funding. Amongst the proposals meeting the

⁹ 12 pt font, single spaced with minimum 2 cm margins.

¹⁰ These conditions will be the subject of an agreement (supplementary to the Grant agreement between the principal investigator and the hosting institution) based on the principles set out in section 3.2.

¹¹ Approximately 20 panels will be established to span the spectrum of research areas, each of which will have responsibility for a broadly-defined set of research fields. Panel members will be compensated on the evaluation tasks they perform. Additional reimbursement of travel and subsistence will be carried for assignments involving travel. Additional referees who may assist the evaluation panels will not be compensated.

¹² Including those reflected in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The opinions of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies are and will be taken into account. Research activities should also take into account the Protocol on the Protection and Welfare of Animals, and reduce the use of animals in research and testing, with a view to ultimately replacing animal use.

quality threshold in any call for proposals, a ranked list (stage 2) will be drawn up to determine the retained proposals to be funded in the context of the available budget¹³. If the call establishes indicative budgets for particular topics or fields of research within the scope of the call, separate retained lists may be prepared for each such field, in addition to the overall retained list. The number of proposals passing the first stage of the evaluation will be limited to avoid oversubscription at the second stage.

3.5 Reapplications and multiple applications

Rules will apply to reapplications by Principal Investigators for ERC grants whose proposals are not judged to meet the threshold of quality, as well as for multiple applications within the same or different type of ERC grants. These rules, which may subsequently be modified by the Scientific Council in light of experience, are as follows:

- No principal or collaborating investigator may be associated with more than one application to the ERC during the same year.
- A Principal Investigator may not submit an application for an ERC grant during the calendar year following the submission of an unsuccessful application unless that application was judged to meet the quality threshold for funding. (Note: this rule will not apply to the second call for ERC Starting Grants, in view of the long interval between first and second calls.)
- Only one ERC grant by the Principal Investigator can be active at any time. In addition, applications by researchers who have successfully applied for a similar type of funding (e.g. EURYI award) will not be normally accepted unless the objectives of the proposed project are clearly distinct. However, it will be possible for ERC Starting grantees to compete for an Advanced Investigator Grant to allow for uninterrupted funding of their project/activity.

3.6 Eligibility Criteria

Eligible Scientific Fields

Applications may be made in any field of research¹⁴.

Funding of human embryonic stem cell research will be possible within the ethical framework defined in the EC 7th Framework Programme¹⁵ as well as the "Ideas" Specific Programme.

¹³ Following allocation of available funding to the highest ranked proposals, a reserve list may be established in case additional funds become available

¹⁴ Research proposals directed towards nuclear energy applications should be submitted to relevant calls under the EURATOM Specific Programme

¹⁵ "Commission Declaration" in Annex IV of European Council's political agreement on 7th Framework Programme on 25/07/2006. Accordingly, proposals which will include research activities which destroy human

Eligible Principal Investigator

The ERC actions are open to researchers of any nationality who would like to set their research activity up in any European Union Member State as well as any Associated or Associated- Candidate Country.

The Principal Investigator can be of any age and nationality and he/she can reside in any country in the world at the time of the application. He/she must have been awarded¹⁶ his/her first PhD (or equivalent doctoral degree) more than 2 and less than 8 years prior to the deadline of the call for proposals.

Extensions of this period may be allowed only in case of eligible career breaks which must be properly documented: maternity & paternity leave and leave taken for long-term illness, national service. Leave taken for unavoidable statutory reasons (e.g. clinical qualifications) may also count as an extension.

The cumulative eligibility period should not in any case surpass 11 years following the award of the first PhD. No allowance will be made for part-time working (2 years of half-time working count as 2 full-time years).

Eligible Hosting Institution (Applicant Legal Entity)

This institution will host and engage the Principal Investigator for at least the duration of the grant. It must be situated in one of the European Union Member States, or one of the countries that are Associated to the Framework Programme including the countries that are candidates to become EU members. It may also be an International European Interest Organisation (such as CERN, EMBL, etc.) or the European Commission's Joint Research Centre. The country of primary residence of the Principal Investigator during the period of the grant must be in one of the eligible states.

Normally, the applicant legal entity will be the only participating legal entity. Other legal entities, including those located in third countries, may however be involved and receive funding to support the work of additional team members, if so specified in the grant award. This presupposes that in such cases the scientific added value is properly justified and accepted during evaluation by the peer review panels.

embryos, including for the procurement of stem cells, will not be submitted to the Regulatory Committee. The exclusion of funding of this step of research will not prevent funding of subsequent steps involving human embryonic stem cells.

¹⁶ The reference date towards the calculation of the eligibility period should be the date of the actual award according to the national rules in the country that the degree was awarded.

3.7 Evaluation criteria

Excellence is the sole award criterion of evaluation. It will be applied to the evaluation of both the Principal Investigator and the research project. The evaluation will also assess the extent to which the research environment enables the excellence of the project to be achieved.

The detailed criteria applying to these 3 elements of the proposal are as follows:

1. Principal Investigator: Potential to become a world class research leader

Quality of research output: Has the Principal Investigator published in high quality peer reviewed journals or the equivalent? To what extent are these publications ground-breaking and demonstrative of independent creative thinking and capacity to go significantly beyond the state of the art?

Intellectual capacity and creativity: To what extent does the Principal Investigator's record of research, collaborations, project conception, supervision of students and publications demonstrate that he/she is able to confront major research challenges in the field, and to initiate new productive lines of thinking?

2. Quality of the proposed research project

Ground-breaking nature of the research: Does the proposed research address important challenges in the field(s) addressed? Does it have suitably ambitious objectives, which go substantially beyond the current state of the art (e.g. including trans-disciplinary developments and novel or unconventional approaches)?

Potential impact: Does the research open new and important, scientific, technological or scholarly horizons?

Methodology:

- a) is the outlined scientific approach (including the activities to be undertaken by the individual team members) feasible? (Stage 1)
- b) is the proposed research methodology (including when pertinent the use of instrumentation, other type of infrastructures etc.) comprehensive and appropriate for to the project? Will it enable the goals of the project convincingly to be achieved within the timescales and resources proposed and the level of risk associated with a challenging research project? (Stage 2)

3. Research Environment (to be assessed only during stage 2 evaluation)

Transition to independence: Will the proposed project enable the Principal Investigator to make or consolidate the transition to independence?

Hosting institution (normally applicant legal entity): Does the institution hosting the project have most of the infrastructure necessary for the research to be carried out? Is it in a position to provide an appropriate intellectual environment and infrastructural support and to assist in achieving the ambitions for the project and the Principal Investigator?

Participation of other legal entities: **If it is proposed that other legal entities participate in the project, in addition to the applicant legal entity,** is their participation fully justified by the scientific added value they bring to the project?

3.8 Application of Criteria

Panels and referees will evaluate and score numerically the proposals under the criteria of Heading 1: *Potential of the Principal Investigator* and Heading 2: *Quality of the proposed research project*.

Proposals will be evaluated under Heading 3 criteria on a "pass/fail" basis and commented but not scored during stage 2 of the evaluation.

The overall scoring of the proposals will integrate the strengths and weaknesses including these scores as well as an overall appreciation of the proposal.

Each evaluation criterion (Heading 1 and 2) will be marked on a scale of 1 to 5. The full proposal will be evaluated on a scale of 1 to 10 and an overall quality threshold of 8/10 will be used to establish the "retained list" of proposal which will be ranked in order of priority for funding.

For the proposals retained at stage 2, panels will establish a recommended budget according to the provisions of section 3.3.

4. Coordination & Support Actions (CSA)

To assist in preparing its future activities and optimising its impact, the ERC will provide financial support for the analysis of developments and trends in science and technology, analysis and dissemination of research results and impact assessment. This will be done by means of "Coordination and Support Actions" (CSAs) established on the basis of specific calls for proposals to be launched during the course of the ERC's operations.

CSAs (Support Actions) will also be used to support the establishment and activities of the Secretary General of the ERC who will assist the ERC Scientific Council in ensuring its effective liaison with the ERC dedicated implementation structure and with the Commission, and in monitoring the effective implementation of its strategy and positions as carried by the ERC dedicated implementation structure. It is envisaged to include a similar CSA in the subsequent work programmes.

In particular the CSA to support the Secretary General will be established immediately by means of a grant to a named recipient. The named recipient will be identified in the Work Programme to be formally adopted by the Commission in early 2007¹⁷.

The objective of the CSA will be to provide an independent position for the Secretary General, who will be selected by the Scientific Council and work under its authority to assist in the organisation of its work, and assure effective liaison with the European Commission and the dedicated implementation structure.

The maximum budget will be € 335,000 for the year 2007.

4.1 Eligibility Criteria

Proposals for co-ordination and support actions must be focused on requirements specified in the work programme and/or call for proposals.

Applicants for co-ordination and support actions must be situated in one of the European Union Member States, or one of the countries that are Associated to the Framework Programme including the countries that are candidates to become EU members. Applications from International European Interest Organisations (such as CERN, EMBL, etc.) or the European Commission's Joint Research Centre are also eligible.

4.2 Evaluation Criteria

Proposals for Coordination and Support Actions (CSA) will be evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

¹⁷ In conformity with the provisions of the Specific Programme "Ideas" and in compliance with Article 14(a) of the Rules of Participation and Article 168 of the Implementing Rules of the Financial Regulation.

1. Objectives and impact (award):

Are the objectives of the proposed project consistent with the requirements specified in the work programme and/or call for proposals? Will the project have a substantial impact in the context of the ERC strategic objectives?

2. Quality and effectiveness (award):

Is the proposed methodology and work plan effective in reaching the goals of the project? Does it ensure the highest quality and/or utility of results? Does it, where appropriate, correspond to, or go beyond, best current practice?

3. Resources (selection):

Are the resources (personnel, equipment, other) appropriate for the goals of the project? Will they be used effectively? Are they properly justified?

Indicative budget for the ERC 2007 Work Programme

Call	2007* M€
ERC-2007-StG	289.5
OTHER ACTIVITIES:	0.335
EVALUATION COSTS	2.00
ESTIMATED TOTAL BUDGET ALLOCATION (rounded)	291.8

* Under the condition that the preliminary draft budget for 2007 is adopted without modifications by the budget authority

Annex 1 Call Information

Call Title: Call for proposals for *ERC Starting Independent Researcher Grant*

Call identifier: ERC-2007-StG

Date of publication: 22 December 2006

Date from which proposals are receivable: 1 April 2007

Call deadline: 25 April 2007 at 17.00 (Brussels local time)

Indicative budget¹⁸: 289.5 million EUR from 2007 budget

Activity: European Research Council Starting Grants

Minimum number of participants: At least 1 independent legal entity established in a MS or in an AC (in the case of the participation of more than one legal entity the participants are not obliged to establish a consortium agreement)

Restrictions on participation: see eligibility criteria in the Work Programme

Topics: Applications may be made in any field of research, other than those specifically excluded from the 7th framework programme

Evaluation procedure:

- The evaluation is carried out through evaluation panels, assisted by referees.
- Proposals may be evaluated remotely.
- The evaluation shall follow a two stage submission.
- The second stage deadline will be announced with the invitation to submit a second-stage proposal.
- Interviews with the applying Principal Investigators will be carried out during the second stage of the evaluation.

Evaluation criteria: See the work programme for the applicable criteria

Information on the modalities of the call and guidance to applicants on how to submit projects is available on:

<http://erc.europa.eu>

¹⁸ Under the condition that the preliminary draft budget for 2007 is adopted without modifications by the budget authority.