UKRO Horizon 2020 Condensed

European Research Council (ERC)

What is the ERC and who should apply?

The ERC funds ambitious ‘frontier research’ proposals submitted by a Principal Investigator (PI), possibly supported by other team members, in any area of research and without predefined priorities. The ERC aims to fund the best research undertaken by the best researchers in Europe, and excellence is the only evaluation criterion (excellence of the PI and excellence of the research project).

ERC-supported research should aim to broaden knowledge, and the proposed research should aim to be ambitious, both in terms of the envisaged research achievements and in the originality of the proposed approaches. Proposals can involve new, ground-breaking or unconventional methodologies, whose risky outlook is justified by the possibility of a major breakthrough with an impact beyond a specific research area. Interdisciplinary proposals are also encouraged.

The ERC operates the following schemes in Horizon 2020:

Starting Grants

The Starting Grants scheme aims to provide support to excellent researchers who are at the stage of establishing their own independent research team or programme (proposals can also be submitted by researchers working individually). The scheme seeks to bring about greater opportunities and independence at the start of a research career and enable PIs to create excellent new teams in order to bring novel ideas to their disciplines.

Projects can be for up to a maximum of 5 years, and the maximum grant is €2 million. To be eligible, the PI must have been awarded a PhD between 2 and 7 years prior to 1 January of the year of the Work Programme.

Consolidator Grants

The Consolidator Grants scheme aims to provide support to excellent researchers who are at the stage of consolidating their own independent research team or programme (proposals can also be submitted by researchers working individually). This scheme seeks to bring about greater opportunities and independence at the early stages of a research career and enable PIs to create excellent new teams in order to bring new ideas to their disciplines.

Projects can be for up to a maximum of 5 years, and the maximum grant is €2.75 million. To be eligible, the PI must have been awarded a PhD between 7 and 12 years prior to 1 January of the year of the Work Programme.
Advanced Grants

The Advanced Grants scheme aims to support excellent, leading researchers to pursue ground-breaking research which opens up new directions in the area of their choice. The PI must be an active and established researcher and have an excellent track record of research achievements during the last 10 years and show evidence of supporting and nurturing more junior researchers.

Projects can be for up to a maximum of 5 years, and the maximum grant is €3.5 million. There are no PhD eligibility requirements for a PI, but evaluators will expect to see applicants at the forefront of their field.

Synergy Grants

ERC Synergy Grants are intended to enable between two and four Principal Investigators and their teams to bring together complementary skills, knowledge, and resources in new ways, in order to jointly address ambitious research problems. Synergy Grants may be awarded up to a maximum of €14 million for a period of 6 years.

Groups applying for the ERC Synergy Grant must be made up of a minimum of two and a maximum of four Principal Investigators and, as necessary, their teams. One of the Principal Investigators must be designated as the Corresponding Principal Investigator. One of the Principal Investigators (not the Corresponding PI) can be based in a third-country.

Proof of Concept Grants

The Proof of Concept scheme funds ERC grant holders to establish the innovation potential of an idea developed during the course of an ERC-funded project. The scheme aims to build upon ideas which draw substantially from research that has been funded by the ERC, increasing the opportunities for commercial or societal application of the frontier research.

A PI of an ERC-funded project, whose project is either ongoing or has ended less than 12 months before the publication date of the call, is eligible to apply. Projects can be up to 18 months in length but it is expected that normally the project would be completed within 12 months.

The grant is administered as a lump-sum of €150,000. Payments are awarded based on the completion of work packages.
Implementing Arrangements

The European Research Council has also signed a number of ‘Implementing Arrangements’ with Third Countries, allowing foreign researchers to join ERC-funded research teams in Europe. The list of countries involved can be found here.

These arrangements provide funding for a participating Researcher to spend 3-6 months working on an ERC project. No additional funding is provided by the ERC, but any relevant expenses can be claimed under the ERC grant. Eligible researchers must apply to their own national programmes, whilst the ERC manages a call for ‘expressions of interest’ from PIs who are willing to host such placements.

Visiting Fellowship Programmes

ERC promotes national programmes to fund potential ERC applicants to visit the teams of existing ERC-funded PIs. This is in order to learn more about the ERC process and how to apply. National programmes must be in line with ERC guidelines, that is: to be notified to the ERC; to be open to researchers from all disciplines; to be based on a fully open and transparent evaluation with scientific excellence as the main criterion.

Visiting researchers must submit a proposal to one of the ERC’s main calls (StG, CoG, AdG, SyG) within a specified time after the end of the visit.

What will be funded?

The ERC calls are open to all research areas (with the exception of nuclear fission and fusion), without any predefined thematic priorities. Proposals can be submitted to one of 25 evaluation panels within three research domains:

- Physical Sciences and Engineering
- Life Sciences
- Social Sciences and Humanities

For interdisciplinary proposals, it is possible to choose a primary and a secondary panel (either within the same domain or a different domain). The ERC operates a single-stage submission and a two-stage evaluation process, which means that the full proposal must be submitted by the deadline date. The latest ERC Work Programme indicates the allocated budget and approximate number of grants which are expected to be awarded for each scheme as well as the expected timings of the calls.

Funding and project details

The ERC will reimburse direct eligible costs at 100% and provides a flat rate of 25% for indirect costs. All projects are led by a PI, supported by a team if this is necessary for the project, and there is no requirement for collaboration across different European countries. Projects are based at a host institution of the PI’s choice, which can be any type of organisation.
In addition, the PI does not have to be based at the host institution at the time the proposal is submitted. Similarly, a PI can apply for an ERC grant while outside Europe, as long as the project is undertaken at a host institution within Europe. This does not exclude fieldwork or other necessary project work which takes place outside Europe, and the proposal can address a ‘non-European’ issue.

However, for Starting Grants the PI must spend a minimum of 50% of their working time on the ERC-funded project and 50% of their time within Europe. PIs on Consolidator Grants must spend 40% of their time on the project and 50% of their time in Europe. For Advanced Grants and Synergy Grants, the PI must spend at least 30% of their working time on the project and 50% of their time within a European Member State or Associated Country.

**Relevant EU policy areas and developments**

The ERC’s policy and funding strategy are decided by an independent Scientific Council, consisting of 22 leading researchers. Although accountable to the European Commission, the ERC’s mandate is to encourage the highest quality research in Europe via competitive funding and support investigator-driven frontier research across all fields. As a result, no other EU policy priorities influence the ERC’s funding.

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**More information:**

- European Commission Research and Innovation Participant Portal for:
  - Calls for proposals
  - Work programmes – 2019 and 2020
- ERC website: erc.europa.eu
- List of Implementing Arrangements countries: [https://erc.europa.eu/funding/additional-opportunities#International%20Arrangement%20funding](https://erc.europa.eu/funding/additional-opportunities#International%20Arrangement%20funding)
- Sign up to the UKRO Portal News to stay up to date on Horizon 2020 general developments, calls, events and results: [ukro.ac.uk](http://ukro.ac.uk)
- For specific questions, contact your UKRO European Advisor
- UK ERC NCP Helpdesk
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