ERC Starting Grants (ERC StG)

2019

A call for applications for ERC Starting Grants, which provide up to €1.5 million over 5 years for a talented early-career researcher, who is ready to work independently and shows potential to be a research leader, is expected to open in August.

The deadline will be in October 2018 (precise date tbc).

What are ERC Starting Grants?

ERC Starting Grants are part of the EU’s Horizon 2020 Programme, which runs from 2014-2020. They are part of a suite of four main grants administered by the European Research Council (ERC): Starting Grants (for early career researchers), Consolidator Grants (for more established researchers), Advanced Grants (for research with a significant track record over 10 years), and Synergy Grants (for groups of 2-4 outstanding researchers).

The ERC’s total budget under Horizon 2020 is €13.1 billion (17% of the overall Horizon 2020 budget). The budget for Starting Grants in the 2018 Work Programme was €581 million (almost a third of the budget for the whole Work Programme). This budget was enough to fund almost 390 proposals.

ERC Starting Grants support projects led by an individual researcher who can employ researchers of any nationality as team members. It is also possible to have one or more team members located in a non-European country. The grants are for up to €1.5 million over five years.

ERC Starting Grants do not have predetermined priorities and work on a ‘bottom-up’ basis, thus providing an excellent opportunity for outstanding researchers, regardless of their field of research. They are also highly competitive, with overall success rates of around 12%; the University’s success rate tends to be slightly higher than this. In 2017, UK HEI’s received 79 of the 406 Grants awarded (19%); in 2016 this figure was 67 from 390 (17%).

Scientific excellence¹ – in terms of the proposed project and the researcher’s record – is the sole criterion on the basis of which ERC Starting Grants are awarded.

The next application deadline will be in October 2018.

¹ The ERC uses ‘science’ and ‘scientific’ to refer to research in all disciplines, not just the natural sciences.
Who is eligible to apply?

- To be eligible, you must have **2-7 years of research experience** since completing your PhD as of 1\textsuperscript{st} January 2019. Some extensions to this are possible if your research has been interrupted by national service, illness or maternity leave. Applicants should have a research track record showing great promise and an excellent proposal.

- The **2018 Work Programme**\(^2\) (pp. 21-22) specifies that candidates should have produced **at least one important publication as main author/without the participation of your PhD supervisor** and provides the following benchmarks for academic track record and leadership potential to be listed in the application:
  - Up to five publications as main author in major international peer-reviewed journals
  - Research monographs
  - Prizes, academy memberships, and invited presentations

- Applications may be made in **any field of research**.

- The PI does not necessarily need to be employed (on an established/permanent basis or otherwise) by the host institution at the time that the proposal is submitted.

- Starting Grants support projects carried out by an **individual researcher**, who can employ researchers of any nationality as team members. It is also possible to have one or more team members located in a non-European country.

Why apply for an ERC Starting Grant?

- Although the application process can be complex, and the grants are very competitive, ERC Starting Grants provide substantial funding and are open to proposals in any research area.

- Holding an ERC Starting Grant is a considerable indicator of academic prestige.

- ERC Starting Grants are aimed at ‘high-risk, high-gain’ projects, which wouldn’t always attract funding elsewhere.

- Unlike some other funding programmes, the ERC Starting Grants do not require you to already have a permanent contract with the University, and are therefore suitable for postdoctoral researchers or researchers employed by Colleges.

How much funding is available?

- Starting Grants provide a maximum of €1.5 million for a period of 5 years (this is reduced on a pro rata basis for projects of shorter duration: a maximum of €1.2 million for four years, and so on).

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\(^2\) The 2019 Work Programme will be published shortly, and is expected to be broadly similar.
• It is possible to request up to €500,000 in additional funding to cover eligible start-up costs (for example, if you are relocating from a third country to the EU or the purchase of major equipment or access to large facilities).
• The ERC’s contribution will take the form of the reimbursement of up to 100% of the total eligible and approved direct costs and of a flat-rate financing of indirect costs corresponding to 25% of the total eligible direct costs.
• In 2018, €581 million of funding is available in total for advanced grants, which will fund an estimated total of 390 Advanced Grants. Similar numbers are expected for the 2019 round.

What is the timeline for applications?
The ERC published the following timeline for ERC Advanced Grants in the 2018 Work Programme; timings are likely to be similar in the 2019 round.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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<tr>
<td>Call opens</td>
<td>August 2018 (tbc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadline for submission of proposals</td>
<td>October 2018 (tbc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applicants informed of outcome of stage one and invited to interview</td>
<td>May 2019 (tbc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>June 2019 (tbc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applicants informed of outcome of interview/stage two</td>
<td>August 2019 (tbc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indicative date for the signature of Grant Agreements</td>
<td>December 2019 (tbc)</td>
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How can I apply?
• In the first instance, please get in touch with your Faculty’s or Department’s Research Grant Administrator and Matt Hann, School Research Facilitator for Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, who will be able to guide you through the process in more detail and support you in putting together your application.
• Researchers may apply to only one of the ERC’s grant programmes in each year (you cannot, for example, apply for both a Synergy Grant and and Starting Grant). If a
A researcher does attempt to apply for two programmes, the ERC will only consider the first eligible application received.

- Proposals must be submitted electronically, using the European Commission's Online Submission Service (SEP) accessible via the Participant Portal. It is a good idea to sign up for this early and familiarise yourself with it.

- Proposals must be submitted before the deadline in October. To avoid missing the deadline, you should submit your proposal as early as possible, as it remains possible to reopen, edit and resubmit your proposal as many times as required before the call deadline. Only the last submitted version will be evaluated.

What does a proposal contain?

- Part A of the proposal deals with administrative information, budget, and ethical considerations (where applicable). Your Department’s or Faculty’s Research Grant Administrator will help you compile the budget, using the X5 database to produce costings.

- Part B of the proposal is the scientific research proposal. This is split into two parts: Part B1 (further split into the cover page, and sections a, b, and c) and Part B2 (also further split into sections a, b, and c).

- Part B1 contains (a) an extended synopsis of the research proposal (5 pages, excluding references); (b) a CV of the PI (2 pages); and (c) an ‘early achievement track record’ of the PI (2 pages).

- Part B2 is the research proposal itself, which must be no longer than 15 pages, excluding references.

- Only Part B1 is assessed at step 1 of the application process; at step two, both parts are assessed – by the panel and by external expert reviewers. At step 1, the panel has no access to part B2.

- An information session on applying for ERC Advanced Grants will be held on July 31st; for more details, and to register, please visit:
What criteria are used to judge applications?

- Proposals are evaluated in a two-step process. Evaluation is carried out by international expert panels and reviewers.

- Scientific excellence is the sole criterion of evaluation. This will be applied in terms of the ground-breaking nature, ambition and feasibility of the project and the intellectual capacity, creativity, and commitment of the PI.

- In general, projects wholly or largely consisting in the collation and compilation of existing material in new databases, editions or collections are unlikely to constitute ground-breaking or ‘frontier’ research and are therefore unlikely to receive funding.

- Assessment is carried out by 25 subject area panels, each covering a spread of research areas. Applicants from Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences will normally be assessed by one of the six Social Science and Humanities panels. Applicants may select the panel they feel is most relevant.

- The 2018 Work Programme (pp. 37-38) provides the following, more detailed criteria:

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<th>Research Project</th>
<th>Principle Investigator</th>
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<td><strong>Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project</strong></td>
<td><strong>Intellectual capacity and creativity</strong></td>
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<td>• To what extent does the proposed research address important challenges?</td>
<td>• To what extent has/have the PI(s) demonstrated the ability to propose and conduct groundbreaking research?</td>
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<td>• To what extent are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g. novel concepts and approaches or development between or across disciplines)?</td>
<td>• To what extent does/do the PI(s) provide evidence of creative independent thinking?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• To what extent is the proposed research high risk/high gain?</td>
<td>• To what extent have the achievements of the PI(s) typically gone beyond the state of the art?</td>
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<th>Scientific Approach</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
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<td>• To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind the extent that the proposed research is high risk/high gain (based on the Extended Synopsis)?</td>
<td>To what extent does the PI demonstrate the level of commitment to the project necessary for its execution and the willingness to devote a significant amount of time to the project (minimum 50% for Starting Grants) (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?</td>
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<td>• To what extent does the proposal go beyond what the individual Principal Investigators could achieve alone?</td>
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<td>• To what extent does the proposal require and demonstrate significant synergies, complementarities and scientific added-</td>
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value to enable it to achieve its objectives?

- To what extent are the proposed research methodology and working arrangements appropriate to achieve the goals of the project (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?
- To what extent does the proposal involve the development of novel methodology (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?
- To what extent are the proposed timescales and resources necessary and properly justified (based on the full Scientific Proposal)?

Where can I find more information?

- The ERC website
  https://erc.europa.eu/funding/starting-grants

- The ERC Guide for Starting Grant applicants

- The 2018 ERC Work Programme

- The EC participant portal FAQ page

- There will be an information session on Tuesday 31st July; prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to attend. For more information, and to register, please visit: https://www.ahssresearch.group.cam.ac.uk/ERCStg2018/

MH, 26/06/2018