

# UKRO Horizon 2020 Condensed

## ERC Pre-Award Factsheet

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### How do I apply for an ERC grant?

To apply for an ERC grant, you need to find the ERC call on the **Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal**. In the 'search funding and tenders' section, select "search funding and tenders", then select "Horizon 2020" under "Filter by Programme" and "European Research Council" from "Filter by Programme Part" from the dropdown menus on the left. To access the call documentation and the Submission Service you will need to click on the name of the grant. If the Principal Investigator (PI) does not already have an ECAS account set up on the portal, then they will need to create one before starting their proposal.

### What are the eligibility criteria for an ERC grant?

ERC grants operate on a 'bottom-up' basis with no predetermined research priorities. Applications can be made in any field of research, except nuclear energy (which is covered by Euratom). The ERC schemes are open to researchers of any nationality who reside in any country in the world at the time of application. The PI can either be already based at a host institution in an EU Member State or Associated Country (MS/AC), or be moving to a host institution in a MS/AC to take up their ERC grant. There are further eligibility criteria for the Starting and Consolidator Grants. For the Starting Grant call, the PI should have been awarded their PhD between 2-7 years prior to 1 January of the year of the call. For the Consolidator Grant call, the PI should have been awarded their PhD between 7-12 years prior to 1 January of the year of the call.

### What are the evaluation criteria for an ERC grant?

Excellence is the sole evaluation criterion for ERC grants. This is further divided into the excellence of the research project (its ground-breaking nature, ambition and feasibility) and the excellence of the PI (his/her intellectual capacity, creativity and commitment).

## Do I need to have European partners in my ERC grant?

It's not necessary to have European partners on an ERC grant. Indeed, Starting, Consolidator and Advanced ERC grants are all designed to be mono-beneficiary. ERC grants are focused on the PI and they can choose to work on their own or, if required by the project, work with 'team members' on the grant (such as professors, post-docs, PhD students or technicians), but these are subordinate to the PI rather than acting as co-investigators. Co-principle investigators are not permitted on the Starting, Consolidator and Advanced ERC grants.

## Can I include PhD students in my ERC grant?

Yes, if the project requires PhD students then they can be included as part of the PI's team. It is possible to include costs for tuition fees as well; tuition fees can be charged where they are considered as a foregone cost to the institution, provided all other conditions for cost eligibility are met. If a student works for a university or research institution on an FP7 or Horizon 2020 project and is exempt from paying tuition fees, these fees can be an eligible cost provided the student's contract specifically mentions the waived fee amount. The full salary, including the waived fee, must be recorded in the university's accounts.

In order to be eligible, information regarding the tuition fees will need to be publically available e.g. published on the university's website and the fee and stipend will need to be mentioned explicitly in the contract/agreement that the student signs with the university when they start their PhD. Tuition fees would then form part of the personnel costs and would be added to the stipend costs. It is recommended that the tuition fee is transferred from the project account directly to the university department collecting fees on the student's behalf. It is important that there is a clear audit trail for the payment. It may also be necessary to check with the local tax office that they accept that the stipend component is tax-free.

It is important to understand that the eligible cost is not the tuition fee in itself, but the waived amount included in the student's contract as part of their remuneration. Where the fee is waived for the student, it is considered that the institution is financing the fee which would have otherwise been the real cost to the student, had the institution not agreed to the payment on his or her behalf as part of the employment package.

Where a student is not working 100% on the project, only the respective share of the tuition fee can be charged to the project, in the same way the salary or stipend are only charged according to the percentage the student works on the project. Timesheets are necessary to demonstrate the student's time spent working on the grant.

## What specifically can I claim as part of the additional budget of an ERC grant?

Up until the ERC 2020 Work Programme, the additional budget could be requested for three reasons, however a fourth one has now been added. These are listed below:

- a) Eligible "start-up" costs for PIs moving to the MS/AC from outside of Europe as a consequence of receiving the ERC grant, and/or
- b) The purchase of major equipment, and/or
- c) Access to large facilities
- d) Other major experimental and field work costs, excluding personnel costs

There are no official definitions for "major equipment", "access to large facilities" or "major experimental and field work costs". However, it is up to the applicant to provide sufficient justification for requesting these additional costs, whilst bearing in mind the ERC's emphasis on feasibility.

## Where can I find previously funded grants?

The [\*\*ERC website\*\*](#) has a very useful tool to search for previously funded ERC projects. It allows individuals to filter by type of scheme, year, panel and country.

## Where can I find a list of panel members?

The ERC publishes [\*\*the list of panel chairs\*\*](#) on its website before the call deadline. The list of panel members is only published after the results of the call. However, there are two sets of panel members who alternate every other year. As such, applicants can get a sense of which evaluators may be involved in their panel by looking at the panel members from the call which ran two years prior to the call which they are applying for. For example, if an applicant is planning to apply to the 2020 call, they may wish to look at the panel members from the 2018 call. Although there are likely to be some changes, the majority of panellists are expected to be the same for both calls.

## I have been on leave due to maternity, paternity or long-term illness - can I extend my eligibility window for the call? (Starting and Consolidator Grants only)

It is possible to use maternity, paternity and long-term illness (of the PI or the PI's close family member - child, spouse, parent or sibling) to extend the eligibility window. Maternity extension is a flat 18 months per child, or more if documents show more than 18 months was taken. The paternity extension equates to the amount of documented leave taken. Long-term illness must be over 90 days with the same illness, but those 90 days do not have to be continuous. The PI will need to have documentation of the periods of absence from an official authority (e.g. their employer, health insurance company). Each document will need to clearly indicate the exact duration per period of illness. Part-time sick leave is acceptable as long as the official documentation includes the exact dates and percentage of leave taken. The PI will not need to submit medical evidence although they can submit this, should they so wish.

## I have a medical doctor degree - am I eligible to apply for ERC funding?

The ERC recognises some other doctoral titles as equivalent to a PhD degree. However, a medical doctor degree by itself will not be accepted as equivalent to a PhD. The applicant with the MD would need to demonstrate "proof of an appointment that requires doctoral equivalency", such as a post-doctoral fellowship or professorship appointment and any other information on their research experience, including peer reviewed publications. For these cases, the eligibility window is extended by two years (i.e. for Starting grant applicants, the eligibility window is 4 – 9 years after the award of the medical degree; for Consolidator grant applicants, the eligibility window is 9 – 14 years after the award of the medical degree). Up to 4 years of extension can also be claimed for time spent in clinical training. More information on ERC policy on PhD and equivalent doctoral degrees can be found in Annex 2 of the ERC Work Programme.

## I have both an MD degree and a PhD degree - how do I calculate my eligibility?

If an applicant has been awarded both a medical doctor degree and a PhD, then the applicant should use the date of the earliest degree which would make them eligible to apply, to calculate their eligibility. For example, if the applicant held a position requiring doctoral equivalency before they were awarded their PhD, then the MD is the degree that should be used to calculate their eligibility. If the earliest degree that makes the applicant eligible is the MD, then their eligibility window is 4–9 years after the award of the MD. If the earliest degree that makes the applicant eligible is the PhD, then their eligibility window is 2–7 years after the award of the PhD.

## How do I know if my CV is competitive enough for the ERC?

The ERC Work Programme includes a profile of a successful PI, but the track record is only an indication of the type of person who would be successful. The ERC does not take a 'one size fits all' approach but rather prefers to assess applicants on a 'like for like' basis. What constitutes a competitive candidate very much depends on the applicant's research area and their relative stage of career. It may help the applicant to compare their CV to the CVs of funded ERC PIs (whose projects are listed on the ERC website) to see whether their track record is competitive.