PREPARING FOR AN ERC CONSOLIDATOR APPLICATION

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MRC- LABORATORY OF MOLECULAR CELL BIOLOGY

WHO AM I?

- BSc in Biological Science - Northern Illinois University - 1994-1999
- PhD in Molecular Virology - Medical College of Wisconsin - 2000-2005
- Postdoctoral Associate - ETH Zurich, Switzerland - 2006-2010
- Oberassistent/Group Leader - ETH Zurich, Switzerland - 2011-2014
- Reader - MRC-LMCB UCL, London - 2014-Present

WHY I APPLIED FOR THE ERC

- Consolidator is for researchers between 7 and 12 years post PhD
  - I was 9 years post PhD
    - If you score a B or C you have to wait to reapply (2 years max)
    - So I would have a second chance in worse case
- I just started my lab
  - Transition looked good
    - Fresh environment, tools, and collaborators
    - I wanted secure funding staggered with MRC funding

WHY I APPLIED FOR THE ERC

- It's a significant amount of money for a good amount of time
  - Up to 2 million € for 5 years
    - 2 postdocs and 1 PhD
    - Portion of your salary
    - Large consumable budget
- Option Equipment Request
  - Up to 750,000 €
    - Large equipment
    - Specialized for research needs

SOUNDS GREAT!..BUT

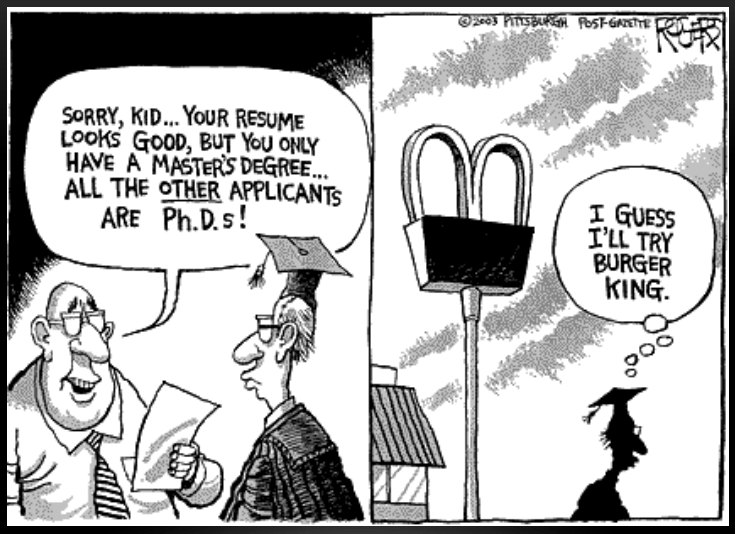
WHAT YOU SHOULD BE AWARE OF

- **Takes a long time to prepare!!!**
  - 2 stage application process (application and interview)
  - 2 grants must be submitted simultaneously
  - The ERC loves paperwork (ERC office at UCL is fantastic)
- Very Competitive!!
  - Round 1 - 80% cut rate
  - Round 2 – Interview and 50% cut rate
  - Final success rate of ~ 9%

WHAT YOU SHOULD BE AWARE OF

- What they are looking for
  - #1 Research excellence
  - Researchers consolidating their own independent research team
  - Demonstration of ground breaking nature, ambition and feasibility of their scientific proposal
- Principal Investigator must have already shown research independence
- Several important publications without their PhD supervisor
- Demonstrate a promising track record of early achievements appropriate to their research field and career stage:
  - Significant publications in major international multidisciplinary journals
  - Or leading international peer-reviewed journals of their respective field
  - A record of invited presentations in well-established international conferences, granted patents, awards, prizes etc.

HOW I FELT AFTER READING THAT



MY QUALIFICATIONS

- **2 postdoc fellowships (Roche and EMBO)**
- **1 transition grant (Swiss SNF Ambizione)**
- **Number of Publications at the time (30) (~1,200 citations)**
  - Papers, Reviews, Commentaries etc..
- **Publications as Postdoc (12)**
  - Science, PNAS, Cell Reports, Annual Reviews, NCB
- **Publications as Group Leader (18)**
  - EMBO Journal, Nano Letters, Cell Reports, Cell Host and Microbe
- **Invited to over 35 international meetings**
- **1 patent**

SO YOU'VE DECIDED YOU WANT TO APPLY
PREPARING THE GRANT:

- **Takes a long time to prepare!!**
  - Start Early
  - You need budget approval through UCL..this is a long process
  - You need that for the UCL commitment letter
  - Get in contact with UCL ERC office ASAP!!

  - There is no 'defined' style… only a page limit
    - Part 1: 5 pages (with references)
    - Part 2: 15 pages (with budget table and references)

PREPARING THE GRANT:
5 PAGE

- **This is meant to be for the board (maybe non-specialists)**
  - Big picture:
    - What we know, what we don't, why you should care
  - State your AIMs clearly
  - Why your proposal is state of the art
  - Why your lab is the best lab to do this
- Describe each AIM
  - Rational, Objectives and Methods, Outcome and perspectives
  - Risk assessment- balance between high-risk/reward and established reliable laboratory bread and butter science
  - No data needed – used Illustrations and models

TIPS!! TRACK RECORD AND CV

- **Don't be modest**
  - Tell them exactly why your research is great
    - Highlight papers
    - Ground breaking findings
    - internationally known
    - Why you're the perfect PI for this grant
    - Why your proposal is state of the art
    - Why your lab is the best lab to do this
- CV
  - Add any comments on paper
  - Citation numbers
  - Talks (highlight keynotes, or special invites)

PREPARING THE GRANT: 15 PAGE

- **Only read if your go to round 2**
- **This is meant to be for specialists in your field**
  - There are 6 reviewers
  - Detailed background
  - Expound on why your proposal is state of the art, new strategies, new technologies
- **Describe each AIM**
  - Use Aims and Sub Aims
  - Add real data -- published and unpublished!!
  - Detailed Methods
  - Expected results and future directions

TIPS AND TRICKS

- Get several successful example grants from colleagues
- Make sure you have a clear path (1 major important question)
  - Bounce off published work (but have a good spin)
  - Make Aims related but stand alone
    - If 1 fails the others don't !!
    - Success or failure should tell you something

CONGRATULATIONS YOU MADE IT THROUGH ROUND 1!

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW!!

- You have to prepare a 10 min talk
  - Exactly 10 minutes
  - They will cut you off!!
- Prepare for ~15-20 minutes of questions
  - 12 people on the panel
  - Some will know your field
- The talk- no time for details
  - General intro, central question
  - What is known, what is not (hypotheses)
  - Methods/expertise
  - AIMS
  - Expected outcomes

TIP

- **Give several practice interviews**





- **But Remember..Your The Expert!**

THE INTERVIEW DAY

- **Arrive at the ERC building…2 hours early….**
  - **Fill out forms and get a badge**
  - **Upload your talk**
  - **Sit in waiting room with other candidates**
    - **People are pacing**
    - **Talking to themselves**
    - **Praying**

- **Then they call your name**
  - You take the elevator to your interview
  - But its not the interview..its another waiting room..your own waiting room

IN THE ROOM

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IN THE ROOM

- **The head of the committee will greet you**
  - **And say Ok, you have 10 minutes..please present**
  - **Give your 10 minutes (no one will interrupt or ask questions)**
- **Questions:**
  - **Largely from the outside experts who have read the long grant**
  - **Some from Panel..may be random (non-expert)..or in the long grant**
- **Tips:**
  - **Read your grant again!**
  - **Think of gaps …obvious questions..mock interviews help**

AND MOST IMPORTANT

- 'Tis a lesson you should heed, If at first you don't succeed,Try, try again (T.H Palmer)