What makes a strong European Research Council application?

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An ERC application is about:

- The Principal Investigator
- The research

"Scientific excellence is the sole criterion on the basis of which ERC frontier research grants are awarded"
- ERC Work Programme 2016

What makes a strong PI

- High quality publications as main author (without PhD supervisor)
  - "Achievements going beyond the state of the art"
  - "Ground-breaking research"
- Other esteem measures (F1000, prizes etc)
- Track record of grant funding
- Appropriate background to do the research

Sections of an ERC grant application

- Section A – administrative forms
- Section B1
  - CV (2 pages)
  - Funding ID (list of current grants / applications)
  - Track record (2 pages)
  - Extended synopsis (5 pages)
- Section B2
  - Scientific proposal (15 pages)

What to include in PI CV (and funding ID)

- There is a template CV (can be modified)
- Concise summary of facts (education, research history, teaching and supervision etc)
- Use CV to explain career breaks (e.g. maternity), unconventional career paths etc
- Funding ID is a list of current grants and applications

Early achievement track record: hints & tips (1)

- ***Publications** (10 for CoG) in **major international peer-reviewed multi-disciplinary scientific journals** and/or in the **leading international peer-reviewed journals**…*
    - Website link (UCL IRIS profile) – full list of publications
    - Highlight those without the presence of your PhD supervisor (should be several)
    - Include number of citations, excluding self-citations (and source)
    - Any other esteem measures (H-index etc)
    - Explain how your role, and the publication, was important (if unclear)

- ***Patents; invited presentations** at peer-reviewed international conferences; **prizes / awards / memberships**…*
    - Be specific (year, value, type of talk etc)
    - Explain significance of any that a generalist evaluator may not understand

Early achievement track record: hints & tips (2)

- Be bold, pack the track record with evidence
- Explain anything specific to the UK
- Can you provide evidence of international influence?
- Consider a written synopsis; bring the facts together
- Refer to evaluation criteria

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What type of research makes a competitive application to the ERC?

- Applications can be made in any field of research

- "Frontier" research grants – emphasis on:
  - Ground-breaking
    - Opening new avenues / opportunities in your research field
  - Interdisciplinary
  - Pioneering/innovative:
    - New and emerging fields of research
    - Unconventional, novel approaches and scientific inventions
  - High risk / high reward
    - But still feasible!

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Writing a strong Extended Synopsis (B1)

Reminder: Step 1 (B1) evaluators = more general expertise; Step 2 (B1/B2) evaluators = international expert review

- Not a shortened version of B2
- Pack it with fireworks: convince (generalist) evaluator that your research is ground-breaking…
- Show how your research is important and exciting
- Outline objectives and scientific approach
  - Demonstrate feasibility
  - Major methodological detail in B2

Writing a strong Scientific Proposal (B2)

- Make it interesting to read (it's 15 pages) – highlight boxes, figures etc.
- Balance vision with structured goals and work plan (Gantt chart)
- Explain roles of team members (and PI – justify time commitment)
- Justify resources very clearly and link back to research / methodology

- Successful examples are available

Some final general advice/tips…

- Refer back to evaluation criteria
- Use the ERC jargon (UKRO tip!)
- It is a lot of writing – do not rush it at the end
- Involve ERIO and RCO as early as possible
- Get input from colleagues/peers

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Evaluation criteria: Principal Investigator
(from ERC Work Programme 2016)

- *To what extent has the PI demonstrated the **ability** to propose and conduct **ground-breaking research**?*

- *To what extent does the PI provide evidence of **creative independent thinking**?*

- *To what extent have the achievements of the PI typically gone **beyond the state of the art**?*

- *To what extent does the PI demonstrate the level of commitment to the project necessary… CoG 40% min – (assessed in B2)*

Evaluation criteria for research project (1)

Ground-breaking nature and potential impact:
- *To what extent does the proposed research address **important challenges**?*
- *To what extent are the objectives **ambitious** and **beyond the state of the art** (e.g. **novel concepts and approaches** or **development across disciplines**)?*
- *To what extent is the proposed research **high risk/high gain**?*

Evaluation criteria for project (2)

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