

# The European Research Council

## Revision of ERC panel structure for the 2021/2022 calls

Rationale and main changes

May 2020



# Background I/II: Main principles in setup of ERC panel structure



European Research Council  
Established by the European Commission

Innovative panel structure reflects overriding principles of ERC evaluation policy:

- **Coherence:**
  - ERC covers all fields of sciences
  - Vision of science as transcending domains and disciplines ('whole science approach')
- **Forward-looking:**
  - Focus on frontier research and excellence only
  - Pursue new and emerging areas of research
  - Instigate transformative changes in research landscape
  - Signal openness to changes in paradigm
- **Evolving nature of disciplines, critical role of interdisciplinarity:**
  - Low number of panels  $\Rightarrow$  wide breadth of viewpoints within panels
  - Panels to be interpreted in flexible and inclusive manner (e.g. cross-panel proposals)

# Background II/II:

## Function of panel structure: provide guidance to applicants



European Research Council

Established by the European Commission

- Not meant to be a complete scientific classification
- Panel titles, subtitles, descriptors do not reflect priorities
- Any topic is welcome, regardless of whether it is explicitly listed
- Proposals can fall in between two or more panels
- The evaluation of each individual proposal will be adapted accordingly
- Panel structure is revised regularly
  - scientific reasons
  - practical reasons, e.g. number and distribution of proposals

# Rationale for revision



European Research Council  
Established by the European Commission

- **Scientific needs:**

- Modernise to reflect scientific reality better
- Integrate parts of science that were so far only implicitly covered
- Encourage applicants who may not have felt “at home” so far
- Ensure coherence of each panel

- **Practical needs:**

- Rebalance panel size for fairness and feasibility of evaluation process

# Approach taken for revision



European Research Council  
Established by the European Commission

## Revision followed the same principles across domains:

- Balance between modernization and continuity
- Any change must make sense for all calls
- Maximise clarity for applicants (in case of overlaps, clarify scientific context)
- Limit number of new panels to the absolute necessary
- Ensure all panels are well integrated and coherent

# Changes per domain: Life Sciences



European Research Council  
Established by the European Commission

- Ensures continuity with the former panels' titles, sub-titles and descriptors
- Contours of panels redefined, descriptors enriched
  - To address the multidisciplinary aspect of the domain and the continuum between its different areas of expertise, with translational work often seamlessly emerging from basic studies
  - To address trend of low number of applications in some panels whilst others are oversubscribed
- Address all biologists, medical researchers and environmental life scientists

# Changes per domain: Physical Sciences and Engineering



European Research Council  
Established by the European Commission

- Subtitles and descriptors of most panels updated and modernised
- Introduction of one additional panel
  - in view of high number of proposals submitted to domain
  - to balance proposals between panels better
- PE11 will cover Materials Engineering – advanced materials development: performance enhancement, modelling, large-scale preparation, modification, tailoring, optimisation, novel & combined use of materials etc.
- PE5 – the conceptualisation & synthesis of all types of materials
- PE8 – advanced processing of materials towards specific industrial applications e.g. aerospace, transport, energy, biomedical etc.

# Changes per domain

## Social Sciences and Humanities



European Research Council  
Established by the European Commission

- Subtitles and descriptors of most panels updated and modernised
- Introduction of one additional panel to address
  - the increase in applications and imbalance between panels
  - the risk that some panels break up in “subpanels”
- SH7 will cover Human Mobility, Environment and Space
  - e.g. sustainability science, environment, geography, planning (currently SH2)
  - e.g. demography, health (currently SH3)
- SH2 – political science, international relations, law
- SH3 – sociology, social psychology, social anthropology, education sciences, communication studies



# Impact for applicants



European Research Council  
Established by the European Commission

- New panel structure applicable as of Starting Grant 2021
- Overriding aim is to tap into full potential of applicants in all areas of science
- Proactive communication effort by ERC Scientific Council and Agency
- Publication of full revised panel structure well ahead of time (exceptionally)
- Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with the changes
- No change in evaluation process linked to this revision