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Press release

ERC at ESOF 2016: New report reveals impact of ERC research

26 July 2016

An independent pilot study, released today at the Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF) currently taking place in Manchester, demonstrates that bottom-up research funded by the European Research Council (ERC) has already had major impacts. Over 70% of projects evaluated in the report have made scientific breakthroughs or major advances. The study concludes that the ERC invests in truly high-risk/high-gain research and that it also contributes significantly to the economy and society at large. The ERC grants have a very positive effect on researchers' careers, the report states.

In this independent qualitative evaluation commissioned by the ERC Scientific Council, high-level peer reviewers analysed the first 199 concluded Starting and Advanced grant projects and found that the overall impact is very high. More than 70% of the projects have already made **scientific breakthroughs or major advances**¹, whilst about 25% of the projects evaluated have made contributions that are incremental. Just 4% had no appreciable scientific output. One of the main findings is therefore that the ERC funds **high-risk/high-gain** projects, in line with the ambition of its Scientific Council. The analysis also highlights that a large share of projects are interdisciplinary, also in accordance with the ERC's mission.

The study, moreover, found that the impact is not purely scientific. This curiosity-driven research, completely free of any thematic constraints, also **benefits the economy and society at large**: close to 50% of projects already had some apparent impact in this respect and another nearly 10% had a major impact to date. As it often takes time for the results to emerge, it is not surprising that the experts also estimate that at least three quarters of the research outputs are expected to have an impact on the economy or on society in the medium or long term.

Other findings of the report include that the ERC grants have a very positive effect on the **careers of the grantees** and they also strongly contribute to the consolidation of research teams.

ERC President Professor Jean-Pierre Bourguignon commented: *"Just nine years after the ERC's launch, this pilot study shows that betting on ambitious high-risk/high-gain frontier research, by means of peer review, truly pays off. This is crucial for Europe, especially as, not only the scientific impact, but also the economic and societal benefits are clearly major. I find the outcome of this ex-post study, the first commissioned by the ERC, very instructive and hope future exercises of this kind deliver as positive results."*

Read the study ["Qualitative Evaluation of ERC Completed Projects"](#)

¹ Around 21% led to a scientific breakthrough and some 50% to a major scientific advance.



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The qualitative analysis of the projects was carried out by 25 evaluation panels consisting of three high-level scientists each; two with experience as ERC panel member and one without any previous experience on an ERC panel.

This report comes in parallel with the announcement of a record budget of €1.8 billion for research grants as announced yesterday in the new [ERC Work Programme](#) for 2017. Today, the first 2017 ERC grant competition opens: the Starting Grant call for proposals makes €605 million available for early-career researchers. The other competitions will open according to the Work Programme 2017 calendar.

Background

The European Research Council, set up by the European Union in 2007, is the first European funding organisation for excellent frontier research. It offers three core grant schemes: Starting, Consolidator and Advanced. Every year, it selects and funds ambitious and creative researchers of any nationality and age, to run projects based in Europe. The ERC also strives to attract top researchers from anywhere in the world to come to Europe. To date, the ERC has funded some 6,500 top researchers at various stages of their careers.

The ERC is led by an independent governing body, the Scientific Council, chaired by the ERC President Professor Jean-Pierre Bourguignon. The ERC has a budget of over €13 billion for the years 2014 to 2020 and is part of the EU research and innovation programme, Horizon 2020, for which European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science Carlos Moedas is responsible.

The ERC takes part in ESOF, Europe's largest general science event that discusses the latest science advances, from 24 July to 27 July 2016 in Manchester, the United Kingdom. It is the occasion for the ERC, represented by President Jean-Pierre Bourguignon and ERC Scientific Council member Dame Athene Donald, to announce the report. Over 40 ERC grantees take part in the gathering, many of which speak in the nine ERC sessions there. See the full ERC programme and speakers in this [brochure](#).

For more information

[ERC at ESOF 2016 brochure](#)

[ERC Work Programme 2017](#)

[ERC website](#)

[ESOF website](#)

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