

Scientific Council of the European Research Council

Meeting of 24-25 January 2006

Press Statement

The Scientific Council is aware that its appointment, the start of the process of building the ERC, has generated considerable enthusiasm and expectations in the scientific community. These positive developments are crucial for the future success of the ERC, and must be safeguarded by maintaining momentum. Having elected its leadership (President and Vice-Presidents), the Scientific Council has initiated, at its meeting of 24-25 January, an intensive programme of work to prepare for a rapid start up of the ERC, pending conclusion of the political negotiations which is expected around the end of this year. Topics addressed at this meeting included the ERC's scientific strategy, the coherent operation of the ERC as a whole and the related matter of identifying a well-qualified Secretary-General.

The ERC's scientific strategy incorporates the fundamental requirements that the research funding must be science-driven, investigator-initiated and meets the central objective of boosting European excellence in frontier research. It is widely recognised that many parts of Europe offer inadequate opportunities for researchers to achieve independence and adequate support at an early stage as research leaders in their own right. In view of this gap and the consequent difficulty in retaining and attracting to Europe top research talent for the next generation, the Council has decided that a first funding stream should be focused on establishing and supporting excellent early stage independent investigators. A second funding stream should be devoted to broader support for excellent and innovative frontier research projects of individual teams, led by investigators at all subsequent career stages.

The Council is mindful of the ERC's mission to promote excellence in all fields of fundamental research, as well as the importance of cross-fertilisation of ideas and techniques at the interfaces between research areas, which can be particularly fruitful in times of rapid change. Therefore, strategy development by the Council will include early consideration of appropriate application procedures and peer review evaluation methods aiming to allow consistent, high quality assessment of proposals not only across all research fields but also where proposals bridge traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Further, to maximise the added-value of the ERC as a new European research funding body, the Council will ensure that the ERC's funding activities are open to the widest possible competition across Europe. Its programmes will benefit from successful experiences gained at a variety of national, European or international programmes, such as the Marie-Curie advanced training schemes, and will aim to be complementary to such programmes. The Council also intends that its funding programmes develop a recognisable, distinctive and successful profile that will make desirable their persistence beyond the initial 7-year period.

Following the agreement at its first meeting to appoint a Secretary General, the Council has decided that the most suitable candidate will be identified through an open search procedure, in good time to prepare the ERC's operations. The person occupying this prestigious position must have exceptional qualities as a respected scientist with substantial experience in basic research funding at the highest level and ideally in all fields, who has the authority, successful track record and breadth of vision to develop and manage a major European initiative, and who is able to command peer respect at the international level.

The ERC must operate as an integrated entity in which the Scientific Council and the implementing structure work closely together in an ongoing dialogue to ensure that the strategy established by the Council is properly and efficiently delivered. The Council has agreed on the organisational arrangements necessary to achieve this coherence, including the establishment of a 5-person Management Board bringing together the leadership of the Scientific Council, the Secretary General and the Director of the implementing agency.