

Research RTD, 7th EC Framework Programme 2007-2013: specific programme "Ideas", frontier research

2005/0186(CNS) - 18/07/2008 - Follow-up document

The European Commission has presented a report concerning the European Research Council operations and realisation of the objectives set out in the Specific Programme "Ideas" in 2007. The European Research Council (ERC) is an ambitious new component of the European Union's research policy. It has been established under the provisions of the Seventh Framework Programme, and is the means for implementation of the Specific Programme "Ideas", with a budget of EUR 7.51 billion over the period 2007-2013. Consisting of an independent Scientific Council supported by a dedicated implementation structure and operating according to the principles of scientific excellence, autonomy, efficiency, transparency and accountability, the ERC's mission is to promote the very best research at the frontiers of knowledge across all areas of science and scholarship, through competition at European level between individual research teams.

The Commission can report that the main institutional building blocks of the ERC have been successfully established during 2007 in accordance with the timeframe envisaged, and the programme has been implemented according to the principles set out in the Specific Programme "Ideas". There has been a strong and effective collaboration between the Scientific Council and the ERC-DIS in implementing the "Ideas" Programme and progressing towards setting up the ERCEA as an autonomous, independent entity.

The ERC Starting Grant call was published on 22 December 2006 with a deadline of 25 April 2007, and indicative budget of EUR 290 million. The ERC-DIS implemented the ERC peer review system, including the appointment of the panel members, as defined by the Scientific Council. The overwhelming response to the Starting Grant call imposed enormous demands on the ERC's operations at a very early and potentially vulnerable stage, testing the peer review process, imposing a very high workload on the administration and panels and posing serious logistical challenges.

The ERC-DIS and other DG RTD support services (particularly the IT infrastructure: Electronic Proposal Submission Service and Evaluation Support Service) nevertheless coped remarkably well, and allowed the peer review to be conducted according to the original schedule and to high quality standards, as judged by the panels themselves and confirmed by the relatively low percentage of cases upheld at redress.

Structures, mechanisms and governance will continue to evolve during 2008, presenting a dynamic and challenging environment for the ERC as it continues on its trajectory towards administrative autonomy. A further Decision of the Commission, on the delegation of tasks to the Executive Agency, will be presented by DG Research in early 2008. During 2008, as progress is made towards the formal establishment and commissioning of the ERCEA, the current tasks of Directorate S will be transferred to the Agency and further staff will be recruited. Directorate S will be dissolved as soon as the ERCEA is ready to take its place as the ERC-DIS.

Also during 2008, the Commission will present to the European Parliament and the Council a Communication on the methodology and terms of reference of the review to be carried out by independent experts by 2010 concerning the ERC's structures and mechanisms, against the criteria of scientific excellence, autonomy, efficiency and transparency and which will explicitly look at the advantages and disadvantages of a structure based on an Executive Agency, against an alternative structure based on Article 171 of the Treaty.

Communication is, and will continue to be, a core challenge - to assure a high reputation and positive image of the ERC in and outside of Europe. From 2008 onwards, ERC-funded frontier research projects will be starting and the ERC will showcase successful Principal Investigators and projects, which will serve as benchmarks and case studies of European research excellence, raising awareness and the aspirations of potential applicants.