

H2020 Work Programme 2014-15:
Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation
Call: WIDESPREAD 2-2014: ERA Chairs
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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IMPORTANT NOTICE This document is the result of a compilation of questions received by potential applications prior the deadline and answers provided by the European Commission. Its intention is to help potential applicants. It does not however replace the call text. This document is a working document being revised on a regular basis.

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1-General questions:

1.1. Why does the Commission launch “ERA Chairs” under Horizon 2020?

Despite serious efforts deployed at national and European level, the Union sees significant internal disparities in terms of research and innovation performance. Together with teaming and twinning, “ERA Chairs” are part of a set of measures tackling this research/innovation divide¹. Issues such as the availability of research funding, institutional rigidities and access to resources hamper the mobility of outstanding researchers to promising institutions in low performing regions. ERA Chairs

¹http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/fp7_monitoring_reports/fifth_fp7_monitoring_report.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none

actions will create the appropriate conditions and opportunities for high quality researchers and research managers to move and engage with willing institutions to improve the excellence of their research and thereby modify their research and innovation landscape.

1.2. What are "ERA Chairs"?

"ERA Chairs" are positions established within universities or other eligible research institutions, with currently low levels of participation in the Framework Programme and with a demonstrated potential and concrete plan for research excellence, that are open to outstanding researcher and research managers. The Commission will provide support to selected universities/research institutions for appointing the ERA chairs holder and his/her research team. This will allow these institutions to develop, in a particular field, the level of excellence required to successfully compete internationally and effectively widen participation.

1.3. Which is the budget of the action and how will this be implemented through Horizon 2020?

A total of 3 calls are foreseen during H2020 with a total budget of EUR 240 million. The provisional call deadlines are in 2014, 2017 and 2019 with indicative budgets of respectively EUR 34 million; EUR 100 million and EUR 110 million. This corresponds roughly to the creation of 100 ERA Chairs during the course of Horizon 2020.

1.4. Are "ERA Chairs" the only measure to reduce the research/innovation divide under Horizon 2020?

"ERA Chairs" are part of a set of measures tackling the research/innovation divide. For instance, the EU supports various forms of collaboration and partnerships between universities and research organisations from R&I low performing countries and more advanced partners, including via Teaming and Twinning actions (see calls WIDESPREAD 1-2014: Teaming and WIDESPREAD 3-2014: Twinning), hereby favouring the reduction of the innovation gap.

1.5. Are synergies foreseen between research excellence (Horizon 2020) and capacity building (Regional Policy Funding)?

Spreading excellence and widening participation requires both investment in research and innovation capacities (such as research facilities) and attracting scientific quality (outstanding researchers). Concentration of resources through European Structural Investment Funds and Horizon 2020 is actively encouraged in the Multi Annual Financial Framework 2014-2020.

EU Cohesion policy is already supporting projects around Europe to promote research and innovation - and to reverse the so called brain drain. In the next funding period of 2014-2020 the European Structural and Investment Funds will be much more focused on fewer priorities. Innovation and research is one of those thematic areas where investment will be mainly directed.

1.6. What is the difference between ERA Chairs, ERC grants and Marie-Curie Fellowships?

One strategic difference is that ERA Chairs will, in close cooperation with their host institutions, address the institutional structural weaknesses by the execution of an adequate set of measures to integrate the European Research Area and achieve research excellence.

In the case of ERC grants they are restricted to frontier research for which the sole criterion of selection is scientific excellence, thus the action is aimed to those already excellent while the ERA Chairs support universities and research organisations to develop their potential for excellence.

The ERA Chairs also differs from the Marie Curie individual fellowships and grants as these are geared towards the career development of individual researchers, while the ERA Chairs target both institutions and researchers to build competitive research capacity.

1.7. Are “ERA Chairs” another EU mobility scheme?

The “ERA Chairs” need to be fully integrated into the institutional structure. Mobility may be a way to recruit the ERA Chair, without mobility being the final objective of the measure.

2- Questions related with the Call

2.1. Which institutions are eligible to apply under the pilot call?

This is a mono-beneficiary action. To apply for an ERA Chair, one single university or research organisation must be a legal entity located in one of the regions detailed in part " Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation" of Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2014-2015 ² which focuses in particular on new Member States. All 13 new Member States are eligible together with Luxembourg and Portugal based on a composite research indicator³ which identifies countries with a deficit in innovation and research.

2.2. Which research themes are eligible?

Proposals from all areas of scientific and technological research as defined in the Horizon 2020 Work Programme are welcome. There are no pre-defined priority areas. However, regions cannot do everything in science, technology and innovation. According to the 'smart specialisation' strategy, a key

² http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/doc/call/h2020/common/1587865-15.spreading-excellence-wp2014-2015_en.pdf

³The detailed scores of the composite indicator can be found in p. 5 (Excellence in S&T 2010) of the "Research and Innovation Performance in EU Member States and Associated Countries 2013" at http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/state-of-the-union/2012/innovation_union_progress_at_country_level_2013.pdf

element of the Europe 2020 Strategy⁴, Member States and regions should promote what should make their knowledge base unique and superior⁵.

2.3. What is requested from institutions applying for an ERA Chair?

Research organisations interested in appointing an ERA Chair will have to commit to introduce measures and activities to facilitate the structural change and put in place the conditions needed to develop excellent research and to fully benefit from the ERA Chair. Such measures should be in line with the Smart specialization strategies for the country/region so that synergies between cohesion and research funding are strengthened. The research organisations must also demonstrate their commitment to implement ERA principles set out in the ERA Communication, such as open and merit based recruitment, gender equality, open access, external peer assessment.

2.4. When is going to be the 1st call?

The first call is open since 11 December 2013 and the deadline for submission of proposals is 15 October 2014. The total budget is EUR 33.6 million and the EU maximum contribution is of EUR 2,5 million for up to 5 years per project. This should allow for funding 14-15 ERA Chair projects

2.5. What is the indicative timetable for the WIDESPREAD 2-2014: ERA Chairs call?

Find it here for your information:

Publication of the call	11 December 2013
Opening of the electronic submission system to potential applicants	1 April 2014
Deadline for submission of proposals	15 October 2014
Evaluation of proposals for the ERA Chair Institution	December 2014
Signature of first grant agreements	March 2015

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_fr.htm

⁵ Foray, D., P.A. David, B.H. Hall. 2011. From academic idea to political instrument, the surprising career of a concept and the difficulties involved in its implementation, November 2011 issue of the Management of Technology and Entrepreneurship Institute College of Management of Technology, Lausanne, Switzerland. 16p

3-Questions concerning the ERA Chair holder

3.1. What is the profile of an ERA Chair?

Prospective Chairs should typically have achieved world-recognised scientific excellence in previous research. Furthermore, they need to have demonstrated leadership and experience of managing research teams.

ERA Chairs should be established and/or leading researchers i.e. fulfil the criteria of a level R3 or R4, according to the profiles of the European Framework for Research Careers⁶:

- R3 is an established researcher conducting research independently with a reputation based on excellence in their field. S/he should be able to take the lead in executing collaborative research projects in cooperation with colleagues and project partners forming research consortia and secure funding and resources for their team and projects.

- R4 is a leading researcher in their research area or field. S/he is the team leader of a research group or head of an industry R&D laboratory, able to create an innovative and creative environment for research. S/he should be an expert at managing and leading research projects with a proven record in securing significant research funding and resources for their team and projects.

3.2. Do ERA Chair holders need to be European?

No, the ERA Chair holders can be of any nationality and indeed may come from the country in which the research organization or university is located.

3.3. Can ERA Chairs also be holders of ERC grants?

Yes, there is no incompatibility with ERC grants.

3.4. How much time must the ERA Chair devote to the research work?

The ERA Chair holder **shall** be appointed to a full-time position. Therefore, the Chair must devote her/himself full time to activities connected to the ERA Chair work at the institution.

3.5. How will the “ERA Chairs” be selected?

⁶http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/Towards_a_European_Framework_for_Research_Careers_final.pdf

The Commission will evaluate proposals with the help of independent experts, in agreement with Horizon 2020 rules and sign a Grant Agreement with successful institutions. Once the grant agreement is signed, the ERA Chairs institutions will start the implementation of the project, publish the vacancy and will appoint the ERA Chair following an open and merit-based recruitment process. The European Commission will carefully monitor how the recruitment process is carried out.

3.6. Does the organisation or university have to employ the ERA Chair?

Yes, it is a requirement that the organisation or university employs, through an employment contract or equivalent, the ERA Chair. The Chair should have a position within the organisation/university, professor or similar, that will allow her/him to freely apply for regional, national, European or international funding, in order to develop and raise the level of research excellence of both the team and the organisation/university as well as to successfully compete at international level.

3.7. Does the organisation/university have to continue to employ the ERA Chair once the contract ends?

No, there is no requirement in the contract between the European Commission and the organisation/university to employ the ERA Chair beyond the lifetime of the grant. However, beneficiaries are strongly encouraged to exploit synergies with other sources of funding in order to ensure the sustainability of the institutional change process that has been initiated by the ERA Chairs grant.

4-Specific questions on eligibility

4.1. What will be the Maximum EU contribution to my proposal?

The EU contribution for the WIDESPREAD 2-2014: ERA Chairs call is limited to EUR 2.5 million and may reach a maximum of 90% of the total eligible costs. This is an eligibility condition.

4.2. What entities are eligible to submit a proposal for the WIDESPREAD 2-2014: ERA Chairs Call?

Entities would be eligible to submit a proposal for this call provided that they fulfil the following conditions:

- It is a University or other research organisation⁷.
- The applicant organisation where the ERA Chair holder will be hosted is established in an eligible Member State or Associated Country. Eligible Member States are Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Institutions from Associated Countries are invited to consult their countries specific association agreements to Horizon 2020 to verify their

⁷ “research organisation” means a non-profit making organisation which carries out scientific or technical research as its main objective

eligibility.

5- Questions related with the preparation of proposals

5.1. Is the SWOT analysis mandatory?

Yes, the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) of the applicant's legal entity is mandatory information within the proposal. A special format is not required but information to be given here should be concrete and detailed.

The applicant's SWOT and Action Plan should be included in the part B of the proposal and should be written in the same language as the rest of the proposal.

5.2. What is expected to be included in the Action plan?

An action plan providing the policy structure of research potential increase of the applicant and the coherent set of measures to be implemented (as indicated in the Work Programme) should be also clearly described in the proposal. The action plan should include measures which involve additional entities (Regional/national authorities, businesses, civil society organisations, etc.) therefore it should be discussed with and agreed by the representatives of all stakeholders. It is highly required that the applicant explains the activities to be undertaken with each one of the stakeholders including duration, impact, costs.

The proposers should clearly explain if they received in the past or if they will receive in the near future funds from the regional policy of the EU to improve their research capacity and how this will complement the funding requested.

There is no need to describe the research work to be undertaken by the researchers to be hired for the ERA Chair team. However, the proposal should explain how the ERA Chair and his/her team, as a whole is expected to contribute to the applicant's research potential increase. Funding of research work is not eligible under this call.

5.3. What are ERA priorities?

ERA priorities⁸ are open and transparent merit based recruitments, gender balance, peer review, and structured innovative doctoral training. Proposals should describe measures to foster compliance with these priorities including the European Charter for Researchers & Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers⁹,

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/era-communication_en.pdf

⁹ European Commission Recommendation to the Member States C(2005)576 [final](#)

5.3. Are links to local stakeholders mandatory?

No, but they will represent a plus for the proposal. The same holds for contacts and interactions with businesses and other local or regional entities which might contribute to the development of Smart Specialisation strategies.

5.4. What if the institution has already an excellent candidate in the area where it expects to develop the scientific activity of the ERA Chair?

No pre-selection of candidates will be tolerated. ERA Chairs holders can only be appointed by successful Universities and/or research organizations following an open and transparent recruitment procedure. Also to be noted that the involvement of potential candidates into the preparation of proposals represents a conflict of interests. The European Commission will closely monitor the recruitment process to ensure these requirements have been fulfilled.

6-Financial issues

6.1. How can the funding be used?

The EU contribution under the ERA Chair grant will be dedicated to salaries of ERA Chairs and his/her team and costs related with the implementation of the workplan. Any research infrastructure or other direct research funding should be provided from other sources, for example, cohesion funding.

Equipment costs are eligible but the objective of the action is to reinforce the research potential of high quality research entities established in the eligible regions through the implementation of the action plan. Therefore, one can expect that durable equipment items needs are limited. The evaluators should find in the proposal information to evaluate the effectiveness of the equipment the applicant plans to purchase for the purpose of improving its research capacity and potential.

The Chair will have the freedom to use part of the grant to hire a research team, including recruitment costs, and pay for the required travel, training activities, meetings, workshops, working visits by foreign experts and collaborators, conference attendance, publication and patenting costs and a contribution to overheads.

As regard to the ERA Chair team – researchers' number, their experience and the duration of contracts should be adapted to the proposer's needs. Nevertheless, provide general information on the selection procedures and type of contract that will be offered to the researchers working for the project. The costs eligible for this action are related to the recruited experienced researchers' salaries. The expenses related to the hiring procedure may be taken into account provided that the appropriate explanation is given.

Eligible costs are salaries, research equipment, conferences and workshops (rental of place to hold the event, travel and accommodation expenses of participants, invited speakers, managers, conference fees) etc...