



# European Association of Geochemistry

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## WELCOME TO OUR NEW COUNCILLORS



Karim Benzerara,  
UMPC, France



Ruben Kretzschmar,  
ETH Zürich,  
Switzerland

Following the EAG Council elections last fall, newly elected councillors Karim Benzerara and Ruben Kretzschmar joined the Council in January 2014. We are thrilled to have two outstanding and energetic scientists come on board, as the growth of our society is only possible through the active participation and accomplishment of our Council and committee members. On

that note, we would like to thank departing councillors Andrea Koschinsky and Anders Meibom for their valuable time and dedication during their three-year term.

## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES – THE EAG ON THE ERC



With a 75% increase in budget over the last funding round, the European Research Council (ERC) appears to be a clear winner in Horizon 2020, the European Union's funding programme for 2014–2020. ERC grants have proved popular with researchers, judging by the number of applications, because they provide a high level of funding through a relatively short proposal and are implemented with comparatively little red

tape. Here we examine the various ERC schemes and look at how they will change in Horizon 2020.

Since its inception in 2007, the ERC has given out €7.5 billion through the funding of 4000 individual research grants, split between the domains of physical sciences & engineering, life sciences, and social sciences & humanities. This money has funded approximately 7000 PhD students and 9000 post-docs Europe-wide over the last 7 years. This is a significant amount of funds that suddenly appeared on the landscape. Rather than developing out of a pre-existing strategy, the ERC was brought into existence as a way of stimulating innovative groundbreaking research in Europe. In contrast to many other types of EU or national funding schemes, ERC grants have no predetermined priorities and are assessed purely on merit. The guide for reviewers makes clear that proposals should be addressing challenges that are beyond the state of the art, and a recurrent catchphrase in ERC literature is high risk / high gain. ERC funding is evidently aimed at inspiring a more adventurous level of research that would not necessarily be funded by the more conservative national funding agencies. ERC grants also stand out in comparison to other EU funding strategies in that they are not increasingly tied to wider initiatives and to industrial collaboration.

Applicants for ERC grants can be of any nationality, although the research must be conducted at a host institution in an EU or associated member state over a period of up to 5 years. There are three main types of grants aimed at different career stages, each with one submission deadline per year. Starting Grants can be up to €1.5 million and are for researchers who completed their PhD between 2 and 7 years earlier. The deadline in 2014 is near the end of March. Consolidator Grants can normally be up to €2 million and are for researchers who finished their PhD between 7 and 12 years earlier. The deadline in 2014 is in May. Advanced Grants are usually for applicants who are scientifically independent and have



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a recent research track record and profile which identifies them as leaders in their respective field(s) of research. Advanced Grants have no age restriction and can be up to €2.5 million. Significant additional “start-up” funds can also be requested within all 3 grant types when the researcher originates from outside the EU.

In Horizon 2020 it will be mandatory for all publications arising from ERC grants to be open access either through the publisher or through an open access repository 6 months after publication.

Proposals are evaluated by 25 panels, which cover different subject areas. In the first review round, the panel evaluates the proposal based on the researcher's track record and a 5-page synopsis of the project. Successful projects enter a second round where the full proposal, which includes a 15-page research project, is sent out for external review. The overall success rate has varied between 9 and 14% in recent years. For the geosciences, the most relevant panel is PE10, Earth System Science, although PE9, Universe Sciences, which includes planetary science, may be also relevant. To date approximately 3% of funded Starter Grants were from PE10, with a slightly higher proportion for funded Advanced Grants. This means that if you order the panels in terms of how many grants they have funded, the Earth science panel is near the bottom of the list. It would be interesting to track down why this is so; are Earth science reviewers harsher than those in other fields?

**Daniel Frost** (University of Bayreuth)

Note: While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of information, all facts, figures, and dates should be checked at the relevant EU portal website, which is currently [http://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/ERC\\_Work\\_Programme\\_2014.pdf](http://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/ERC_Work_Programme_2014.pdf).



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