

**UK best practice in supporting
potential ERC applicants:
example of strategy at
Imperial College London**

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Overview of Imperial

- Founded 1907
- 14,700 full-time students
- Students from 126 countries
- 7,000 staff
- Mission statement: 'Imperial College London embodies and delivers **world-class scholarship, education and research in science, engineering, medicine and business**, with particular regard to their application in industry, commerce and healthcare. We foster **multidisciplinary working** internally and **collaborate widely externally**'
- In FP7 we were the **3rd most successful HEI overall** in winning funding and **10th most successful HEI** in winning ERC funding - we won **67 ERC grants: 37 Starting and Consolidator, 27 Advanced and 3 Synergy**

Imperial's internal structure

- Imperial is organised into three Faculties:
 - Faculty of Engineering
 - Faculty of Medicine
 - Faculty of Natural Sciencesplus The Business School (post-graduate students only)
- Each Faculty manages its own teaching and research activities and provides a range of service functions to its academics:
 - Research Services**
 - Teaching support
 - Human Resources
 - Finance
 - Safety support

Imperial's Research Office

Imperial has specialised **central** functions including the College **Research Office**

- Formulates research funding policies for good governance, best practice and maximising research income
- Provides expert advice on research management and contracting
- Leads assurance activities and institutional audits
- Supports and develops systems to underpin the management of research

It has five functional areas:

- Operations and Assurance
- Systems and Information
- **Europe**
- Contracts
- Intellectual Property

Role of the Research Office EU Team in H2020

- Interpret EU policy, provide details of the implications for the College and make recommendations for College strategy
- To disseminate information on H2020
- To act as the source of specialist advice for Imperial on all contractual aspects of H2020
- To manage Grant Agreement preparations and negotiate Consortium Agreements
- Work closely with all academic staff and Faculty Research Services teams (responsible for administrative and financial matters, including costing of proposals) to support H2020 funding
- We **focus on** projects where Imperial is the Co-ordinator, **ERC applications** and MSC actions

How we raise awareness of the ERC schemes

- Each **Faculty** has a **Research Committee** composed of Heads of Departments and Departmental Research Directors – we ensure they are **briefed on each ERC scheme well before each call** so they can start talking to suitable candidates
- Imperial's Research Office EU Team holds **annual information events** for each ERC call for all prospective College applicants – applicants are encouraged to attend first several years before they intend to submit
- **We meet prospective applicants individually** to discuss their personal profile, project idea and when best to apply to maximise their chance of success
- Prospective applicants **discuss their wish to apply with their HoD**
- Each HoD sends a list of applicants s/he will support to their Faculty management for **discussion at the Faculty Research Committee**
- A final **list of approved applicants** is circulated to the Research Office EU Team and Faculty Research Services Teams

How we raise awareness of the ERC schemes 2

- Imperial is committed to promoting equality and eliminating all forms of discrimination (e.g., age, **gender**, race, religious belief, sexual orientation, trans staff)
- Imperial is one of only four UK universities to hold a prestigious **Silver institutional award from Athena SWAN**, a UK national scheme to recognise good practice in recruiting, retaining and promoting women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine in higher education
- We have a **range of activities to help women at Imperial** e.g., Academic Gender Strategy Committee, Faculty Ambassadors for Women and Female Academics Development Centre
- We thus do not specifically encourage women to apply to the ERC as we already have a strong equal opportunities culture across College
- **13 of our StG/CoG** holders are women and **1 AdG** holder is female

Help for Imperial ERC applicants

- We offer to **meet all approved candidates** to discuss their proposal
- We provide approved candidates with **detailed Notes** on how to prepare each section of the application
- The Research Office EU Team offers to **read and to comment on successive drafts** of the proposal to advise on **how best to sell the PI and his/her ideas to the ERC**
- In parallel, the PI's departmental peers **comment on the scientific aspects** of the draft proposal
- N.B. Successful ERC candidates are usually those who leave sufficient time for us all to comment on several versions of the draft proposal
- Faculty Research Services teams work out the **budgets**, complete the budget tables and check all details on the Part A **Administrative Forms**
- Faculty management prepares the **Commitment of the Host Institution** statement of support

Help for Imperial ERC applicants after Step 1 evaluation

- We meet all applicants who have reached **Step 2 evaluation** to brief them on the **experiences of previous Imperial candidates at interview** and **how best to prepare**
- We hold a **mock panel interview** exactly to the format and timings of the particular panel to which they have applied
- The mock panel comprises the applicant's **HoD** and **senior departmental academics, ERC StG/CoG holders** and staff from the **Research Office EU Team**
- The mock panel gives the applicant **detailed constructive criticism**
- If necessary, we **repeat** the panel interview
- We **discuss the ESR with candidates unsuccessful at Step 1**- do they need to improve their personal profile and/or the project?

Debriefing after the interview

- We **meet candidates after their ERC interview** to discuss the questions they were asked and their impressions of the experience
- We **discuss the ESRs** of unsuccessful applicants with them in order to identify any weaknesses to be addressed in a re-submission
- N.B. **Do not give up if you are unsuccessful at the first attempt!** Imperial has ERC StG holders who were successful at the second or even third attempt