# The European Research Council

ERC and DORA principles –

commitment and implementation

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# The European Research Council – key features

*The ERC awards long-term grants to researchers of any nationality and age, from anywhere in the world, who wish to carry out their research projects in a host institution based in Europe. Scientific excellence is the sole evaluation criterion.*

## Scientific Governance

- Independent Scientific Council (22 members); full authority over funding strategy
- Dedicated ERC Executive Agency

## Scientific Freedom

- Support to individual scientists (no consortia)
- No predetermined subjects (bottom-up)
- All fields of science and humanities
- International peer-review
- Portability of grants

# San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)

What is DORA?

- Set of recommendations addressed to funders, research institutions, publishers, metrics providers, and researchers

- Developed by a group of journal editors and publishers at a meeting of the American Society for Cell Biology in San Francisco in 2012

- Aim: improve the ways in which the output of scientific research is evaluated

- Headline principle:

> *"Do not use journal-based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, to assess an individual scientist's contributions, or in hiring, promotion, or funding decisions."*

# DORA recommendations to funders

*"Be explicit about the criteria used in evaluating the scientific productivity of grant applicants and clearly highlight, especially for early-stage investigators, that the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published."*

*"For the purposes of research assessment, consider the value and impact of all research outputs (including datasets and software) in addition to research publications, and consider a broad range of impact measures including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice."*

# ERC's commitment - timeline

- 2012: First discussions of DORA; declaration endorsed by then President Nowotny and several Council members

- 2019: Intense discussions on alignment between ERC evaluation processes and DORA

  ➢ *Scrutiny of documentation and processes: Work Programme text, Information for Applicants, Peer Review Guide, Panel briefings, etc.*

  ➢ *Conclusion: ERC's approach broadly in line with DORA principles*

- Late 2020: Scientific Council decision to endorse DORA

- July 2021: Formal endorsement announced concurrent with publication of the Work Programme 2022

  ➢ *Several changes in the WP text related to the PI's track record for further alignment*

# Adherence to highest standards of research assessment

- Evaluation process carefully designed to avoid biases e.g. related to gender, age, nationality, institution of the PI
  - ➤ Unconscious bias and gender issues carefully addressed in panel briefings
  - ➤ Different schemes for different career stages
  - ➤ Host institution not evaluated
- Career breaks and unconventional research career paths taken into account
- Evaluations monitored to guarantee transparency, fairness and impartiality

# Updated guidance on track record for applicants (WP 2022)

- Journal Impact Factor no longer accepted among the field relevant bibliometric indicators that may be included with the publications track record

- Clarification that applicants are free to include any scientific achievements they deem relevant to their research field and project (no closed list)

- Explicit mention that PIs can provide a short narrative describing the scientific importance of the research outputs and their role in them

- Already in earlier WPs: Number of publications and preprints that can be listed limited to ten (five for Starting Grant applicants)

  ➢ *These items directly address DORA recommendations to funders*

# Beyond DORA – ongoing reflections

- Regular discussions with panel chairs on challenges related to DORA implementation and how to tackle them – and moving beyond

- ERC takes active role in debates related to research assessment at European level

- Involved in the drafting of an 'Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment' (process initiated by European Commission) as 'core group' member

- Dedicated 'Task Force on Research Assessment' of the Scientific Council set up to reflect on whether further adjustments to ERC evaluations needed

# References

- About DORA: https://sfdora.org/about-dora/

- ERC page in the DORA resource library:
  https://sfdora.org/resource/european-research-council-erc/

- ERC Work Programme 2022: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2022/wp_horizon-erc-2022_en.pdf

- Process towards an agreement on reforming research assessment
  https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/process-towards-agreement-reforming-research-assessment-2022-jan-18_en

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