



30 March 2006

Dr William Cannell  
ERC Council  
SDME 1/32 European Commission  
Brussels

Dear Dr Cannell

The European Plant Science Organisation is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the development of the science strategy and operational mechanisms of the ERC. As you know, as a founding member of the ISE, we have been keen supporters of the ERC from the beginning.

The EPSO Board understand the need to focus the currently limited budget in order to have a major impact while respecting the fundamental requirement of scientific excellence. An initial focus on early stage young investigators was widely supported. A clear definition of this is required for applicants- for example that used by EMBO for its YI Programme may be appropriate. It was felt that specific efforts may need to be made to encourage young scientists contemplating returning to Europe and those working in new and candidate member states to apply. It was not clear if FSU nations are eligible for ERC funding.

Funding levels for successful individuals must be transformative and not just supportive. For example a budget to support up to two posts, consumables, small equipment, infrastructure and reasonable overheads for 3-5 years is needed to boost career development effectively. An opportunity for renewal would also be welcome.

The Netherlands (NWO) VENI, VIDI, VICI programme also has some attractive elements that could be considered as a model (as well as a catchy name). VENI within 3 years after their PhD: €200.000 for 3 years; VIDI within 8 years after their PhD: €600.000 over 5 years; VICI for starting young professors within 15 years after their PhD: €1.250.000 for 5 years.

Finally it may be a good idea to encourage "multidisciplinary approaches" in applications. This is an effective way of maintaining high standards while applying a filter for the many high quality proposals that are anticipated. The HFSP does this effectively and it really encourages scientists to break new territory.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mike Bevan'.

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