

Expanding resources for researchers at all career stages - Funding decisions in 2017 discovery research calls

Over 400 researchers and research projects won more than HUF 11.5 billion (EUR 37.7 million) in funding in this year's calls aimed at promoting discovery research announced by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office. In 2017 the NRDI Office announced its annual discovery research calls with an increased budget, introducing new funding schemes that are better adapted to researchers' different career stages. This year 40% of the funds were awarded to researchers under 40 years of age.

In the domestic funding system for discovery research the NRDI Office not only provides funding to the broader community of researchers through researcher initiated thematic calls and postdoctoral calls but also contributes to the competitiveness of cutting-edge research projects with targeted excellence programmes.

The system of calls provides funding opportunities for postdoctors just starting their researcher careers (PD_17), young researchers launching their own research projects or research groups (FK_17), and more experienced researchers (K_17) in the area of discovery research. This year the portfolio of calls was expanded with a new call aimed at promoting the international visibility of the achievements of excellent domestic researchers engaged in discovery research (KH_17). The total budget available for discovery research projects has been increased to HUF 12 billion (EUR 39.2 million) this year from HUF 8.8 billion (EUR 28.8 million) in 2016.

The Call for researcher initiated thematic applications (K_17), designed to strengthen researchers' creativity and effectiveness in any field of science, contributed to the launch of 197 new projects with a total of HUF 6.5 billion (EUR 21.3 million) in funding. The Postdoctoral excellence funding programme (PD_17) provided a total of HUF 1.5 billion (EUR 4.9 million) in fellowship grant for a period of three years to 99 young scientists with a postdoctoral degree to start their researcher career. In the framework of the call for thematic applications specifically targeted at young researchers (FK_17), introduced this year, researchers under 40 years old have the opportunity to launch altogether 108 new projects with a total funding of HUF 3 billion (EUR 9.8 million). Of domestic research groups whose excellent results had the most significant international impact 27 met the rigorous eligibility criteria and won altogether HUF 500 million (EUR 1,6 million) in the new funding programme aimed at promoting the international visibility of domestic scientific achievements.

Project proposals were assessed by anonymous experts against the criteria indicated in the calls, with the involvement of expert panels and specialised scientific colleges.

The number of proposals submitted by researchers under 40 years of age exceeded expectations by two fold in the framework of the call announced for the first time this year (FK_17) to help young researchers create their own research group and start independent projects.

The call for researcher-initiated thematic applications (K_17) had a total budget of HUF 6.5 billion (EUR 21,3 million), whereas the FK_17 call announced for young researchers (under 40) had an increased budget of HUF 3 billion (EUR 9.8 million).

Based on the number of grants received in the call for researcher-initiated thematic applications, the call for young researchers and the postdoctoral programme, the top performer is the Eötvös Loránd University with 53 funded projects benefitting from a total of HUF 1.3 billion (EUR 4,3 million). Universities garnering more than HUF 1 billion (EUR 3.3 million) in funding further included the University of Debrecen and the University of Szeged with 41 and 34 funded projects, respectively. The ranking of the institutes of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences is topped by the Research Centre for Natural Sciences with 31 funded projects and a total funding of HUF 0.9 billion (EUR 2.9 million), followed by the Institute of Experimental Medicine (11 projects, HUF 454 million funding) and the Wigner Research Centre for Physics (18 projects, HUF 443 million funding).

The international visibility of scientific results is gaining importance worldwide. It is measured by innovation scoreboards, university rankings and the citation index of scientific publications. By announcing the new excellence programme titled "Funding for research groups with significant achievements having an international impact" (KH_17), having a total budget of HUF 1 billion (EUR 3.3 million), the NRDI Office incentivises domestic research groups to achieve new results which greatly advance their field of science and lay the groundwork for further research, and to present them in the most visible international scientific forums.

The KH_17 was designed to provide funding to 50 eligible research groups but only 30 applicants entered the competition and only 27 of them met the strict requirement to have an internationally significant publication achieving a citation index that belong to the top 5% of their scientific field within two years following publication. This call was also dominated by the Eötvös Loránd University with 7 funded projects. The ranking by scientific field is led by physics and neuroscience with 4-4 funded projects.

Last year the total available funding under the K_16 and PD_16 calls was HUF 8.8 billion (EUR 28,8 million) which provided funding to 219 research projects and 118 postdoctors.

At an open forum in February 2017 the President of the NRDI Office summarised the lessons drawn from the assessment process of discovery research calls with the aim of preparing next year's call, helping applicants to get prepared and improving the assessment process.

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