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## UCL research: European Research Council 10 years of the ERC + 30 grants for UCL = €39 million

On 21 March, the **European Research Council (ERC)** celebrates its tenth anniversary. UCL can celebrate, too, because its researchers just landed **UCL's 30th ERC grant** – that's €39 million for research over ten years. **'Getting an ERC grant means you can take risks...and strive for a world first.'**

### Exactly what is the ERC?

It's a council that **provides financial assistance for European research in science and technology**. It selects the **best European researchers** to receive grants for research projects. Grant amounts are significant, making it possible to acquire cutting edge equipment, for example, or to put together an expert and even international team.

### Where does UCL come in?

UCL has **3,000 researchers** invested in more than **2,500 projects** for a total of **€225 million/year** (ERC grants amount to 4% of UCL's research budget). UCL researchers have received **30 ERC grants**, including the latest, an 'Advanced Grant' awarded to Godefroid de Callatay:

- **19 Starting Grants**, intended for early career researchers, **2 to 7 years since PhD completion**
  - o Ingrid Van Keilegom, Michel Crucifix, Pierre Sonveaux, François-Xavier Standaert, Tom Dedeurwaerdere, Jean-François Collet, Pierre-Emmanuel Caprace, Bruno Rossion, Tom Claeys, Patrice Cani, André Mouraux, Olivier Collignon, Claude Duhr, Patrick Meyfroidt, Laura Merla, Aude Simar, Virginie Van Ingelgom, Xavier Dumay, Sophie Opfergelt;
- **3 Consolidator Grants**, intended for mid-career researchers, **7 to 12 years since PhD completion**
  - o Sophie Lucas, François-Xavier Standaert, Philippe Chatelain;
- **7 Advanced Grants**, intended established researchers, with **12 years of post-PhD research experience**
  - o André Berger, Ingrid Van Keilegom, François Maniquet, Véronique Dehant, Yves Dufrière, Jean-François Remacle, Godefroid de Callatay;
- **1 Proof of Concept (POC) Grant** – for Patrice Cani – which funds **exploratory research** or provides funding to transition from laboratory to human testing.

These grants have fuelled **important research** and even allowed certain researchers to make **major advances in their field and thus cultivate their international reputations**. Testimonials:

**Patrice Cani**, a WELBIO researcher at UCL's Louvain Drug Research Institute, obtained **two ERC grants: one Starting Grant and one POC for a total of €1.7 million**. These grants 'allowed me to buy cutting edge equipment unique in Belgium and to quadruple my team members (from 4 to 16 researchers). Such a sum also allowed me to work on scientifically high-risk topics (that is, departing from assumptions that can seem utopian). When it works, the payoff is huge! Today, our lab can conduct both animal and human experiments.' He and his research team have since used the Akkermansia bacterium to **prevent the development of obesity and type 2 diabetes** in mice.

**Pierre Sonveaux**, a researcher at UCL's Institute of Experimental and Clinical Research, obtained a **Starting Grant worth €1.7 million**. He and his team successfully **blocked the progression of human tumour models in mice**. They tested and validated a family of pharmaceutical components that can prevent tumour metastasis. 'Simply put, the ERC grant allowed me to create my own lab. Since then, most of the researchers I've hired have been international. An ERC grant is also high-risk/high-gain – it lets you take risks to test very original ideas. And when it works, it brings unprecedented results! With other funding sources, you almost have to show in advance that your experiment will succeed.'

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