



Therefore, in this illustration, a network of **200** researchers being supported over a **five-year** period would be eligible to receive a fixed amount of **€17.5 million** (plus any bonus for doctoral students).

Payments regime

The grant will be disbursed in annual instalments on the basis of results (i.e. progressive advancement towards durable integration), with an additional check that costs greater than the value of the grant were incurred in implementing the JPA. The consortium will have to submit an annual report outlining the previous year's activities, accompanied by relevant financial documents.

The proposal procedure

Proposals for NoE can be submitted in response to 'calls for proposals' which will be published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* and in various other media, such as the Europa and CORDIS websites (see later). Invitations to submit expressions of interest may be used to help focus the calls and assist in the consortium-building process.

Proposals themselves will be simplified, in particular to reflect the evolutionary nature of networks.

The evaluation procedure

Proposals will be evaluated using a peer-review system, strengthened to reflect the more complex goals of NoE. This may involve the use of a two-stage submission process, remote assessment prior to panel meetings and hearings of applicants by the evaluation panel.

Key issues to be addressed during the evaluation of NoE include:

- relevance to the objectives of the specific programme;
- scale of ambition and potential impact;
- excellence of the participants;
- degree of integration and the JPA; and
- quality of the organisation and management of the network.



Flexibility and autonomy in the implementation of NoE

'Flexibility' and 'autonomy' will be key elements in the implementation of NoE, as reflected in:

- The detailed **JPA** covering the coming 18 months, which will roll forward annually.
- The **allocation of the Community grant**, where the partnership will have freedom to distribute it between partners and between activities.
- The **possibility for changing the network partnership**; either the network may itself decide to take in new participants (though *without* additional funding), or the Commission may decide to launch calls to add participants (*with* additional funding) to ongoing networks.

Governance and monitoring

A network's governance must ensure institutional engagement by the partner organisations through, for example, a 'governing board' of senior representatives from the partnership. The Commission will also ensure a robust monitoring of outputs through annual reviews and an end-of-term review, involving high-level independent experts at all stages.

Other practical information

Regularly updated information on networks of excellence and other FP6 instruments can be found by consulting the detailed 'working documents' which can be downloaded at the following website:
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/fp6/networks-ip.html>

A *Guide for Applicants* is available for prospective FP6 participants.

For a broad range of information about FP6 and ERA consult the following websites:

Europa: http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/fp6/index_en.html
CORDIS: <http://www.cordis.lu/ist/home.html>

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EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Community Research

KI-46-02-484-EN-D

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Networks of Excellence

Addressing
the fragmentation of
European research



Sixth Framework Programme 2002-2006

FP6 – A defining moment for European research

The primary mission of the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) is to help realise the European Research Area (ERA), which is, in turn, a central component of the endeavour launched in March 2000 at the European Council in Lisbon to turn Europe into the world’s most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy.

New instruments for FP6

One of the key features of FP6 is the introduction of more effective instruments, notably:

- Integrated projects (IP), and
- Networks of excellence (NoE).

These ‘new’ instruments are characterised by their capacity to mobilise the critical mass of expertise needed to achieve ambitious objectives. They are also characterised by the structuring and integrating effects that they will have on the fabric of European research.

Instruments available for implementing the FP6 priority thematic areas	
New Instruments	Traditional Instruments
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integrated projects (IP)• Networks of excellence (NoE)• Article 169*	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specific targeted research projects• Co-ordination actions• Specific support actions

*Strictly speaking, this is not a new instrument, but it has taken on new importance in FP6.

The purpose of this leaflet is to present the main features of the networks of excellence.

What is the objective of NoE?

The networks of excellence instrument is designed to **strengthen excellence** on a particular research topic by networking together the **critical mass** of resources and expertise needed to provide European leadership and be a world force on that topic. This expertise will be networked around a **joint programme of activities (JPA)** aimed primarily at creating a **durable integration** of the research capacities of the network participants while, at the same time, advancing knowledge on the topic.

*A network of excellence is, therefore, an instrument for strengthening excellence by **tackling the fragmentation** of European research, where the main deliverable should be a **durable structuring and shaping** of the way that research is carried out in the topic of the network.*

What is a joint programme of activities (JPA)?

The JPA contains a range of ‘additional’ activities carried out within a **coherent management framework**:

Integrating activities

Integrating activities aim at structuring and shaping the way the participants carry out research in the topic:

- co-ordinated programming and ‘mutual adaptation’ of the partners’ activities;
- sharing research facilities, tools and platforms;
- joint management of the knowledge portfolio;
- schemes for increasing staff mobility and exchanges (including perhaps the relocation of equipment and even whole teams); and
- using reinforced and shared information and communication systems.

Jointly executed research

Through a programme of jointly-executed research to support the network’s goals, networks of excellence can:

- develop new research tools and platforms for common use; and
- generate ‘new knowledge’ to extend the collective knowledge portfolio.

Activities for spreading excellence

An essential mission of each NoE is to spread excellence beyond its boundaries through activities such as:

- joint programmes for training of researchers and other key staff to ensure the sustainability of Europe’s excellence in the topic;
- communication campaigns for disseminating results (and raising public awareness of science); and
- networking activities for encouraging knowledge transfer and innovation.

What is the scale of critical mass?

The concept of critical mass is relevant in the following areas:

• **Expertise**
Each NoE must assemble whatever critical mass of expertise is needed to achieve its ambitious goals. This will vary from topic to topic, and larger networks may involve several hundred researchers.

• **Partnership**
Networks need at least three participants from three different Member or Associated States, of which at least two are Member States or Associated candidate countries. In practice, however, the Commission would expect at least six participants per network.

• **Duration**
Networks would typically last five years, but can be up to seven years if needed to create durable integration.

Financial regime

Community support will be targeted at overcoming the barriers to durable integration, which are mainly organisational, cultural and human, and cannot be quantified in usual accounting terms. This has led to the concept of an incentive in the form of a fixed ‘grant for integration’, which takes into account the expected degree of integration in the network, the number of researchers proposed for integration by all participants, the characteristics of the field of research concerned, and the JPA.

Each call for proposals will contain a reference table converting the number of researchers into the annual average grant to be allocated to the network. A ‘researcher’ means research staff with a doctoral degree or at least four years of research experience. A supplementary bonus scheme for doctoral students engaged in research activities related to the network will also be introduced.

Illustrative calculation of the grant	
The average annual grant to a network could vary with the number of researchers as follows:	
50 researchers	€1 million/year
100 researchers	€2 million/year
150 researchers	€3 million/year
250 researchers	€4 million/year
500 researchers	€5 million/year
1 000 researchers and above	€6 million/year