



## EUROCORES Programme

# Consciousness in a Natural and Cultural Context (CNCC)

## *Call for Outline Proposals*

### What is EUROCORES?

The EUROCORES (ESF Collaborative Research) Scheme provides a framework for national research funding organisations (research councils, academies, ministries and other funding organisations) to fund multinational and multidisciplinary collaborative research projects, in and across all scientific areas. Participating funding agencies publish a joint Call for Proposals for a specific research programme, define the type of proposals to be submitted and agree on the common peer review procedure to be followed. ESF provides support for the networking of funded scientists and dissemination activities, while the funding of the research itself stays with national research funding organisations. Further background information on the EUROCORES Scheme can be found at <http://www.esf.org/eurocores>

### Funding initiative for multidisciplinary consciousness research

Following agreement with funding agencies from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, the European Science Foundation (ESF) is launching a **Call for Outline Proposals for Collaborative Research Projects (CRPs)** to be undertaken under the EUROCORES Programme CNCC.

The objective of this new EUROCORES Programme CNCC is to form and fund robust international and multidisciplinary research teams that develop new avenues for consciousness research from a variety of perspectives.

CNCC will run for three to four years (2006/07-2009/10) and will combine national research funding and ESF support for networking and dissemination activities (EC FP6 Contract no. ERAS-CT-2003-980409).

**Outline Proposals are to be submitted by 15 September 2005.**  
**Full Proposals will be invited on 1 November 2005.**

For an overview over procedures and the documentation required see below; for complete instructions and national contact points, see <http://www.esf.org/cncc>

### Background and objectives

Until recently, many scientists considered consciousness to be an unsuitable topic for scientific research. Prompted by technological developments (brain imaging techniques etc.) as well as conceptual changes, this attitude has shifted. Scientific interest in consciousness has much expanded during the last decade. Currently, the explanation of consciousness is considered by many to be one of the major unsolved problems of modern science; for consciousness is a cultural as well as a natural phenomenon.

It has been observed that despite remarkable results some representatives of biomedical and neurosciences are beginning to acknowledge they have encountered a conceptual deadlock in the study of consciousness. Similarly, researchers in the humanities and social sciences (e.g. in philosophy, history, literary studies, sociology, anthropology, religious studies, artistic and musical studies) and in psychology have made significant contributions to the understanding of the development of consciousness over time – yet they are struggling with the same fundamental problem: for just as natural sciences treat consciousness as a natural phenomenon, humanities tend to treat it as purely cultural.

CNCC acknowledges, in its structure and objectives, that consciousness relates to both natural and cultural contexts, and that a proper account of the phenomena must include both. CNCC offers a framework for researchers from a wide range of relevant humanities and natural science disciplines to

build joint research projects, in order to foster top-quality consciousness research in Europe.

The leading idea behind CNCC is that despite the advances in the study of the brain in recent biomedical research, the study of consciousness is not solely a matter for the biomedical sciences. The conception of consciousness delivered by the humanities is part of our self-conception, and therefore part of our cultural endowment. This is why CNCC is founded on the conviction that philosophy, anthropology, history, literary, artistic, religious and cultural studies all can contribute – in addition to psychology and the neurosciences – to the understanding of the complexity of consciousness.

Given the wide variety of phenomena which go under the heading of consciousness – such as perception, emotion, attention, self-awareness, sensation, intentionality, dreaming, wakefulness – progress will depend on the integration of available scientific resources from a variety of theoretical and empirical disciplines and methods. For example, empirical-data can serve to challenge and validate theoretical analyses, while conceptual analysis can in certain cases provide directions and tools for the empirical scientists.

The overall aim of the EUROCORES Programme CNCC is to build a framework for creating links and strengthen exchange and cooperation between these different approaches and perspectives. CNCC aims to support the emergence of an integrated science of consciousness that develops prospects for the renewal of research through mutual interaction across disciplinary boundaries. Proposals are expected to initiate or strengthen collaborative efforts, within the humanities, and between the humanities and the social, natural, and biomedical sciences. Proposals combining such conceptual and empirical components with modeling efforts are welcome. A preference will be given to proposals that explicitly address the natural and cultural dimension of consciousness.

As an outcome of CNCC, the creation of a platform for European consciousness research could inspire and direct future scientific thinking about consciousness in settings such as (but not limited to) humanities, mental health, and social policy.

## Specific Research Areas

CNCC is problem-driven rather than discipline-driven. It concentrates on questions and topics in the study of consciousness that cannot be answered in a purely mono-disciplinary manner.

Teams of scholars will therefore propose Collaborative Research Projects (CRPs) within the broad framework of the programme. They will outline how the combination and dialogue of their various approaches will help to address complex and fundamental questions such as the following:

### **1. Conceptual and methodological challenges**

How do empirical and conceptual elements interact in the study of consciousness? If one of the truly characteristic (and challenging) features of consciousness is its subjective nature, how can it then be opened to inter-subjective validation? Will an in-depth understanding of consciousness require new first-person methods or are standard (third-person) scientific methods sufficient? Are the different aspects of consciousness (subjective experience, intentional control, self-consciousness, etc.) dissociable? Do they involve the same or different neural mechanisms? What is the relationship between the different concepts of consciousness that we find in different cultures and different scientific disciplines? Do they have the same meaning in different cultures? Do we need, in order to study the human phenomena of consciousness, to have a reflexive awareness of the history of the traditions of thought which have studied it?

### **2. Metaphysics and phenomenology of consciousness**

What are the most general features of consciousness and how do we best describe them? To what extent is the selection of such features culturally invariant? What is the relation between such descriptive and phenomenological accounts and more metaphysical and explanatory accounts of consciousness? Is it possible to reduce consciousness to its physical basis in the brain and body? Is consciousness a feature of the individual mind or need we also conceive it as something that can belong to larger collective units?

### **3. The sense of self**

What do words like “I” or “you” refer to? What is a self? Is it a social and cultural construct? Or is the sense of a persisting self an illusion? If something like a self exists, what role does it play in conscious life? Does it give unity to the stream of consciousness? How does it relate to the problems of free will, voluntary action and moral (and legal) responsibility? Can we ascribe selfhood to non-human creatures and complex artificial systems? When and how does the sense of self emerge in the development of the infant? To what extent do selfhood and the sense of self presuppose social cognition and interpersonal relations?

### **4. Consciousness and emotion**

In recent years, there has been a remarkable revival of interest in the emotions in a wide range of disciplines: psychology, neuroscience, philosophy and in the social sciences. Emotions are among the most intense and identifiable conscious states and episodes. What are the characteristic marks of moods and emotional experience? To what extent do they have an evolutionary explanation, and what is their neural basis? Do emotions interfere with rational thought or do they play a crucial function in achieving good long-term decisions? How can emotions be distinguished from their natural (bodily) expressions and cultural manifestations? In what ways are our experience and conception of emotions shaped by our cultural and historical affiliations and connections?

### **5. Norms and abnormalities in the study of consciousness**

Consciousness can be disturbed at many different levels. How can the study of pathological and other non-standard cases of conscious experience enrich our insight into the nature and functioning of consciousness? How are the disturbances at these different levels interrelated and how can they best be treated? Is the operationalist definition of abnormal mental phenomena in current diagnostic manuals the right way to characterize them? How do cultural traditions inform such definitions of abnormality? Why do different cultures prescribe and proscribe different types of conscious experiences? Is there a link between abnormal states of consciousness and creativity?

### **6. The phylogenetic, ontogenetic and historical development of consciousness**

In order to understand consciousness fully, we must necessarily also look at its temporal development, be it phylo-genetic, ontogenetic, or historical.

Does consciousness have any evolutionary relevance and if so, which? What are the evolutionary precursors to human consciousness? What forms of consciousness do we find in non-human animals? Cognitive psychology suggests that young infants might share certain innate features of consciousness with other complex adaptive and autonomous biological creatures. But how precisely do infants develop and obtain what might be the origin of an explicit human type of consciousness? How has our conception of consciousness developed across human history? What can knowledge of past cultures tell us about changes in conscious phenomena and in our conception of them?

### **7. Consciousness and language**

What is the relation between language and consciousness? Does the use of language essentially involve consciousness or is consciousness epiphenomenal in language-use? Do conscious mental states differ from non-conscious mental states by involving linguistically structured representations? What forms of consciousness are clearly language-dependent ones, and what forms can exist without language? What is the role of language in the development of an explicit human type of consciousness? To what extent do differences in languages modulate, facilitate, and extend the scope of the conscious mind?

### **8. Social dimensions of consciousness**

Consciousness is not merely individual and private; it also has a social dimension, and as such, it is a historical and cultural phenomenon. It cannot be divorced from its natural expressions and manifestations but many of these are culturally informed and differ from culture to culture. What is the role of social interaction? Do social cognition and maturation involve a theory of mind? Is this process of maturation culturally invariant? How do cultural factors influence the individual's conscious experience? How can a scientific

investigation of consciousness take these factors into account? In what ways can specific cultural products (e.g. literature, religion, music) contribute to the understanding of consciousness as a social phenomenon? To what extent, for example, have works of art and new media engendered new types of conscious experiences? How do the cultural history and the intellectual and scientific study of consciousness within the European tradition differ from that in other traditions?

## Networking

While not all projects have to include components outside the humanities disciplines, the networking activities -workshops, symposia, summer schools, conference panels, conferences - under CNCC are expected to address the need for sustained interdisciplinary dialogue.

## Programme Structure and Management

The funding period of CNCC is expected to start in autumn 2006 and will run for three to four years, depending on the rules and regulations of participating Funding Agencies.

The overall responsibility for the programme lies with the *Management Committee*, formed by one representative from each participating funding agency (normally: a senior science manager) and a representative from ESF.

The independent international *Review Panel* of leading scientists in the participating fields of research, appointed by ESF following suggestions from participating funding agencies, will be responsible for the project selection process and will monitor the scientific progress of the Programme. Membership of the Review Panel is public.

In the two stage selection process *Outline Proposals* will be screened for eligibility (criteria of the Call) by the Review Panel. Successful applicants will be invited in autumn 2005 to submit Full Proposals.

*Full proposals* will be internationally peer-reviewed. Referees will be selected by the ESF, principally using a pool of scientists whose

names are provided by the participating funding agencies and the Review Panel. A list of names of referees used in the international peer review will be published once the selection process is complete.

Based on these assessments, the *Review Panel will recommend and prioritise the best applications for funding* by the participating funding agencies of the selected applicants.

Funding of the proposals recommended will depend on the total amount of money made available in each country by the participating funding agencies.

The use of funds in a project will be subject to the rules and regulations of each participating funding agency as well as to the national laws of those countries.

Once CRPs are being funded, ESF will support networking and dissemination activities to facilitate cross-project communication of funded Collaborative Research Projects (CRPs), exchange of information and presentation and discussion of results. To this aim, *scientific workshops, summer schools, conference panels and conferences, web facilities, publications* and similar activities can be organised by the funded scientists. Such activities will be coordinated by a Programme Coordinator appointed by ESF and advised by the *Scientific Committee* (formed of CRP representatives), the Review Panel (RP) and the Management Committee (MC).

A Mid-Term or Interim Evaluation, conducted by the Review Panel, will assess the progress of the Programme, based on the progress of the funded CRPs. Here, the Review Panel has a steering function and can comment on the CRPs' workplan in relation to the overall Programme.

A final evaluation will assess the achievements of the Programme, based on the progress of the funded CRPs and on the use made of the networking activities to develop the Programme.

## Programme Terminology

**Collaborative Research Projects (CRPs)** are the international research activities which make up a EUROCORES programme. A CRP consists of a number of **Individual Projects (IPs)**, each led by a **Principal Investigator (PI)**. Associated Projects are also part of a CRP. Each CRP is represented by a Principal Investigator called **Project Leader (PL)**.

All Principal Investigators (PIs) will be responsible for complying with the requirements attached to awards granted by national funding agencies.

The Project Leader (PL) will submit the proposal and act as the principal contact for the CRP proposal, and for the duration of the funded CRP. The PL will represent the CRP, will steer its participation in programme activities, and for any ESF reporting requirements.

# Guidelines for proposals

Specific guidelines for outline (and later for full) proposals will be made available on <http://www.esf.org/cncc>

For general information on the EUROCORES Scheme see also: <http://www.esf.org/eurocores>

**Outline Proposals** for Collaborative Research Projects (CRPs) for the EUROCORES Programme CNCC are **to be submitted by 15 September 2005**.

Submission will be expected **online**.

Access to the **online form** can be found through <http://www.esf.org/cncc>. **Applicants must follow the outline proposal guidelines** on this website.

The online form will require data to be entered regarding the PL, PIs and associate partners, title, starting date, duration and keywords identifying the CRP, as well as an indication of the estimated overall budget.

An Outline Proposal must further comprise: concise description of aims, methodologies and originality of the envisaged CRP (for further instructions refer to the forms), listing

1. Short description of the CRP (max. 1.200 words, incl. overall aims, objectives, methodologies, experiments, fieldwork etc.).
2. Short description how the different partners contributing to the CRP will work together (incl. scientific project management)
3. Short CVs of PL, all PIs and associate partners (max. 1 page each, incl. 5 most relevant publications)
4. Estimated budget (consistent with the rules of relevant national funding agency) in the template provided.

**Each CRP** proposal must involve scientists or research groups applying to at least **three different funding agencies**, normally in three different countries. At every stage, such CRPs will be evaluated jointly.

Researchers with funding obtained or expected from funding agencies not participating in CNCC are eligible to apply as "**Associate Partners**" in a CRP, if they bring added value to a CRP. This applies to all ESF Member Organisations and other non-ESF funding bodies, such as Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities / Israel Science Foundation (**IASH/ISF**). Associate Partners can boost the strength of a CRP, but do not count towards the eligibility threshold (three agencies).

The Outline Proposals will first be examined by ESF and participating funding agencies for eligibility. They will then be sifted by the Review Panel according to the following criteria:

1. Suitability for the Call for Proposals
2. Originality and novelty of the proposal (no "repetitive" research)
3. Level of collaboration: prospects for the renewal of research through mutual interaction across disciplinary boundaries and internationality (incl. "European added value")
4. Feasibility
5. Qualification of the applicants.

**N.B.:** For **specific national eligibility criteria** and individual funding restrictions applied by participating funding agencies, please contact the national contact points.

The Review Panel does not, at this stage, comment in detail on the scientific quality of the proposal.

The Review Panel may, however, give recommendations concerning the further development of a proposal such as suggesting the mergers of proposals or the inclusion of existing teams as associate partners.

Successful applicants will be **invited on 1 November 2005 to submit Full Proposals (deadline 19 Dec. 2005)**.

**For Full Proposals**, access to the **online forms** will be found through <http://www.esf.org/cncc>. **Applicants must follow the guidelines** on the website.

Full Proposals must make a well-argued scientific case jointly for the whole CRP, comment on the scientific standing of the partners and explain the internal expected collaboration. The amounts requested by PIs from their national funding agency must be specified separately in the template provided.

A Full Proposal must include the state of the art, bibliography (max. 2 pages), overall aims, strategy and work plan (milestones), description of the envisaged collaboration (expertise, track record of the partners and their expected contributions; incl. project management), requested budget and information about past (publications) and present (other applications) fields of research.

Full proposals will be assessed through an international peer review managed by ESF. Referees will be selected by ESF, principally using a pool of scientists whose names are provided by the participating funding agencies and the Review Panel. A list of names of referees used in the international peer review will be published once the selection process is complete.

The assessment will be based on the following criteria:

- 1.** Scientific quality of the CRP and IP proposals
- 2.** Level of integration of the participating scientific disciplines within the CRP
- 3.** Qualification of the applicants (suitability for this CRP; international standing)
- 4.** Level of collaboration envisaged between the IPs in this CRP (incl. project management)
- 5.** Feasibility, incl. suitability of the methods / experiments selected
- 6.** Overlap with existing projects (or projects applied for)
- 7.** Suitability of resources (staff) and budget items ("value for money")

After receiving all referee reports, assessments will be made available to the applicants in an anonymised format; applicants will be given a opportunity for a "right to reply", that will be taken into account by the Review Panel.

Depending on the rules of the participating national agencies, funds applied for under CNCC can include salaries for scientific and technical staff, equipment, travel costs, consumables. Detailed instructions can be obtained from the national contact points. Applicants should be aware that failing to comply with national rules and regulations may lead to significant budget adjustments on the part of the funding agency.

# List of contact persons

## Participating EUROCORES funding agencies

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## Associate status

Researchers with funding obtained or expected from funding agencies not participating in CNCC are eligible to apply as "Associate Partners" in a CRP if they bring added value to a CRP. This applies to all ESF Member Organisations and other non-ESF funding agencies.  
[Some specific contacts for "Associate Partners"](#)

## Israel

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7 July 2005