**Estonian Research Council Development Plan 2020**

***The Estonian Research Council is a foundation established in public interest in the government area of the Ministry of Education and Research to support the implementation of the national research and development policy.***

**Introduction:**

The Development Plan of the Estonian Research Council (ETAg) sets outs targets to be met by the institution in order to contribute to the development of knowledge-based society and economy. The Estonian Research Council Development Plan covers the period from 2014 to 2020. It is subject to a review at the end of each calendar year and its specific details will be outlined in annual action plans. All staff members of the ETAg participated in the drafting of the Development Plan through discussions held in individual working groups and general staff meetings. The Development Plan has been approved by the Board of the ETAg.

The targets and actions specified in the Development Plan are based on the statutes of the ETAg, taking into account other sectoral development plans: Estonian Research and Development and Innovation (RDI) strategy “Knowledge-based Estonia 2014-2020”, the general principles of Estonia’s cultural policy up to 2020, evidence-based priorities of the EU structural aid (2014-2020), and European harmonised RDI strategy.

**Current situation**

The Estonian Research Council Foundation was established by the Republic of Estonia on 1 March 2012 by merging the Estonian Science Foundation with the Research Cooperation Centre of the Archimedes Foundation, with the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) exercising the rights of the founder. The ETAg belongs to the administrative area of the MER and the cooperation between the ministry and the foundation is regulated by a cooperation contract under public law.

Strategic management and supervision of the ETAg is conducted by a Board, consisting of seven members appointed by the Minister of Education and Research; the obligations and rights of the Board are specified in the statutes of the foundation. The work of the ETAg is managed and responsibility for the activities is assumed by the Management Board, appointed by the Board. The quality of research and development in Estonia is evaluated by the Evaluation Committee, an expert panel consisting of thirteen eminent scientists from different research fields.

The internal audits of the foundation are organised and the Management Board is advised by a quality manager.

The ETAg has six departments – five for the organisation of principal activities and one for support functions. The main office of the ETAg is located in Tartu (Soola 8), with a branch office in Tallinn (A. Lauteri 5). The ETAg organises and manages the work of the Estonian Liaison Office for EU RTD in Brussels.

The statutory purpose of the foundation is financing basic and applied research, research and development by distributing grants, and supporting the implementation and development of the national research policy, assessing the effectiveness and impact of the grants, and organising participation in international programmes according to the resources allocated under Estonian, European Union and other international programmes and within the framework of the national responsibilities imposed on the foundation with a contract under public law.

Compared to many other research funding organisations in Europe, the ETAg has a very broad spectrum of activities, including promotion of science and fostering of science education, as well as serving as the coordinator for the contact network of R&D programmes in the EU.

Several functions imposed on the ETAg involve relatively novel subject matters compared to the previous system of research management and carry a broader socio-economic significance; they include, for instance, research integrity, the impact of research funding, or the problems associated with intellectual property.

**Our mission:**

**The mission of the Estonian Research Council foundation is to provide efficient and effective support for the development and implementation of the national R&D and innovation policy.**

**We fulfil our mission by:**

* **coordinating and organising the processing and funding of research work and research grants, as well as sectoral R&D programmes, basing our funding decisions on the expert assessments and proposals of the Evaluation Committee;**
* **making an active contribution to the development of Estonian RDI policy, using analysed R&D data to make evidence-based decisions;**
* **involving relevant stakeholders groups in our activities through improved cooperation between businesses and research institutions, and integration of technological, applied and fundamental research;**
* **helping to strengthen the competitiveness and success of Estonian R&D in the international research sphere;**
* **fostering science education and communication, a scientific literacy, open partnership and cross-sectoral cooperation.**

**Our vision:**

The Estonian Research Council foundation is a capable and reliable organisation that supports and shapes research, development and innovation in Estonia, maintaining and developing a balanced, high-level and internationally successful RDI system in Estonia, as well as knowledge-based and sustainable Estonian society.

**Our values**

* + **Reliability** is a precondition of the ETAg’s effective performance and a value that upholds our actions and development. We keep to our agreements and promises. We are persistent and energetic. We are objective and impartial in our decisions. Our decision-making process is comprehensible, justified, transparent, and consistent with good international practice. In case of disagreements, we listen to all parties, are open to debates, and provide a rationale for our positions.
  + **Expertise.** Expertise is based on knowledge, skills, and experience. In daily practice, it means continual learning and professional development for better planning of work, finding new ideas, developing, implementing and communicating those ideas. Extensive knowledge and skills make us a valued cooperation partner and enable us to have a say on the development of our areas of activity.
  + **Efficiency** signifies our desire for continuous improvement, which would enable us to use the greater efficiency for implementation of innovative and progressive ideas, raising the quality of our service, and creation of added value. We work in an efficient manner and assess the effectiveness of our work and actions.
  + **Openness and cooperation** are the foundations of our development. We involve the scientific community and strategic partners in our work and consult them reguraly future developments. We are open to cooperation with diverse partners, target and interest groups, as well as those interested in developing ideas with us or supporting us. Our cooperation is based on trust and open communication. We maintain good relations, notice and value our colleagues, and operate as a team. We are open to discussion and constructive criticism, and we are prepared to learn from relevant comments and proposals.

**Strategic targets and activities**

# Estonia’s research funding system supports development and diversity of research

**1.1. Ensuring that the research funding system supports research careers, is effective, and user-friendly**

* We develop the system of research grants to make it effective and supportive of research careers
* We create and develop a database of reviewers
* We establish a link between research evaluation and external evaluation of higher education
* We conduct evaluation of research in Estonia, develop evaluation methodology, and analyse the results
* We improve and modernise the system of evaluating research grant applications and reports, and create a working environment facilitating the work of the Evaluation Committee

**1.2. Fostering cooperation between ministries, businesses, and research institutions**

* We participate in the development and implementation of measures for strengthening sectoral R&D
* We foster cooperation with ministries for directing R&D in accordance with the needs of society
* We foster cooperation of R&D institutions with businesses, and knowledge transfer

# The ETAg’s activity supports competitiveness of Estonian R&D in the global research environment and increased visibility of research in the international image of Estonia

**2.1. Ensuring that Estonia’s RDI community has access to international know-how, knowledge, infrastructure, and funding**

* We specify, in cooperation with research institutions, ministries and Enterprise Estonia, the priorities of Estonia’s foreign research cooperation, based on the objectives of Estonian research, foreign, defence and economic policies
* We support development of foreign research cooperation in priority fields
* We coordinate and support participation in the EU partnerships (incl. motivating direct grants, lobbying, participation in working groups and steering committees, etc.)
* We encapsulate and represent Estonia’s positions in the EU and multilateral partnerships

**2.2. Developing competitiveness of the participants in international cooperation**

* We organise training, workshops, and conferences
* We support the system of Estonian support services for the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, and develop the capacity of applicant organisations to participate in the EU or other partnerships (incl. development of coordinators’ capabilities and skills, greater international recognition of sectoral consultants, etc.)
* We consult applicants and provide information on calls for proposals, initiatives, participation rules, and the objectives of instruments
* We analyse the effectiveness of foreign research cooperation

**2.3. International promotion of Estonian R&D**

* We promote Estonian research at international events and organise respective workshops and conferences in Brussels
* We organise events in Estonia to promote Estonian research for interested foreign groups
* We promote R&D in the dedicated online portal researchinestonia.eu, as well as in information and media channels that promote Estonia

**2.4. Representing Estonia in international networks of research organisations**

* We participate in the work of Science Europe and its working groups and communicate the acquired information for the development of Estonia’s research policy

**2.5. Supporting arrival and integration of foreign researchers in Estonia**

* We coordinate the EURAXESS network in Estonia, and provide researchers and their family members with practical advice and reliable information on all matters related to mobility
* We train and consult the staff of research institutions on issues pertaining to hosting of foreign researchers
* We collect feedback and make proposals on updating legislation associated with foreign labour force
* We organise training on the Estonian system, organisation and funding of research for foreign researchers and teaching staff in the framework of the welcoming programme for newly arrived foreigners
* We offer grants for bringing foreign scientists and researchers, who have gained experience in foreign countries, to Estonia

# The ETAg is a valued partner in the development of Estonia’s RDI policy

**3.1. Analysis and international comparison of the Estonian research system**

* We perform monitoring and comparative analyses of international RDI developments and (best) practices
* We cooperate and share experiences with R&D funding organisations from other countries

**3.2. Organising studies, data collection, analyses and distribution required for the development of RDI policy**

* We promote cooperation with the MER and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications to identify the studies needed for the development of RDI policy
* We promote cooperation for systematic collection, analysis and publication of data

**3.3. Involving researches in the formulation of positions and participating in the development of research policy**

* We initiate, and participate in, working groups for the development of research policy, we participate in public discussions on research issues
* We support the dialogue between researchers and society

**3.4. Managing, developing and promoting the Estonian Research Information System (ETIS)**

* We provide competent and fast user support for ETIS
* We collect regular feedback from the users of ETIS, analyse the problems encountered when using the information system, and provide input for the development of ETIS
* We perform random data checks and implement measures to improve the quality of data in the register

**3.5. Coordinating the development of principles of open research and open accsess in Estonia and contributing to the implementation of those principles**

* We establish clear rules in funding measures, requiring open access to publications and research data
* We monitor and analyse the changes in the percentage of open access publications, the statistics of publication of research data, and the relevant impacts
* We coordinate, in cooperation with universities and research libraries, the promotion and education activities related to open research and open access, as well as development of harmonised terminology

# Research and knowledge are visible and held in high regard in society

**4.1. Supporting science education at school, promoting extracurricular science education and the popularity of career in research and engineering, supporting the development of scientific literacy.**

**We promote career opportunities in different fields of research and engineering to help young people to make informed decisions while choosing their career path**

• We organise events, workshops and festivals promoting science to improve scientific literacy of young people, and the general public, and to popularise a knowledge-based worldview

• We support development of inquiry based learning in schools by involving researches in the supervision of science projects, organising teacher training and various contests.

4.2. **Coordinating and organising systematic communication of the work of researchers and research results**

• We work in cooperation with the Universities Estonia, R&D institutions, the Academy of Sciences, and science journalists to achieve a more effective science communication

• We prepare information materials and tools to promote and support other communicators in promotion of the research in Estonia, and organise information activities

# The Estonian Research Council is a reliable, competent, efficient organisation that involves partners and values its employees

**5.1. Creating and implementing an effective structure to ensure optimal and ordered division of labour, responsibilities and tasks, based on qualifications**

* We update the document management and IT security policy
* We develop the quality management system and organise external assessment (EFQM)
* We develop internal communication

**5.2. Implementing a personnel strategy to ensure transparency of the wages policy and remuneration, motivation of employees, compliance with qualification requirements, and career opportunities for employees within the organisation**

* We develop competence and skills of employees
* We increase the satisfaction and motivation of employees

**5.3. Shaping and maintaining the reputation and position of the institution, developing proactive and professional communication with target groups and partners**

* We create and develop a new website
* We develop strategic partnership for the implementation of our principal activities

*The Development Plan was prepared by the departments and staff members of the Estonian Research Council from October to December 2014 and was approved by the expanded management team of the ETAg on 30 December 2014.*

*The Development Plan was updated by the departments and staff members of the Estonian Research Council from February to August 2015, in parallel with the preparation of the action plan for 2017 and with the risk assessment of the institution.*

*The updates were approved at the ETAg staff development workshop on 25 August 2016.*

***ANNEX 1***

# SWOT analysis

**Our strengths:**

* Diverse expertise is the foundation of the ETAg’s synergy and working arrangements. Integration of different substantive activities, target groups and social networks related to the organisation and development of R&D in a single organisation ensures both the administrative sustainability of diverse tasks and the maximum involvement of the general public in the achievement of the ETAg’s goals.
* One of the ETAg’s strengths is openness to development and change because, while the structure and organisational culture of the ETAg are still in the phase of development, its employees’ development readiness, initiative, sectoral expertise, professional experience, ability to perceive and respond to changes in the research landscape in an adequate manner can serve as a precondition for harnessing the opportunities entailed in the ETAg for the benefit of society.
* Competence and experience are the greatest assets of the ETAg. The ETAg staff members have the knowledge and skills required for the procedures and processing of personal and institutional research grants, national programmes, structural assistance, research evaluation, etc., combined with the ability to perform systematic analyses and feedback surveys, develop and consult international R&D, and promote lifelong learning through popularisation and concretisation of research activities and results.
* The ETAg staff members are characterised by friendliness and helpfulness in internal communication, as well as in domestic and international cooperation. Communication and successful cooperation are based on mutual respect, the ability to hear, understand and support a partner, to appreciate constructive criticism and learn from it. The friendliness and helpfulness of the employees provide the ETAg with an excellent foundation for trusting partnership and cooperation with different target groups.
* The balance and reliability of research policy decisions are ensured through the ETAg’s Evaluation Committee, consisting of top researchers. The professional competence and personal authority of the Committee members provide the funding and policy decisions of the ETAg with an internationally and domestically adequate guarantee.

**Our weaknesses:**

* + **Uneven utilisation of the expertise and experience available in the organisation**, which comes to light in the imbalanced structure and division of labour in the institution, as well as in an uneven distribution of tasks, limited and insufficient movement of information within the institution, weakness of solidarity with the institution as a whole.
  + **Weak dialogue** in our relations with the general public, which reduces the impact of scientific information and messages on the development of public opinion and achievement of the socio-economic goals of society.
  + **Weak social position, which** stems from limited ability to contribute to and influence the decisions that affect the scientific sphere and research activities.
  + **Weak and diffuse contact** with the innovation and business sector, caused by the fact that the ETAg has not needed active and leading cooperation with the business sector in the past and the respective competences have not been developed.

**Opportunities in the external environment:**

* R&D is based on the needs of society and economy, ensuring an increase in the importance and social profile of knowledge and science through effective cooperation with potential partners (businesses, ministries, local governments, educational institutions, government agencies, etc.).
* The reputation and position of the ETAg will improve in line with the overall change; efficient cooperation with institutions that affect the field of innovation and entrepreneurship (Enterprise Estonia, Development Fund, etc.) can open new opportunities for the development of the ETAg.
* The utilisation of R&D for ensuring Estonia’s development and economic growth increases, with the resulting increased need for the ETAg’s experiences and skills.
* Estonian R&D is attractive and visible in international RDI cooperation, creating new opportunities and challenges for the development of the ETAg.
* Society’s dynamism, modernity and ability to meet new innovative challenges create the need for the ETAg to develop new competences.

**Threats in the external environment:**

* + The state’s governance and tax system cannot ensure sustainable development of the state, and the need for the ETAg’s skills and knowledge decreases.
  + Public funding of R&D and the education system stagnates or becomes unstable, jeopardising the general educational and cultural environment, and creating ambiguity in terms of existence, functions and development of the ETAg.
  + Strong political and business interest groups interfere with R&D, ignoring the national needs and the autonomy of research institutions, which starts to affect the activity of the ETAg.
  + The interest of young people in activities and developments associated with sciences and technology continues to decrease, economically important development areas lose continuity and sustainability, the number and funding of researchers and research activities decreases and the ETAg becomes redundant.
  + Cooperation and synergy between institutions, based on national needs, cannot be created, there is continued duplication of duties and inefficient use of resources between multiple institutions, and the ETAg is unable to make a convincing case for its necessity and importance.
  + Estonia fails to develop its positions as an attractive research and development environment, international investments based on RDI capacity decrease, and the relevant efforts of the ETAg produce no results.