

Funding Review Programme

This programme evaluated the network-related activity of individual researchers and sites over the past year in order to set the following year's base funding of the site at a level commensurate with its probable future activity. The site funding was provided in addition to any requests to specific network programmes. It was designed to give site managers the flexibility to devote resources to the network in whatever way seems most useful, and also to reduce the pressure on popular programmes such as conference attendance and short-term visitor funding.

The evaluation model evolved significantly during the life of the network. In its final form it embodied a number of basic principles that we believe are critical to the success of structuring actions such as Networks of Excellence. The central point is perhaps that participants vary widely in how and what they can contribute, so it is essential to support a diversity of styles and degrees of participation. The funding needs to be organised in such a way that participants at all levels (from new PhD students to senior professors) in all (thematically relevant) areas and with all degrees of involvement (from key players to people whose core interests are elsewhere but who can still usefully contribute in some way) feel that they can comfortably contribute to and benefit from the network at their own natural levels. The counterpart of this openness is the need for a quantitative, evaluation-based funding model in which contributions are validated and rewards are proportional to real contributions:

- There is no distinction between young and established researchers. The same programmes are available to all and the same evaluation rules are used. Evaluation is based only on recent network activity so active younger researchers can successfully compete with established ones.
- Large and small sites are treated equally: the site's funding is simply the sum of its researchers' funding.
- Researchers from, or associated with, participating sites who are not currently active within the network are permitted and encouraged to participate, but funding is proportional to recorded activity levels so the site receives no direct funding for them in the first year of their participation. (Subject to approval by their site manager they can still spend their site's funding, and they can also apply for funding from other network programmes).
- The activity scores reflect a broad range of different network-related activities, with a strong bias towards ones that are goals or priorities of the network (rather than, e.g., pure academic excellence). Also, a strong nonlinearity is applied to the raw activity score in each category before summing the weighted scores. Together these rules encourage a balanced range of activities and discourage over-narrow focuses by limiting the funding that can be obtained by extreme scores in any one category.

- For practical reasons the evaluation is automated by basing it largely on statistics that are available from the individual programmes and the network web site. Sites can appeal to the funding review committee if they feel that the scoring process has misrepresented their true level of activity, but in practice very few do. Despite its many imperfections, this model appears to have become accepted as a reasonable compromise within the network.

Pump Priming Programme

This is the largest programme of the network, and the main tool for funding collaborative research between the network members. (Several other sections of this brochure describe some of the results achieved through pump-primed work.) The overall budget for pump-priming was close to 20% of the budget for the entire project. The programme was structured like a small funding agency within PASCAL. There were three calls for proposals: the first one after about six months from the project's start, and then two more with gaps of one year between each. The budget available in each call was about 320K euros.

The managers decided to keep the calls quite broad in scope. No specific preference was given to any of the areas covered by the network, and both theoretical and applicative proposals were invited. The spirit of the programme was expressed by explicitly requesting ideas that "target innovative or emerging research themes", that are "too risky to attract mainstream funding", and "aim at obtaining substantial advances in a core PASCAL research area".

In all the calls, the selection of the proposals was based on two basic criteria: (1) scientific merit, (2) relevance and potential impact on the project. A further criterion was the extent to which the project's achievements could contribute to launch new initiatives (such as follow-on national or European projects). Special attention was also devoted to ensuring that a proposal could be assembled with a reasonable effort, so that good research ideas could easily attract attention. A programme committee of five people, chosen among the network members, supported the programme managers in ranking the proposals. The proposals were reviewed by three people, one of whom was chosen from outside the network. Based on the reviews, the programme managers and the programme committee prepared a short-list of proposals that were all judged above the threshold for funding. The final decision on which proposals in the short-list had to be funded was taken at the steering committee meeting. In the three calls a total of 37 proposals were submitted and 16 of them were funded by PASCAL. The budget of a funded proposal was typically between 50K and 100K euros.

One of the main goals of pump-priming was to foster collaboration between network members. Indeed, a necessary condition for funding a proposal was the involvement of at least two different network sites. In practice, a significant fraction of the accepted proposals involved three or four sites that exchanged frequent visits and often shared a post-doc. In the



end, the relative tightness of the community of the network members eased the task of finding partners for proposals.

Finally, it was requested that each team of a pump-priming project provided a short report every six months describing the progress in the research, plus a final report at the end. It happened a few times that some projects were delayed beyond their agreed duration due to disparate reasons (typically, involving hiring of post-docs). In these cases extensions were decided by the programme managers. To ensure dissemination within the network, each team also had to set up and maintain a web site illustrating the project's goals and activities. This was complemented by a video of a 30 minute presentation summarising the results of the research, which was produced at the conclusion of each project.

Conference and Workshop Organisation Programme

The conference and workshop organisation programme (CWOP) allowed PASCAL researchers to apply for partial funding for conferences and workshops. Individual PASCAL researchers could request funding by filling in a web form in which they had to answer a number of questions and give a preliminary budget. Questions included 'how does the proposed conference/workshop help accomplish the general objectives of PASCAL', 'are there any invited speakers that are not PASCAL members; if so, provide a list'; and so on. It was decided to have a continuously open call. Proposals that requested funding

of more than EU 2500 were sent to two referees, usually PASCAL members from sites not involved in the proposal. The programme manager then made the final decision based on the referees' recommendations.

Proposals requesting less than this amount were decided upon directly by the programme manager, without additional recommendations. The whole process was automated - the programme manager could handle appointments of referees and decisions via the web portal. The main decision criterion was usefulness of the proposed activity for PASCAL. A distinction was made between "core" and "non-core" workshops. Core workshops had to involve several PASCAL sites in the organisation, and concerning a topic central to the PASCAL objectives. They were videoed, the videos then being made available on the web portal. The maximum amount of funding for core workshops was 9000 EU. For non-core workshops the requirements were much less stringent, but they could only be funded up to a maximum of 2500 EU. Such workshops were required to have a topic related to, but not necessarily central to, the PASCAL objectives. The decision could either be 'fund the full amount requested', 'fund by a smaller specified amount' or 'reject'. In practice, only one workshop was ever fully rejected. It happened regularly, however, that a proposal was sent back to the applicant with the note 'we can only accept this proposal if you enhance the usefulness of your workshop to PASCAL'. In several cases this led to the inclusion of additional PASCAL researchers or speakers in the proposed workshop.