



**ERA AGE**

**European  
Research  
Area in  
Ageing**

# The University of Sheffield ERA-AGE Co-ordination Team



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# NEWS

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A better future for ageing

**ERA AGE**

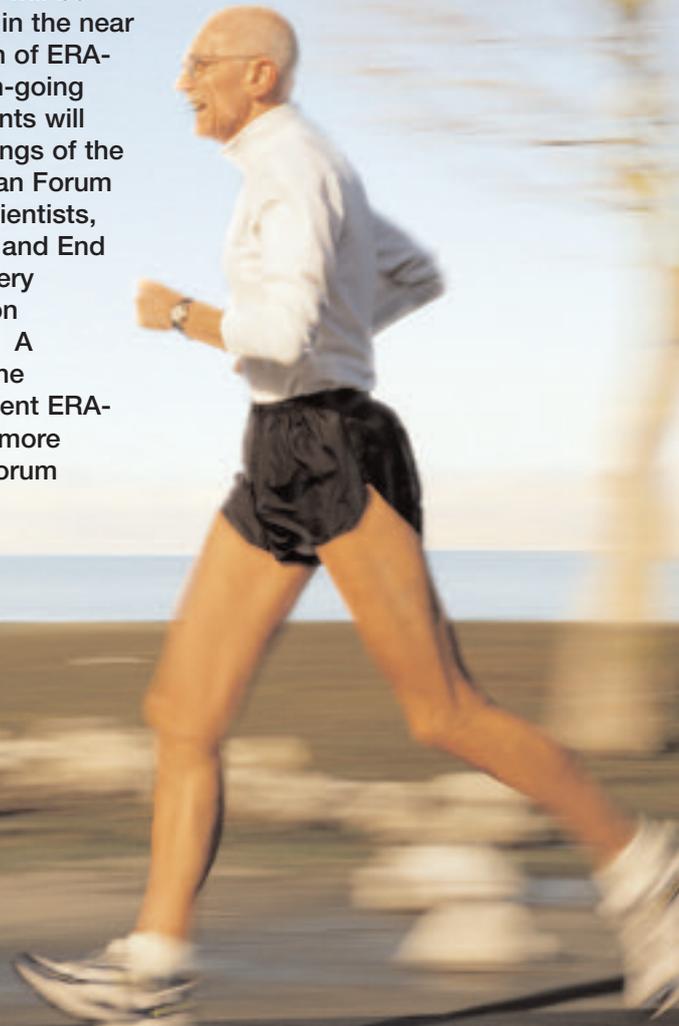
European  
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## Project Progress

The ERA-AGE project has made significant progress since the newsletter on project activities. In line with the third phase of the project, which part focuses on joint activities, ERA-AGE has established and recently announced a unique joint post-doctoral funding initiative between nine of the twelve participating countries in the project. The Future Leaders of Ageing Research in Europe (FLARE) funding initiative has attracted a lot of interest from applicants across Europe and from representatives of European funding organisations who have forwarded positive comments about the focus of the call. More details of the call can be found within this newsletter and on the ERA-AGE website: [www.shef.ac.uk/era-age](http://www.shef.ac.uk/era-age)

Other ERA-AGE activities include two highly successful scientific workshops on User Involvement in Ageing Research Workshop held on 22nd November 2006 in London and Research Priorities for Demography,

Longevity and Genetics, held on December 1st, 2006 in Austria. The first Good Practice Guide for Programme Management formed the focus of a special edition of the last newsletter which is published on the ERA-AGE website and readers can look forward to the second Good Practice Guide for User Involvement which will be made publicly available in the near future. The continuation of ERA-AGE is the subject of on-going discussion. Developments will be informed by the findings of the latest ERA-AGE European Forum Meeting of Research Scientists, Funders, Policy Makers and End Users which was held very recently in Rome, Italy on 13th - 14th March 2007. A forthcoming edition of the newsletter and subsequent ERA-AGE report will provide more information about the Forum meeting in Rome.





## Future Leaders of Ageing Research in Europe (FLARE)

FLARE is a unique joint post-doctoral funding initiative between nine of the twelve participating countries in the European Research Area in Ageing: [www.shef.ac.uk/era-age](http://www.shef.ac.uk/era-age)

The FLARE programme is also unique in the promotion of both European scientific mobility and cross-disciplinary development. Each of the 3-year post-doctoral research fellowships comprises a main project part of (of 2-21/2 years) and a mobility part of (of 6-12 months). The second part must be spent in another European country and with a research group consisting mainly of a different discipline to the fellow's.

The aims of FLARE are:

- To provide outstanding researchers with the opportunity to qualify for a leading position in ageing research

- To support ageing research and develop a well trained cohort of European interdisciplinary researchers in this field, connecting them to the prominent research institutes and scientific teams in Europe as well as to other post-doctoral researchers through communication, meetings and schools
- To enhance communication and multilateral co-operation in ageing research and thereby create a network of leading European institutes and experts to form a basis for future national and EU-funded research on ageing.

The main eligibility criteria are:

- Scientific quality and originality of the project and of the research plan
- Scientific excellence of the applicant (previous scientific track record, publications in scientific journals, other)

- National and international standing of the home and receiving institute (research profile of group and/or leading scientists) and complementarity
- Integration of the project/fellow in the two institutes
- Inter- or multidisciplinary of the proposed project.

The FLARE post-doctoral programme will run from 2008 to 2010. Successful applicants will attend an interdisciplinary summer school which will take place in Sweden in 2008.

Details of the call are published in the ERA-AGE website: [www.shef.ac.uk/era-age](http://www.shef.ac.uk/era-age) and in various websites (see below)



The participating national organisations are:

Participating Country	Participating Organisation	Website
Austria	Austrian Academy of Sciences	<a href="http://www.stipendien.at">www.stipendien.at</a>
Finland	Academy of Finland	<a href="http://www.aka.fi/tutkimusrahoitus">www.aka.fi/tutkimusrahoitus</a>
France	Caisse Nationale des Allocations de Vieillesse in partnership with Caisse Nationale de Solidarité pour L'Autonomie	<a href="http://www.cnav.fr">www.cnav.fr</a> <a href="http://www.cnsa.fr">www.cnsa.fr</a>
Germany	Federal Ministry of Education and Research, BMBF	<a href="http://www.gesundheitsforschung-bmbf.de/en/1502.php">www.gesundheitsforschung-bmbf.de/en/1502.php</a>
Israel	Ministry of Health	<a href="http://www.health.gov.il/pages/default.asp?maincat=14&amp;catId=45&amp;PageId=873">www.health.gov.il/pages/default.asp?maincat=14&amp;catId=45&amp;PageId=873</a>
Luxembourg	Fonds National de la Recherche	<a href="http://www.fnr.lu">www.fnr.lu</a>
Romania	UEFISCSU- Executive Agency for Higher Education and Research Funding (Romania)	<a href="http://www.cnccsis.ro">www.cnccsis.ro</a>
Sweden	Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS)	<a href="http://www.fas.se/flare">www.fas.se/flare</a>
United Kingdom	Medical Research Council	<a href="http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Careers/Fellowships/MRCFellowshipTermsandConditions/index.htm">www.mrc.ac.uk/Careers/Fellowships/MRCFellowshipTermsandConditions/index.htm</a>

# Newsletter Features

## Scientific Workshop Reports

### **ERA-AGE Scientific Workshop Title: User Involvement**

**Held: Holiday Inn, Regent's Park, London, Wednesday 22 November 2006**

#### **Feedback Report: Dr Benny Leshem and Dr Irit Allon**

(Ministry of Health, Israel)

In March 2000 the Lisbon European Council adopted the European Research Area (ERA), in order to structure and promote the concept of European research and cooperation between all actors in the field of science and technology within the EU. The "science to society" action plan was subsequently adopted within the ERA in December 2001. One of the main objectives of this plan was to promote scientific education and involvement of the public in science.

The ERA-AGE user involvement workshop held in London on 22nd November 2006 commenced with presentations from key European scientists and a non government organisation (NGO) policy officer which was followed by working group discussions involving representatives from 19 member states. Funders, policy makers, NGO representatives and scientists considered ways to sustain dialogue between funders,

researchers and end users on how research should be carried out and on how research should be used to improve quality of life in old age. Approaches and barriers to user involvement and examples of good practices were discussed. 'End user' groups were identified as older people, policy makers, funders, NGOs, caretakers, clinicians and families. Various ways of involving users were discussed including research agenda setting, participation in review panels and funding decision making, involvement in the research process and knowledge dissemination. Our working group provided various examples of user involvement specific to their own countries including an old age political party winning elections etc.

The growing political and research interest in user involvement is recognised by ERA-AGE. The approach to involving end users in the research process reflects the democratic approach to participation. Increasingly end users are being invited to assist in developments to improve

the quality of their own lives and to influence decision makers.

Advantages of implementing user involvement in the research process include identifying and prioritising research topics relevant to users, developing more user-friendly/effective services, exchanging ideas, dissemination of relevant information, setting research agendas, raising the profile of research, reducing the gap between academia and actual practice, and attracting funding.

Although the extent to which end user involvement is implemented in Europe varies among different organisations in different countries, workshop participants agreed that the involvement of older people is a necessary component of the *engagement* process between science and society. User involvement should be encouraged more within the field of ageing research.



# Scientific Workshop Reports continued

## ERA-AGE Scientific Workshop Title: User Involvement (continued)

### Feedback Report – Dr James Goodwin (Help the Aged, UK)

As Head of Research in a major British NGO (Help the Aged), I was very pleased to attend the ERA-Age User Involvement workshop in London, both as a delegate and as Chair of one of the small groups. Help the Aged has significant involvement in research, currently holding the Chair of the UK Funders Forum on Ageing Research, having international involvement with the UN, WHO, the USA and Europe and funding major research projects with an expenditure in excess of 4m per year.

The involvement of older people in research has been a major priority for Help the Aged for some time. We have developed considerable expertise in the theory, principles and practical involvement of older people, funding the OPPS Project which reported in 2004 (author Dr Sam Taylor) and working with the Funders Forum members to ensure that older people are fully involved in the both the research agenda and the research process. We fully support the principle that grants should not be awarded for research on ageing which does not fully integrate older people. We were members of the New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA) Commissioning panel which required all proposals to be academically rigorous, multi-disciplinary and have the full (not token) involvement of older people. Therefore our involvement in the meeting strengthened the academic discussion by adding value in terms of our leadership contribution and depth of experience in this field.

One of the salutary features of the workshop was the range of participants and the different perspectives which they brought to the meeting. The great diversity of view offered a clear opportunity for a

dynamic interaction and for the construction of an approach which integrated a wide spectrum of opinion. In the small group sessions especially, there was not only a common assumption of the importance of the issue under consideration but equally the will to produce positive and meaningful outcomes. It is my view that the Workshop Report will add substantially to the continued pressure to ensure the democratic and considered involvement of older people in research. One of the major issues on which the workshop agreed was the necessity to balance the expert position of the academic researcher and the lay-contribution of older people, with emphasis on the more creative means for achieving effective involvement.

In summary, the workshop added significantly to the continuing debate on the extent and importance of the involvement of older people in research and should serve to establish a consensus on the principles which should be implemented across Europe.





**ERA-AGE Scientific Workshop Title: Research Priorities for Demography, Longevity and Genetics  
Held: Hilton Hotel, Innsbruck, Austria, 1st December 2006**

**Feedback Report: Professor  
Beatrix Grubeck-Loebenstein**  
(Institute for Biomedical Aging  
Research-IBA, Austria)

This workshop was organised by Beatrix Grubeck-Loebenstein, Director of the Institute for Biomedical Aging Research (IBA) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and member of the ERA-AGE steering committee, in partnership with the ERA-AGE Coordination Team in Sheffield, UK.

Back in February 2006, the IBA as host institution started preparations for the meeting by sending out invitations to European stakeholders in the fields of demography, biogerontology, genetics, and epidemiology, drawing up the scientific programme for the one day meeting and working out the composition of the three discussion groups as well as the specific questions they should focus on. The workshop brought together 37 representatives of research institutes

and experts from the field of ageing research from 15 European countries. The main aim of the meeting was to discuss how healthy longevity can be achieved in our society. In particular, participants focussed on the questions of how genetics, biogerontology, social factors and environment may contribute to reach this goal and what impact bio- and social sciences have on demography?

The first part of the day involved presentations on genetics, demography and longevity, while the afternoon programme concentrated on working group discussions in order to define strategies on what steps can be taken to reach the goal of healthy longevity and how better interaction between the different disciplines within ageing research can be achieved. The recommendations of the three working groups were presented in the closing plenary.

At the end of the day, many participants expressed their appreciation for the rare opportunity to attend a meeting with representatives from a number of different disciplines which resulted in an exchange of ideas that may subsequently form the basis for transnational interdisciplinary collaborative development in the field of ageing research. There was a broad consensus that a prospective multidisciplinary longitudinal study would be an important future goal.



## Research Priorities for Demography, Longevity and Genetics Scientific Workshop Continued

### Feedback Report: Professor Brian Clarke (Aarhus University, Denmark)

As the Coordinator for an EU-integrated project "Proteomage" started in March 2006, I was happy to speak out at the recent ERA-AGE Demography, Longevity and Genetics workshop. Since one of the aims of ERA-AGE is to promote the development of a European Strategy for research on ageing, which is essential for Europe to catch up with better American funded research in this all-important field that affects the society as a whole, I considered it of great benefit to improve my overview of ageing research.

Clearly, Ageing Research has developed in a multidisciplinary way. What we need is more inter-disciplinarity and I found that the workshop stimulated this admirably. Our subject, in retrospect, fits the current emphasis in the EU FP6 and FP7 programmes on

"Translational Research" with definitive amplifications by introducing the social aspects.

Environmental, stochastic and genetic effects are believed to result in different rates of ageing of individuals. Even within a given individual, these effects can cause different rates of ageing at the level of organs, tissues or even cells. Defining "biological age" or perhaps better now to call it "functional age" is a central theme for basic and clinical research. Functional age must be contrasted with "chronological age" which our society is hung up on. Our understanding of "functional age" will change the structure and function of our Western-style society and lead to

better, more individualised medical treatment and social environment for defined sections of the elderly population. The long term praiseworthy aim is to allow individuals to live more active, healthy lives with less tension in the society.

Experts in research into the molecular and cellular basis of ageing have begun to assess new technologies for identifying molecular mechanisms with the aim of definition and maintenance of functional age through a knowledge of biomarkers of human ageing and through manipulation of gene expression for ensuring maintenance of normal healthy ageing mechanisms.

Our integrated project (IP) PROTEOMAGE is a start in the above scenario by aiming to gain novel insight into the molecular mechanisms of healthy ageing. Based on a proteomic analysis of ageing processes in a variety of ageing models including model organisms and model systems (e.g., human cell

cultures) it will address the question how (1) changes in protein concentration and protein modification, (2) protein-protein interactions and protein networks, (3) signalling mediated by extracellular proteins, and (4) protein turnover and degradation via the proteasomal system play a functional role in the ageing process. For this study, a consortium has been assembled of 15 highly experienced European research laboratories, 1 Chinese high technology Institute and 3 small companies with complementary expertise in the field of cellular and molecular biology of ageing, proteomics analysis and mass spectrometry, structural biology and

bioinformatics. By using a centralized cutting-edge proteomic technology, a high-resolution proteomic analysis will be made of in vitro models of replicative senescence and cells and tissues from people of different ages including centenarians. Novel technology will also allow indentifications and cleavage events that are known to influence greatly the activity of proteins and also identify biomarkers of ageing. Trans-species comparisons will reveal candidates for proteins that play a functional role in driving ageing processes, allowing for the first time a delineation of cause-effect relationships (instead of mere correlations) governing proteome changes that lead to age-associated phenotypes. The results will also lead to new protocols for early diagnosis and prevention of age-associated dysfunctions, based, for example, on strategies to reactivate proteasome activity in senescent cells.

The breadth of the ERA-AGE programme of speakers gave a splendid up to date picture of the demography, social, and biological research on ageing in Europe. I deemed it very successful by expanding my knowledge and understanding of all aspects of human ageing. Especially through its interdisciplinarity it enabled me to make important new contacts and gain valuable sources of information for faster progress in translating the impact of our research.

A final comment on terminology, which seemed to help the different medial researchers for public communications, centres on the definition of "wellness" and "wellbeing." Instead of vague hand waving, many are adopting the idea of "wellness" as being physical fitness, so embraces frailty considerations and "wellbeing" for describing state of mind and brain function.

"I thoroughly enjoyed the workshop and its high level academic, friendly atmosphere"

# Forthcoming Events

The next European Forum 'Ageing and Migration' meeting will be hosted by our French partners in Paris, November 2007. Details of the event will be made available via the ERA-AGE website in the near future.

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