

Frontiers of Psychological Science: An Interview with Eveline Crone

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Eveline Crone, Professor of Neurocognitive Developmental Psychology at Leiden University, has been elected as vice president of the European Research Council (ERC), an EU-focused scientific funding body with an annual budget of over €2 billion. In her new role, Crone oversees the funding of the social sciences and humanities, a portfolio that includes psychological science.

Crone, a member of the ERC scientific council, studies brain development in children and adolescents, focusing on how the brain permits complex decision-making in daily life. In 2017, she was awarded the Spinoza Prize, which is the highest scientific award in the Netherlands. In April, she will begin a new position as professor of developmental neuroscience in society at the Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

In a Q&A with the *Observer*, Crone discusses the role of psychological science at the ERC and the exciting opportunities afforded by her new role.

What does it mean to you to be overseeing the social sciences and humanities disciplines at the European Research Council?

Eveline Crone: I am very honoured to have been elected as ERC vice-president. The ERC covers all fields of science, engineering and scholarship, divided into three research domains — Social Sciences and Humanities, Life Sciences, and Physical Sciences and Engineering — each represented by one of the three ERC vice presidents who oversee the activities in their respective domains. Since 2017, I have already been one of the 22 members of the [ERC Scientific Council](#) — the governing body of the ERC — who represent the European scientific community at large. The core business of members, who are all active researchers in their respective fields, is to set the ERC strategy and select the peer review evaluators. The different domains work very closely together.

I am of course particularly thrilled that I will be in charge of Social Sciences and Humanities when I take up duties in January. It is a domain that uses multiple perspectives to embrace scientific complexity and contributes to societal and individual issues that occupy the world today. This domain encompasses seven peer review panels at the ERC that I will be overseeing.

I am incredibly motivated to work with the ERC; it is an organization that truly makes a difference. I strongly believe in the ERC's investigator-driven nature, in which researchers approach problems not only from the perspective of tomorrow, but also from the vantage point of the generations of the future. It has already proven itself as a European success story and has shown that the formula it runs on works — giving top researchers the opportunity to carry out their dream project, selected on the single dimension of excellence.

What role do psychological science and basic behavioral research have at the ERC?

Crone: The ERC's grants operate on a bottom-up basis without predetermined priorities — that's our trademark. We treat all fields of research equally, and the budgets for the various fields are driven by demand. The peer review is in the hands of 25 evaluation panels covering all fields of research. Psychological science and behavioral research are evaluated by the panel "The Human Mind and Its Complexity," which covers cognitive science, psychology, linguistics, philosophy of mind; and by the panel "The Social World, Diversity, Population," which covers sociology, social psychology, social anthropology, demography, education, and communication. The panel "Neuroscience and Neural Disorders" covers neural cell function and signalling, systems neuroscience, neural bases of cognitive and behavioral processes, and neurological and psychiatric disorders. This could therefore also be the panel suitable for applicants proposing research on psychological and behavioral sciences from the life-sciences perspective. Interdisciplinary proposals are evaluated within the primary panel with input from panel members from one or more other panels and remote referees.

As someone who has been a speaker at the International Convention of Psychological Science (ICPS), what can APS and ICPS do to promote and encourage the bottom-up, frontier research that the ERC strives to support?

Crone: We are grateful that APS and ICPS continue to encourage researchers, especially young ones, to follow their scientific curiosity and push the frontiers of knowledge. Be daring in your research and do not fear failure! In this day and age, this message and scientific freedom are more crucial than ever. It cannot be emphasized enough.

What kind of attention is the ERC devoting to integrative research initiatives like those that are

the cornerstone of ICPS?

Crone: APS is dedicated to advancing scientific psychology across disciplines and geographic borders. One of its main goals is to foster the integration of scientific perspectives within psychological science and with related disciplines. This is actually in tune with the ERC's goal of supporting excellent investigators and their teams to pursue ground-breaking, high-risk/high-gain research. In particular, the ERC encourages proposals of a multi- or interdisciplinary nature that cross the boundaries between different fields of research; pioneering proposals addressing new and emerging fields of research; and proposals introducing unconventional, innovative approaches and scientific inventions. Having said that, it should be noted that the sole selection criterion is excellence; integrative or interdisciplinary research are not rated higher than monodisciplinary proposals.

Is there any current research or other work you are conducting currently that you would like to highlight to APS members?

Crone: My own research is driven by the question of how dynamic changes in brain development are related to cognition and behavior during childhood and adolescence. We study changes in brain structure and function that underlie our ability to anticipate, produce, and evaluate complex decisions in daily life, mostly using longitudinal behavioral and brain-imaging designs.

In recent years, we have come to understand how the many changes that occur in this important period in life open up opportunities for young people to explore, take risks, discover their identities, have purpose and meaning, and contribute to the challenges that the world faces today. This change — from a problem-focused definition of adolescence to valuing the opportunities — has been, and still is, a strong motivator for me. New directions that I am currently exploring include how we can employ citizen science in our designs, a novel direction of youth engagement that I am very excited about. We need many different perspectives to understand the complexity of human behavior, from interdisciplinary scientific approaches to understanding how our work finds its way in society, especially when it concerns young people.

So again, [my work has] many alignments with the goals and ambitions of APS. The new generation grows up in a world that is more globally oriented than we could even imagine, so understanding how we can create opportunities for youth all over the world is more important than ever.