

ELAN program for supporting clinical research and teaching

Speaker

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Aims and Structure

The ELAN program was designed according to the guidelines of the German Council of Science and Humanities and the Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs to support clinical research and teaching. A total of 1.3 million Euro annually is devoted to fund projects for limited periods of time, taking into account the previous work done by the respective researchers. Decisions on the distribution of funding are made by a committee of Faculty members, consisting of seven professors from various clinical and preclinical departments, the dean of the faculty, the medical director, and the chairman of the research advisory board. Main purposes of the program are to financially support research projects, promote innovative didactic models, and internationalize clinical teaching as well as its evaluation.

In 2016, ELAN was integrated under the umbrella of IZKF (compare own report). Due to financial support by FAU (ETI program), the ELAN program could be opened for all young researchers of the Faculty of Medicine.

Funding

First and foremost, funding is provided for projects of highly qualified young investigators and newly established groups. Besides this, pilot projects are supported and financial gaps in ongoing investigations are bridged ("standard program"). The best young investigators are additionally supported by the so-called "first-time applicant program", initiated and financed in cooperation with the IZKF. It is intended to enable as many qualified investigators as possible to raise further funding from external grant providers. The standard program provides short-term support for personnel and operational costs for six to twelve months. In the "first-time application-program", an extension of up to 30 + 6 months is possible.

From mid-1998 until the end of 2016, a total of 979 grant applications were received (2015: 36, 2016: 27), coming from virtually all clinical departments. The numbers of grant proposals from the respective departments are proportional to both, their sizes and research activity, although to a different extent. Whereas the average funding per project increased to 44,000 Euro in both years, the total amount of granted money decreased to 1.58 and 1.2 million Euro annually due to a lower number of grants. External peer review of grant proposals is required for funding requests above 20,000 Euro. Besides the scientific excellence of the project, the committee also considers compliance with other prime goals of the ELAN program in its funding decisions, e.g. initial funding for new research groups or young investigator support.

The grant applications reflect the impact of the core research areas, infection and immunology research (half of all applications) and the growing core research area tumor research (up to one third of all applications).

An evaluation of the program shows that the average time span from approval to the end of the project is two years. It takes an additional two to three years to have a paper resulting from a project accepted or to obtain a subsequent funding from external parties. Therefore, the final evaluation can be done four to five years after approval of the grant.

All except one project of 2012 are completed and documented by a final report. 60 % of the grants led to at least one accepted publication and 25 % led to external funding. External funding following an ELAN funding amounts to more than 1.7 million Euro, thus indicating a higher income than investment. Parental leave and change of jobs account for missing reports and/or a lack of results in terms of publications or external funding.

In conclusion, the ELAN program has successfully stimulated high quality research projects from all clinical departments. The lower number of applications due to a restriction to younger researchers (the age limit is 38 years) was wanted as the amount distributed per grant increased whereas the total budget was pared at the same time.

The majority of finished projects resulted in a visible success. This emphasizes the value of this program as a tool to dynamically improve clinical research within the Faculty of Medicine.