**Background**

ERA-AGE was established, in 2004, to provide co-ordination in the ageing research fields between national programmes run by research councils or ministries. It is Europe’s ERA-NET in the ageing field and is the only one to be coordinated by an academic institution. From an initial membership of seven it grew to sixteen countries and three regions by 2012.

**Aims**

ERA-AGE is an ERA-NET, part of the infrastructure of the European Research Area. Its aims are focussed on the coordination and development of ageing research between countries:

- To facilitate the coordination of existing ageing research programmes.
- To share good practice in the coordination and management of ageing research.
- To develop new European ageing research programmes.

ERA-AGE also aims to prioritise multi-disciplinary research and to emphasise the importance of research informing policy and practice.

**The study**

ERA-AGE operates as a consortium with regular meetings between partners to discuss priorities and plan the focus of future activities.

Its activities are broadly split between joint calls and joint activities. Three joint calls have been undertaken during the life of ERA-AGE: two for post-doctoral fellowships under the FLARE programme; and one for Europe’s first joint research programme in the ageing field, on “Active and Healthy Ageing Across the Life Course”.

The joint activities have included: periodic forum style meetings for a wide range of national and European stakeholders, from scientists to business people, to discuss hot topics in ageing research; Summer Schools for the FLARE Fellows; the development of a joint database of information on ageing research centres, funders and their programmes and projects; and the development of good practice on Programme Management and Involving Older People in Research.

**Key Outputs**:

- Creation of new research collaborations between national research funders in different European countries
- Publication of good practice guides in managing ageing research programmes
- Creation of Europe's first post-doctoral programme in the ageing field which combines geographical and disciplinary mobility
- Funding for 33 post-doctoral fellows
- Creation of Europe's first joint programme of ageing research, supported by 12 national funders
- Research funding (€4.2 million) for six multi-national research projects:
  - Continence Across Continents To Upend Stigma and Dependency (CACTUS-D)
  - Ambient Assistive Living Technologies For Wellness, Engagement, and Long Life (AAL-WELL)
  - Understanding The Role of Contrasting Urban Contexts In Healthy Aging: An International Study Of Daily Mobility and Active Living Using Wearable Sensor Devices Across Cohorts (CURHA)
  - Healthy Ageing In Residential Places (HARP)
  - Determinants Of Healthy Ageing In Work and Retirement: A Cross-national Longitudinal Study Based On The Integrated Datasets Across Europe For Ageing Research (IDEAR) Network
  - Hearing, Remembering, and Living Well: Paying Attention To Challenges Of Older Adults In Noisy Environments (HEARATTN)

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Findings

The initial activities of ERA-AGE concentrated on the production of good practice guides for programme managers, developing common priorities and encouraging bi-lateral collaboration.

Over its lifetime ERA-AGE also staged ten European Forums on Ageing Research which examined issues as diverse as ageing research recommendations, the structure of ageing research funding, the future of ageing research, the role of technology in ageing and routes for future collaboration.

In 2007 the consortium launched its first joint programme which was also the first European programme on ageing research funded by the Member States themselves. This was a post-doctoral programme involving funders in eight countries, titled The Future Leaders of Ageing Research in Europe (FLARE) Programme. Eighteen three-year fellowships resulted from this call. FLARE Fellowships have two unique features: the stipulation of not only geographical mobility but disciplinary mobility as well. In 2011 a second round of FLARE provided funding for fifteen additional fellowships.

In total four Summer Schools have been held for FLARE fellows between 2007 and 2012, in Sweden, Bulgaria, Spain and Ireland. Each Summer School lasted 3-4 days and included up to 40 participants — a mix of FLARE post-docs, non-FLARE post-docs from other European countries and Canada and guest speakers to address specific disciplines, methodological issues, career development and contextual issues about the wider European ageing research environment. The Summer Schools provided a unique opportunity for networking between Fellows and other researchers and have been highly valued by all attendees.

In 2011 ERA-AGE created another benchmark in the coordination of European ageing research by launching the first European research programme on ageing by publishing a call for multidisciplinary research in “Active and Healthy Ageing Across the Life Course”. Twelve funders in nine countries (including BBSRC and ESRC in the UK) came together to create a jointly funded programme aimed at combining research expertise from 3 to 5 different countries. A budget of €4.2 million was committed by funders to address the aims of the joint programme, which are to:

- Generate new knowledge on the biological, clinical, behavioural, social and environmental factors that enable individuals to live actively and healthily into later life.
- Explore comparatively different models, methods, approaches and good practices in societal responses to increased longevity which emphasise both social inclusion and sustainability.
- Engage in effective knowledge exchange activities that will assist European and other countries to achieve the goal of increasing healthy life expectancy by 2 years by 2020.

Research Impact

The major impacts of ERA-AGE are:

- The creation of Europe’s first post-doctoral programme in the ageing field, which has supported a total of 33 early career researchers in two cohorts and generated €5 million for ageing research. The wide ranging topics of their research will contribute to improved quality of life in old age.
- Europe’s first joint research programme in the ageing field focused on multidisciplinary research applications on “Active and Healthy Ageing Across the Life Course” which has funded six multinational research consortia. The call was specifically aimed at improving healthy life expectancy, and in particular, to address the major priority established by the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing of a 2 year increase in healthy life expectancy in the European Union by 2020.

Following a two-stage peer review process six new major projects have been funded, each running for three years and involving at least three different partners from three different countries.

The membership of ERA-AGE expanded from seven partners in 2004, to number in 2012 a total of 19 partners across Europe and North America, as shown in the map below.

Further information

ERA-Age reports and newsletters can be accessed at http://era-age.group.shef.ac.uk/

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