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## A sneak peek into the Early Career Members' session at the ERS International Congress and the experience of organising an ERS Research Seminar

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*Published in:*  
Breathe

*DOI:*  
[10.1183/20734735.0012-2020](https://doi.org/10.1183/20734735.0012-2020)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2020

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

### *Citation for published version (APA):*

Collins, J. J. P., Bartel, S., Ubags, N. D., Gompelmann, D., & De Brandt, J. (2020). A sneak peek into the Early Career Members' session at the ERS International Congress and the experience of organising an ERS Research Seminar. *Breathe*, 16(2), 1-5. [200012]. <https://doi.org/10.1183/20734735.0012-2020>

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## Early career forum

# A sneak peek into the Early Career Members' session at the ERS International Congress and the experience of organising an ERS Research Seminar

### Early career member sessions at ERS International Congress

The European Respiratory Society (ERS) International Congress, the largest respiratory meeting in the world, will take place 7–9 September 2020 in a virtual way. Next to an outstanding scientific programme with novel insights into a broad spectrum of respiratory topics, a comprehensive programme will be offered to Early Career Members (ECMs). ECMs will have access to pre-recorded postgraduate courses, professional development workshops and “Expert view” sessions, which are only a few examples of an excellent educational programme that promotes the exchange of basic and translational science, and clinical knowledge. Alongside this educational programme, the Early Career Members Committee (ECMC) also organises a session dedicated to the professional development of ECMs. This ECM session, will take place on Wednesday morning (9.30–10.30 h in Studio Madrid), 9 September. Useful information about the ERS structure and how to get involved within the ERS will be covered by the co-chair of the ECMC, Maxime Patout. Furthermore, the opportunity of fellowships that allow ECMs to gather experience in another country, to learn new skills and to promote respiratory networks worldwide will be highlighted by Louise E. Donnelly (ERS Fellowships and Awards Director), followed by the Mina Gaga lecture given by Chris Burtin, who is

the 2020 ECM awardee. The session will be closed by a talk on motivation and leadership in science by ECMC representative Daniela Gompelmann. As clinical and scientific work presents multidisciplinary teamwork, one key to success in science is to develop the ability to inspire, push and motivate the team. As motivational leadership is a true challenge, some motivational techniques that will positively influence the productivity and happiness of the scientific team will be presented.

Furthermore, we recommend all ECMs attend their Assembly meeting on Sunday 6 September (access the programme to find out the exact timing of your Assembly's meeting <https://erscongress.org/programme-2020/access-the-programme>) to get an update on what is going on in the Assembly and how ECMs can get involved. ECMs can also request extra information by contacting their Assembly ECMC representative. We are looking forward to seeing many ECMs in the virtual ERS world.

### Organising an ERS Research Seminar: a testimonial from ECMs

Each year, the ERS organises research seminars. ERS Research Seminars are scientific and research-oriented events of which the programme includes cutting-edge clinical, translational and basic

**Cite as:** Collins JJP, Bartel S, Ubags ND, *et al.* A sneak peek into the Early Career Members' session at the ERS International Congress and the experience of organising an ERS Research Seminar. *Breathe* 2020; 16: 200012.

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A sneak peek into the @EarlyCareerERS session at #ERSCongress 2020 and the experience of organising an @EuroRespSoc Research Seminar <http://bit.ly/39yngcO>



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science. The seminars are aimed at gathering a limited number of well-established and early-career investigators to address a specific scientific question, and discuss and share research in progress, unpublished data and future aims for research in a specific field. Research seminars have well defined outcomes including publication in an ERS journal, creation of a collaborative research network or work towards the establishment of new guidelines or grant application. The ERS opens a call for applications every year with a deadline in October. In this article, we provide a testimonial from three ECMs who have had the opportunity to organise an ERS Research Seminar in the past years. In the following section, Sabine Bartel will describe her experiences organising the research seminar “Cross-talk in the lung microenvironment – implications for understanding chronic lung disease” that was held in Berlin on 22–23 February 2018. Niki Ubags and Jennifer Collins will discuss their experiences organising the research seminar “Early origins of lung disease: an interdisciplinary approach”, which was held in Lisbon on 11–12 November 2019.

## Application process

Every ERS member can apply to conduct a research seminar. The deadline is 15 October, and the latest news and updates will be communicated at the ERS Congress, *via* the ERS Newsletter and online at <https://www.ersnet.org/research/research-seminars>. To apply, interested members must submit a proposal specifying the scientific background of the topic, the learning outcomes for the participants, a draft programme including expert faculty and speakers, and a budget plan. A template for the application and the current guidelines can be found on the ERS website. It is recommended (but not mandatory) to discuss potential applications with the respective assembly heads before submitting the proposal, as their support will be needed in the selection process. All proposals will be evaluated and ranked by the ERS Science and Events working group and one or two proposals with the highest ranks will be accepted for funding by the ERS Science Council.

### *Jennifer Collins*

As an ECM, I was initially unaware that I was eligible to apply to organise a research seminar. Indeed, I did know about ERS Research Seminars as I had attended one, which I really liked. However, I thought that at the very least, I would need a more established scientist as a partner. After I was contacted by Niki [Ubags, a fellow ECM] to apply for a research seminar together, I started talking with several established scientists active within the ERS to find out whether we would stand a chance if we applied together. To my surprise, I found that the Assembly and group leaders we talked to were very enthusiastic and supportive about our idea and

initiative. We were encouraged to apply and they were happy to provide us feedback on our proposal. Even though our proposal was rejected after our first application round, we were told that this was very common and were urged to resubmit the following year, as there was a lot of support within the ERS for our research seminar idea. Our proposal was granted the second time around, and we could actually go ahead and organise our research seminar.

### *Niki Ubags*

My interest to put together an application for a research seminar was sparked when I noticed the call for applications in the ERS Newsletter right before the start of the ERS International Congress in Milan (2017). During the Congress, I contacted my co-chair, and we discussed our ideas and prepared an outline for the programme. Although, as mentioned by Jennifer Collins, we were not sure whether we would stand a chance with our application since both chairs would be ECMs, I talked to members of the ECMC and Assembly heads, and they were all very supportive and provided input where needed. Our application was rejected in the first application round; however, given the enthusiasm of the reviewers about the topic and with their additional comments, we improved and resubmitted the application. Fortunately, this time with a positive outcome. It is important to read the comments from the reviewers/committee carefully and address all of them when preparing your resubmission. If you do not understand the full meaning of a comment, the ERS staff can help to clarify. In general, when applying for a research seminar, it is important to check the topics that have been covered in the preceding years to make sure that there is not too much overlap. Next to the topic, it is also important to have a clear idea about the output that you wish to produce/gain after the research seminar, and communicate this clearly in your application. Lastly, make sure that your list of faculty and pre-selected participants reflects diversity regarding age, gender and nationality. If you find it difficult to select speakers or participants from a specific field, make sure to contact your Assembly head and their ECM representative and ask for their input.

### *Sabine Bartel*

My idea to propose a research seminar came up at the ERS International Congress in London (2016), where this opportunity was discussed in the Assembly 3 meeting. As my research interests are somewhat interdisciplinary and I also work on a relatively new topic (extracellular vesicles), it is never fully covered at regular congresses such as the ERS International Congress. Thus, I thought it would be a great idea to bring together experts in the different fields in one conference to discuss potential applications for future lung research. I made a programme draft after the ERS International Congress of my perfect

conference based on all my research interests and sent that to the heads of Assemblies 3 and 5 (as the proposal was relevant for both assemblies). Luckily, they shared my enthusiasm for the interdisciplinary approach and helped to develop the proposal further. I also teamed up with a more senior collaborator that became the co-chair of this application, but everyone encouraged and supported me (as an ECM) to be the main applicant. I think sending and discussing the application with your Assembly head is crucial as you will need their support along the way and they have a lot of experience in proposal writing and ERS policies. Moreover, it is wise to include more than one Assembly as this will include your chances of funding.

## Organisation

Upon approval of a research seminar application, the ERS office organises a conference call with the organisers and the Conferences and Seminars Director of the ERS, currently Reinoud Gosens (Groningen, the Netherlands). In this call, the final date and location, as well as the programme, will be discussed and decided upon. Furthermore, the budget will be discussed. The ERS provides a lump sum of EUR 35000 for each research seminar, which can be expanded by additional funding from external sponsors (*i.e.* industry or other societies) if applicable. This money will be used for renting the location, providing food and drinks, and the travel and accommodation of the faculty speakers, and if possible, other participants. The responsibility to find additional sponsors lies with the organising faculty but the ERS office helps finalise official matters such as contracts and agreements. The rest of the organisation is done by the ERS office, apart from selecting abstracts, participants and travel grants.

### *Jennifer Collins*

Since we had already put a lot of thought into the programme, speakers and invited faculty for the application, the organisation was fairly straightforward. A lot of the logistics and communication around the organisation was taken care of by Hanna Gaisne, the scientific programme coordinator at the ERS headquarters. We had the additional challenge of organising our research seminar sooner than we would have liked, at a time when quite a few scientists and speakers were unable to attend because of other conferences, grant deadlines and teaching responsibilities. Nonetheless, through regular Skype meetings and e-mail contact, we managed to get a fantastic line-up of speakers and a decent number of registrations. The trickiest part was to get sufficient PR for our research seminar, even though we used every opportunity available to us by tweeting, advertising at other conferences, and asking our group and Assembly leaders to advertise our research seminar.

### *Niki Ubags*

It was a real pleasure to organise the research seminar. From the moment of the initial kick-off teleconference until the end of the research seminar itself, the ERS staff was extremely helpful and pleasant to work with. In the selection of speakers, we aimed to have a diverse group with renowned and established scientists, and early career scientists. As an ECM, it can be difficult to find additional sponsorship for your research seminar (if needed). I would recommend asking more senior colleagues to help by reaching out *via* their network if you do not have many connections within your own network.

### *Sabine Bartel*

The organisation of the research seminar was a lot of fun. The ERS staff is great and they are very supportive, so there is only minimal effort required from the organisers. Mostly, we had to select participants, select their funding and choose which abstracts should be presented. Unfortunately, in my case, several speakers became ill (very) close to the seminar, but with the help of the ERS office we could still get two replacements on short notice.

## The main event

As discussed above, the ERS office takes care of most the organisation, so the faculty can focus on the content and enjoy the seminar themselves. To ensure that everything runs smoothly, the ERS officials are present during the research seminar.

### *Jennifer Collins*

The location for our research seminar in Lisbon was excellent, and I was really glad that we had picked one of the pre-selected locations with which the ERS has negotiated a special deal. The conference hotel was close to the airport and right next to a subway station, also making it very easy to explore the city by public transport for those who wanted to. The hotel itself was very good, with good amenities and, importantly, a good conference room. During the research seminar, we were pleased to have succeeded in creating an atmosphere that allowed for a lot of interaction among participants, both ECMs and established scientists from a variety of backgrounds. Because we chose a mix of faculty presentations with ample time for discussion and interactive breakout sessions, we were really able to inspire people and draw out incentives for further interdisciplinary research in the future, which is what we set out to do in the first place. The feedback we got from faculty and participants alike was very positive (also on social media), and multiple participants expressed the desire for a follow-up initiative based on this research seminar, such as a collaborative network or a biannual recurring conference/research seminar.

As a primary deliverable, we have set out to write a comprehensive review on the research seminar's topic, but we are looking into keeping the interaction among the participants by following up on their suggestions. It would be great if our initiative can lead to something bigger that is carried by others in the field and not just us.

### *Niki Ubags*

As mentioned by Jennifer, the location and the choice of the conference venue in Lisbon was outstanding. The interactions between the participants started during breakfast on the first day and continued throughout the two days of the seminar. All faculty presentations included indications of where the field should be heading in the future and which topics remain under-investigated at this time. The discussion was further stimulated by a very interactive audience, which given the interdisciplinary nature of the research seminar, led to a lot of "food for thought" and "outside the box" ideas. We provided all faculty and participants with a break-out session survey, which was to be completed before the research seminar. This allowed us to focus the break-out session on specific topics, such as "Where should the field head in the next years?" and "What are challenges to tackle to move this research forward?". We are currently in the process of writing a perspective review based on the discussion from the break-out sessions, which was one of our deliverables. We also distributed a post-seminar survey to get an idea of what kind of follow-up participants and faculty would like to see, and as mentioned by Jennifer, we are now trying to shape this further and aim to work towards setting up a collaborative network. Similar to what Sabine mentioned, we were able to organise a scientific symposium on the research seminar topic at the ERS International Congress 2 months before the research seminar took place. There was a lot of interest for the session and this served as an excellent teaser for the research seminar.

### *Sabine Bartel*

The ERS office has preselected locations for research seminars, where it is clear that there will not be any logistical problems during the seminar. We chose to do our research seminar in a hotel in the heart of Berlin, which also provided the opportunity for participants and faculty to explore this great city before/after the seminar. One of the highlights was a joint walk through the historic centre towards the restaurant for the dinner. Furthermore, as every research seminar does, our seminar provided a very nice atmosphere with great scientific discussions in a relatively small group, giving also ECMs the opportunity to speak up and get themselves known. In our seminar, we decided to test a new format of Poster Discussion sessions with two-minute "lightning" talks at the beginning. After this very

successful trial, this format is now used at the ERS International Congress and it feels great to have been the one to get this going. All in all, it was a great networking opportunity for me as well, and I still have good connections to the participants and the invited faculty. In my opinion, it really helped with being seen as an equal member of the scientific community and not just as "some postdoc". After the conference, we wrote a joint review article about the most important insights from this seminar [1]. Additionally, we were able to organise a scientific symposium at the ERS International Congress in Paris (2018) to reconvene the research seminar and we have established a research topic at the journal *Frontiers of Medicine*.

## Overall experience

### *Jennifer Collins*

Overall, I am really grateful to have been given the experience of organising this research seminar, as I really felt that it was so valuable to get people from other disciplines together and look beyond their own comfort zone. Even if your career leads you outside of academia, I believe that the skills that you hone while organising a research seminar will be valuable no matter which direction life takes you. Most importantly, I thought it was a lot of fun to do and a great opportunity to meet interesting people along the way!

### *Niki Ubags*

Organising this research seminar has taught me so much more than I could have expected when I first started to work on the application. Not only have I learned a lot about research and what we need to do to move our field forward, but also how to lead discussions and synthesise knowledge in a short amount of time to provide a good overview of the most important discussions. Moreover, I met a lot of new scientists that all have a similar interest, and this has created opportunities for collaborations and additional research projects. It was a lot of fun and very motivating to see many people interested and invested in this topic, and I would definitely recommend submitting a proposal if you are interested and have a good idea.

### *Sabine Bartel*

Organising this research seminar was one of the best things I have done so far in my scientific career. As discussed above, it felt like getting money to organise the most perfect conference for myself. By inviting the experts that you are most interested in, you can learn a lot for your own research, but also you gain a strong network within your field. On top of it all, it was a lot of fun at all stages and I can only highly recommend everyone to submit a proposal. The ERS is always looking for fresh and new ideas, so do not be shy if your idea is a bit outside the box.

### Step-by-step to your own ERS Research Seminar

- *Before or during the ERS Congress*  
Think about the topic and possible speakers, and discuss the application with your Assembly head.
- *Before 15 October*  
Develop the proposal including the draft programme, the faculty, the location and time, and the budget with the template provided by the ERS. Send the finalised proposal to your Assembly heads for input.
- *15 October*  
Submit the application to the ERS office *via* e-mail. Make sure it is complete and signed.
- *Spring*  
One or two proposals of highest ranking will be accepted for funding.
- *6–12 months prior to the seminar*  
Conference call with organising faculty and the ERS to finalise the programme, logistics and the faculty invitations. Additional external funding can be discussed (if needed).
- *2–4 months prior to the seminar*  
Selection of participants for the seminar, selection of travel grants, abstract allocation into the programme.

### Affiliations

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### Support statement

Jana De Brandt is funded by the Flemish government. The Research of FWO Aspirant Jana De Brandt is sponsored by FWO-grant #11B4718N. Sabine Bartel is supported by a Marie Curie Post-doctoral Research Fellowship (RESPIRE3) from the European Respiratory Society and the European Union's H2020 research and innovation programme (Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 713406). Jennifer Collins is supported by a Dirkje Postma Talent Award from the Lung Foundation Netherlands (project number 11.1.16.152).

### Conflict of interest

J.J.P. Collins has nothing to disclose. S. Bartel reports grants and personal fees from Bencard Allergie GmbH outside the submitted work. N.D. Ubags has nothing to disclose. D. Gompelmann reports personal fees from Pulmonx, Novartis, Boehringer Ingelheim, Chiesi, AstraZeneca, Berlin Chemie, Uptake Medical, Grifols and Olympus, outside the submitted work. J. De Brandt has nothing to disclose.

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1. Gosens R, Hiemstra PS, Adcock IM, *et al*. Host-microbe cross-talk in the lung microenvironment: implications for understanding and treating chronic lung disease. *Eur Respir J* 2020; 56: 1902320.