Featured School:

Erasmus Research Institute of Management (ERIM),

The ERIM Early Career Talent Programme

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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AACSB International
Erasmus Research Institute of Management,
Early Career Talent Programme

Within the Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) exists the Erasmus Research Institute of Management (ERIM), which, with nearly 350 researchers affiliated, has grown to be one of the largest university-based public research centers of management in Europe. Erasmus University Rotterdam is comprised of two schools that focus on management knowledge; the Rotterdam School of Management (RSM) and the Erasmus School of Economics (ESE). In 1998, these schools created a joint research institute and graduate school; the Erasmus Research Institute of Management.¹ ERIM prides itself for investing in quality management knowledge and its researchers, in turn building a respected reputation among global business schools and research institutes in management.

The mission of ERIM is to conduct scientific research that enables organizations to assess and improve their business processes in order to perform in a profitable and responsible way.

ERIM’s research programs focus on two pivotal areas of investigation. The first is the study of intra-firm and inter-firm business processes. The second is the role of data, information, information processing and knowledge in managerial decision making. ERIM’s objective is to carry out first-rate research in management, as recognised by the community of peers, and to offer an advanced Doctoral Programme (both Mphil and PhD level) in management for the education of new, outstanding scholars in the field. ERIM is fully accredited by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). More specifically, the goals of ERIM are:

- To be a high quality institute with high visibility and a strong reputation among its peers in the international community of researchers in management.
- To achieve a high output and impact of scientific publications in the top journals and books of research in management.
- To offer high quality doctoral education through an internationally competitive Doctoral Program.
- To attract, develop and retain top research talent in all stages of their career.

Throughout its activities, in research as well as teaching, ERIM has five distinct areas of research in management:

- Business Processes, Logistics and Information Systems - LIS
- Organization - ORG
- Marketing - MKT
- Finance and Accounting - F&A
- Strategy - STR
ERIM’s goal of producing global “thought leaders”2 in management education in the academic career market is strongly enforced through its various research programs, as well as through its full-career perspective in the support and services it offers to its members. Through programs such as the Early Career Talent Programme, ERIM upholds its philosophy of fostering support for its academic talent at all stages of their academic careers.

**Early Career Talent Programme**

Building upon the success of ERIM’s Post-Doctoral Programme, which ran from 2001-2005, the Early Career Talent Programme was initiated in 2005 with the goal of investing in young academics in order to increase top quality scientific output and improve their productivity and viability. The initial Post-Doctoral Programme hired young PhDs for two year periods, but many participants subsequently left the university to pursue tenure track positions elsewhere. ERIM’s perception of this structure as often resulting in the loss of a two-year investment prompted it to explore alternative models.

The Early Career Talent Programme, therefore, is a four year program that is fully aligned with the tenure structures of RSM and ESE, making it very attractive to candidates who wished to take part in a “fast-track for tenure” program. As ERIM’s Executive Director, Wilfred Mijnhardt, notes, this format provides an excellent way of attracting, testing and selecting high potential individuals while enhancing the international networks of the researchers; and in turn elevating ERIM’s success rate in quality publishing and with external scientific funding bodies. Mijnhardt likes to refer to ERIM as an “academic club-model” within Erasmus University that is fully connected to the two founding schools (RSM and ESE).

Participants in the talent program are appointed as university employees in one of the two schools, while also being members of the ERIM research institute.

**Characteristics of the Program**

Through the Early Career Talent Programme, recent PhD graduates who show strong academic potential can be offered a temporary contract as an assistant professor for a maximum of six years. Participants are selected through concerted actions and a combined decision by the ERIM scientific director, the relevant department chair, and the dean of the school. Decisions are based on the applicant’s CV, publications, academic recommendation letters, research seminars, etc. as well as a research proposal that relates to research activities of ERIM’s research programs.3

Participants (“Early Career Talent Fellows”) are appointed as assistant professors and presented with specific targets that must be met by the end of the term. If, according to the relevant promotion and tenure committee, the researcher meets all the obligations associated with a tenure track position, he/she is promoted to associate professor. Otherwise the contract with the Erasmus University Rotterdam is not
extended. Some high potential fellows performed so well that the Early Career Programme evolved into a “fast track” to tenure, well within the maximum of six years.

While in the program, fellows of the Early Career Talent Programme are presented with ample opportunities to “further personal intellectual fulfillment and an international academic career,” and are given freedom in conducting research and encouragement to explore multidisciplinary areas of research on an international level. Support provided through ERIM includes the provision of office space, secretarial assistance, research facilities (e.g. a world class behavioral lab), library and data facilities, assistance in finding living accommodations, legal/fiscal advice, and social hosting. Participants also receive an internationally competitive salary and an investment budget for research activities.

One of the key features of the program is a “research voucher” structure that allows fellows to focus more on their research in the beginning of the program, and gradually receive a heavier teaching load as the program progresses, to develop teaching skills which are important for their future job market value. Whereas a regular ERIM (associate) member would receive a 0.4 FTE research voucher, the researchers in this program receive 0.8; 0.7; 0.6 and 0.6 research voucher in each of the first four years of the program. Therefore, they commence the program spending more time on research (0.8 or 80% of focus on research) and less time teaching (0.2 or 20% of focus on teaching). It is expected that after 4 years, the participants will have published enough to acquire the ERIM High Performing Member status with a 0.6 research voucher.

The research voucher is fully funded through structural research funds. At the same time, the departments of the school cover the portion of the salary pertaining to the teaching load, thus ensuring the department’s commitment in hiring and coaching their Early Career Talent Fellows.

As Mijnhardt stresses, aiming at “quality publishing” is very important in this program. Participants are given extra research time in their academic careers, rather than going straight into teaching in order to boost publishing performance in top journals and scholarly works. The research voucher structure is seen as crucial in helping fellows get tenured faster, and speeding up their career progression. Since the program is fully integrated with faculty/departmental policy in hiring new junior faculty with high research potential, and aligned with promotion and tenure policies, it is expected that the participants will receive permanent offers as an associate professor upon program completion. This is particularly likely if they have been successful at obtaining external academic grants from, for example, the Dutch National Science Foundation (NWO) or European career grants, like Marie Curie grants; submitting grant proposals is a requirement for participants in the program.
Strengths and Success

The program’s selective nature reflects ERIM’s perspective that its researchers are a very valuable investment worth supporting through their entire careers at EUR. The idea of “nurturing talent” and the program’s embedded nature are the Early Career Talent Programme’s key success factors, claims Mijnhardt. Participants receive large amounts of support for their research initiatives, and ERIM encourages fellows to take on truly innovative research topics for which they have a passion for. Mijnhardt notes that ERIM in essence shares the risk with the relevant department for research topics that are particularly challenging and do not comply with traditional research themes.

Currently, there are over 350 researchers at Erasmus University in the area of management. By the end of 2009 more than twenty researchers had entered the ERIM Early Career Talent Programme, which is about 20% of the total tenure track faculty in ERIM. Because of the selective nature of the program, nearly all participants get tenured at EUR on completion of the program. Mijnhardt mentions that several promising international academics were persuaded to come to Erasmus University for permanent positions because of this program. Regardless of whether they stay at EUR or go elsewhere, graduates of the talent program take away a values system and a performance mindset that either reinforces (at EUR) or influences (elsewhere) an emphasis on cultivating research skills as a part of ongoing faculty development.

Furthermore, the Early Career Talent Programme is just one component of an overall performance system with incentives for different stages in one’s academic career. For example, once fellows are tenured and enter the next stage (associate professor), a new set of incentives with new forms of support is offered. Given the success of the Early Career Talent Programme, ERIM is considering further leveraging its appeal to more senior scientists. This would be done through a system of temporary add-on research vouchers to mid-career and senior members. It would enable selected members to reduce their teaching load temporarily in order to take on a larger research project such as developing a large international research consortium or writing a monograph for a highly prestigious publisher. With ERIM’s philosophy of providing support to its researchers at all career levels, this type of program would fare as an attractive opportunity to researchers who are further along in their careers but who still desire to contribute more to global management research.

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End Notes