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Italian research funds: escaping from the PRIN labyrinth

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Introduction

In the last few months a number of researchers have been involved in the submission process of the PRIN 2012 projects. PRIN is the acronym of **Progetti di ricerca di interesse nazionale** (Research projects of national interest) and refers to one of the major Italian public sources of funding for academic research. The submission to the new proposals follows the recent publication of the PRIN 2010/2011 projects admitted to and cofounded by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (tab.1).

Table 1. PRIN 2010/2011: Projects admitted to cofounding

National Coordinator	Title	University of the national coordinator
Laura Bazzicalupo	Biopolitical governance: inclusion and happiness. Historical and conceptual genealogy, present challenges and future perspectives of a politics for man and society	University of Salerno
Laura Bovone	Sustainable practices of daily lives in a context of crisis: job, consumption, participation	Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore
Pierangelo Isernia*	Italian foreign policy and the new challenges of the international system: actors, institutions and policies	University of Siena
Mario Morcellini	Professions of the public space: beyond the crisis	University of Roma La Sapienza
Leonardo Morlino*	Economic crises and quality of democracy in Europe	LUISS University at Roma
Ida Regalia	Old and new modes of job regulation in Italian and European small enterprises	University of Milano
Antonio Schizzerotto	Social belongings, beliefs about instruction and participation to the university: an integrated experiment with a longitudinal survey	University of Trento
Paolo Segatti	Political representation changes in Italy. Voting decision in the 2013-2015 electoral cycle	University of Milano
Carlo Trigilia	University, innovation and regional economies	University of Firenze
Pierluigi Valsecchi	State, plurality, changes in Africa	University of Pavia

Note: Due to the lack of information and transparency of the Miur Internet site, I would prefer not to give the list of the research units, which would be incomplete. At the same time, I have decided to give the complete list of all the projects funded in the research area of Political and Social Science because of the possibility of multidisciplinary research

projects with, for instance, political scientists participating in sociologists' research units and vice versa. The names of the coordinators belonging to the disciplinary sectors of Political Science are also emphasized by an asterisk.

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After the publication of the PRIN 2012 call for proposals, colleagues have been confronted with the new procedures required for submission. After the path-breaking approach introduced in the last 2011-2012 call, the Miur has promoted different relevant reforms. The main ones are the following:

1. the pre-selection phase—until now carried out under the responsibility of the single universities—will be based on draft projects;
2. the criteria used in the pre-selection phase are now partially defined by the National Committee of Research Guarantors (*Comitato Nazionale dei Garanti della Ricerca* – CNGR) created after the approval of the Gelmini Reform;
3. instead of making reference to the 'traditional' fourteen disciplinary areas, the projects are now divided according to the three ERC domains;
4. there are three lines of interventions, defined according to the time-span between the coordinator's first PhD, specialization or Bachelor and the publication of the 2012 call; specific funds are reserved for younger scholars;
5. there are no limits to the number of operative units participating in projects and no minimum and maximum costs associated with the projects.

I will now, briefly, illustrate the new requirements and procedures established by the 2012 call for proposals, with the aim of rendering them more familiar to the research community. The changes introduced by the 2012 call for proposals have on occasion been the cause of disorientation among researchers and professors. Finding the way out of this labyrinth is not always easy...

Evaluation and selection

The procedure introduced in the 2010-2011 call was confirmed in 2012. The evaluation of the submitted proposals is organized in two different steps: the first is under the responsibility of the single university, the second is organized by the MIUR itself. The Ministry works by means of Selection Committees (*Comitati di Selezione* – CdS) organized according to the three European Research Council domains (*Social Sciences and Humanities* – SH; *Life Sciences* – LS; *Physical Sciences and Engineering* – PE), whose members are appointed with Directorial decree after designation by the CNGR (tab. 2 and tab. 3).

Table 2. Composition of the National Committee of Research Guarantors (CNGR)

Name	Institution
Angelos Chaniotis	University of Princeton
Daniela Cocchi	University of Bologna
Anna Maria Colao	University of Napoli
Alberto Sangiovanni Vincentelli	University of California, Berkeley
Francesco Sette	European Synchrotron Radiation Facility, Grenoble
Vincenzo Barone	Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa
Claudio Franchini	University of Tor Vergata, Roma

Note: CNGR members have been nominated by the Ministerial Decree D.M. 7645 of 26 April 2012.

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Table 3. Composition of the CdS Social Sciences and Humanities – SH

Panel	Name	Institution
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SH 1 Individuals, Institutions and Markets: economics, finance and management	Massimo Bordignon	Catholic University of Milano
SH2 Institutions, Values, Beliefs and Behavior: sociology, social anthropology, political science, law, communication, social studies of science and technology	Giovanna Colombini	University of Pisa
SH3 Environment, Space and Populations: environmental studies, demography, social geography, urban and regional studies	Francesco Billari	University of Oxford
SH4 The Human Mind and Its Complexity: cognition, psychology, linguistics, philosophy and education	Michela Cennamo	University of Napoli
SH5 Cultures and Cultural Production: literature, visual and performing arts, music, cultural and comparative studies	Lina Bolzoni	Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa
SH6 The Study of the Human Past: archaeology, history and memory	Tonio Hölscher	University of Heidelberg

Note: CdS members have been nominated by Directorial Decree D.D. n. 648 8 April 2013.

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Once they have gathered the evaluations of anonymous referees, the CdSs are invited to express their evaluation according to a 5-point scale (tab. 4).

Table 4. The evaluation scale of the projects

Category	Description	Points
Excellent	Fully convincing, without weakness	5
Very good	Extremely strong with, at most, some minor weakness	4
Good	Strong but with some moderate weakness	3
Fair	Some important weakness	2
Poor	Not very convincing with numerous weakness	1

Note: CdS members have been nominated by the Directorial Decree D.D. n. 648 of 8 April 2013.

*

Only the projects that have been pre-selected by the single universities are submitted to evaluation by the MIUR. Each University shall pre-select a number of proposals not exceeding 0,75% of the number of professors and researchers of the university or, if superior, not exceeding the double of the mean of the projects financed in the last five PRIN call for proposals (tab. 5).

Table 5. Italian Universities that can pre-select more than 20 projects

University	Max N of pre-selected projects	University	Max N of pre-selected projects
University of Rome La Sapienza	122	University of Genoa	32
University of Bologna	75	University of Pavia	32
University of Milan	74	University of Perugia	29
University of Naples Federico II	73	University of Siena	28
University of Padua	73	University of Palermo	26
University of Florence	66	University of Trieste	26
University of Pisa	48	University of Roma Tre	25
University of Turin	42	Polytechnic of Turin	24

University of Rome Tor Vergata	35	Second University of Naples	22
University of Catania	33	Catholic University of Milan	20
Polytechnic of Milan	33	University of Milan Bicocca	20
University of Bari	33	University of Parma	20

*

Pre-selection is based on the judgment of three anonymous referees that take into account the innovativeness and originality of the proposed project, the methodology and scientific qualifications, in relation to the submitted project, of the scientific coordinator and of the managers of the operative units. Each university is subsequently responsible for the definition of the pre-selected projects to be newly submitted to the MIUR.

Characteristics of the projects

First of all, PRIN projects should be submitted by a 'Principal Investigator' called the PI, who is a Professor or researcher that coordinates several operative units and has the scientific responsibility of the entire project. The operative units are led by a local manager, in charge of organizational responsibility, and are composed of Professors and researchers. The 2012 call for proposals is organized along three lines of action, according to the time span between the PI's first PhD, specialization or Bachelor and the publication of the call for proposals. The first line (line A) is called 'Starting PRIN – young researchers', the second line (line B) is called 'PRIN Consolidator', and the third line (Line C) is called 'PRIN Advanced' (tab. 6). Mixed projects are allowed: in line A and B researchers can belong to line A and/or B but not C; in line C researchers can belong indifferently to line A or B or C.

Table 6. The temporal limits applied for the definition of the PI's line of belonging

Line A – PRIN starting	PhD/Specialization ≤ 7 or bachelor ≤ 10
Line B – PRIN consolidator	$7 < \text{PhD/Specialization} \leq 12$ or $10 < \text{bachelor} \leq 15$
Line C – PRIN advanced	PhD/Specialization > 12 or bachelor > 15

*

The MIUR finances the approved projects with 70% of the costs which are considered adequate for the implementation of the research. The approved projects will have at their disposal no less than 80% of the costs considered adequate. The Social Sciences and Humanities (SH) domain has €7,651,978 available for funding, half of the funds provided for the other two domains (€ 15,303,958 each). In the SH domain at least €750,000 is reserved for 'PRIN starting' and €1,000,000 for 'PRIN consolidator'. Results of the national selection are due on 20 October 2013 (tab. 7).

Table 7. Principal deadlines for the 2012 call for proposals

Date	Activity
11/02/2013	Submission of a brief project proposal by the PI to its university
28/02/2013	The CNGR nominates the CdS' members
19/04/2013	End of the peer review for the pre-selection phase
10/05/2013	Communication of the pre-selected proposals
14/06/2013	Submission of the complete detailed proposal to the MIUR
30/09/2013	End of the peer review for the selection phase
20/10/2013	Communication of the selected projects



Conclusion

The PRIN 2012 call for proposals introduced several changes to the selection procedure. It is plausible that the next call for proposals will change yet again. The aim of the MIUR is apparently that of making the national system of research funding more similar to the one adopted by the EU and more in line with Horizon 2020. For this reason, one may expect that in 2013 scholars will enter into yet another labyrinth.



For more information

General information about the PRIN is available at [this link \(http://prin.miur.it/\)](http://prin.miur.it/).

The general call for proposals is available [here \(http://prin.miur.it/documenti/2012/BANDO_PRIN_2012.pdf\)](http://prin.miur.it/documenti/2012/BANDO_PRIN_2012.pdf), with amendments introduced by the following [ministerial decree \(http://attiministeriali.miur.it/anno-2013/febbraio/dm-01022013.aspx\)](http://attiministeriali.miur.it/anno-2013/febbraio/dm-01022013.aspx).

Some universities have elaborated some operative documents and Q&A. As examples, one can see those available at the [University of Trento \(http://www.unitn.it/ateneo/bando-ricerca/26772/bando-prin-progetti-di-ricerca-di-interesse-nazionale-bando-2012\)](http://www.unitn.it/ateneo/bando-ricerca/26772/bando-prin-progetti-di-ricerca-di-interesse-nazionale-bando-2012), the [University of Milan \(http://www.unimi.it/ricerca/finanziamenti_nazionali/2332.htm\)](http://www.unimi.it/ricerca/finanziamenti_nazionali/2332.htm), and the [University of Padua \(http://www.unipd.it/ricerca/finanziamenti/finanziamenti-ministeriali/progetti-di-ricerca-di-rilevante-interesse-nazionale\)](http://www.unipd.it/ricerca/finanziamenti/finanziamenti-ministeriali/progetti-di-ricerca-di-rilevante-interesse-nazionale).

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