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Scottish scientist wins £5.5m for major research

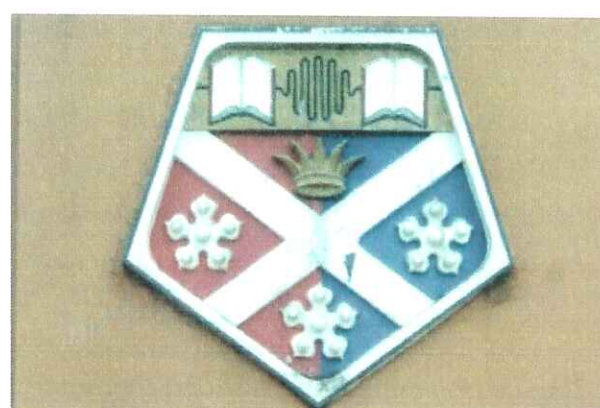
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A Scottish scientist is to head a major cross-European research project into the origins of life, having secured £5.5million of funding.

Martin McCoustra, professor of chemical physics at Heriot-Watt University, will take control of the LASSIE, Laboratory Astrochemical Surface Science in Europe, physics and astronomy initiative.



LASSIE will, in part, focus on the investigation into whether life began due to complex organic molecules being manufactured in the freezing centres of interstellar clouds.

Mr McCoustra sought finance for the project through the European Commission's 7th Framework Programme, securing one of the largest sums ever awarded and nearly double the amount normally granted.

He and his team will work alongside astronomers and astrophysicists from 13 other higher education institutes based across Europe, including the University of Strathclyde, and others

in Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the Netherlands.

Mr McCoustra said: "This is an extremely exciting project and I am delighted that we have been able to secure the funding to allow us to progress with our research.

"Whilst the project will provide the opportunity to establish a vital understanding into how life began and to question what we believe we know now, it is also the all-round experience that we can offer those involved, which will equip them with the skills they need to take them further with their

scientific careers."

The project will provide job opportunities for 28 new researchers and four experienced researchers, giving each the chance to work at the 13 other higher education institutes involved.

Junior researchers will also be given the chance to gain practical work in the industry and learn language skills.

Funding was awarded by Marie Curie Actions within the European Commission's Framework Programme, which is currently in its

seventh cycle.

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