

RCUK RESPONSE TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S HORIZON 2020 PROPOSAL

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- Research Councils UK (RCUK), the partnership of the seven Research Councils of the United Kingdom, welcomes the publication of the European Commission's proposal for Horizon 2020, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, and supports the three-pillar structure that is proposed.
- RCUK is particularly pleased to see the strong emphasis on excellence throughout the programme, and not just within the 'Excellent Science' pillar, believing that excellence-based funding is essential in strengthening the European science base and ensuring European growth and competitiveness.
- In developing excellence and capacity across Member States, cohesion funding has an important role. RCUK supports the proposals to improve complementarity between this and Horizon 2020, such that Structural Funds can be better used for research and innovation-related development, and that funds to support research and innovation continue to be allocated on the basis of excellence.
- RCUK supports the central role of frontier research and bottom-up activities, as proposed under the 'Excellent Science' pillar. The proposed increase of the ERC budget will allow for funding of a greater number of the ERC's flagship schemes (Advanced Grants and Starting Grants) and continuation of the newer schemes (Proof of Concept and Synergy Grants, if successful in its pilot phase). However, RCUK would caution against expansion beyond these core schemes, without careful consideration and consultation, to ensure that the ERC remains both straightforward in operation and focused on excellence. The ERC should continue to fund the highest-quality projects, and care should be taken to ensure that this quality is not diluted if the programme expands. We would therefore not expect to see an increase in the budget that is significantly out of scale with the general budget increase without demonstration that there is demand for this within the current schemes.
- We are also pleased to see that Marie Curie and Research Infrastructures remain an integral element, although are disappointed that these see budget increases that are considerably below that proposed for the ERC. The Marie Curie schemes have been extremely successful in fostering research talent in, and attracting researchers to, Europe. The funding provided through the EU for research infrastructures adds significant value to investments made at Member State level and has an important leverage and structural effect. Consequently, there is justification for increased funding in both programme areas.
- Also under the 'Excellent Science' pillar, the increased focus on, and budget for, Future and Emerging Technologies (FET) in all areas is welcomed.
- Horizon 2020 proposes a move towards a 'partnership' approach, with increased opportunities for co-funded activities, and a stronger role for Member and Associated State organisations in terms of co-ordinated European-level funding. This approach will only work if there is an understanding of the role of different partners, and if all potential partners are included from the outset in the debate, with a view to the development of equitable partnerships which balance the needs of Member State stakeholders and the Commission. Consequently, the European Commission is encouraged to maintain dialogue with key stakeholders, including national research funders and research institutions, as the details of these mechanisms are worked out.

- The Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs) introduced in FP7 can be an extremely useful mechanism for partnering and joint programming, particularly in terms of addressing the agreed societal challenges. Thus, RCUK supports continuation of such mechanisms into Horizon 2020, where appropriate and where driven by Member States and their research communities. ERA-Nets can also be a valuable mechanism for joint planning and funding on more focused research topics.
- RCUK supports the challenge-based approach proposed for Horizon 2020, and the significant budget allocated to the 'Societal Challenges' pillar. However, we recognise that much detail on how these will operate in practice is yet to be developed. It is hoped that the challenges will each include a coherent and streamlined range of instruments, funding both large- and small-scale projects, and focused and more open topics. Inter- and multi-disciplinarity will be essential, with all relevant disciplines brought into the challenge. It should also be recognised that priorities may shift over the lifetime of Horizon 2020, and there will need to be sufficient flexibility to adapt to this.
- As stressed in the RCUK response to the consultation on the Common Strategic Framework for Research and Innovation, the new programme should cover all elements of the research and innovation landscape, from basic research through to market and user-oriented activities; it is essential that these elements should be seen as inter-dependent. Consequently, each societal challenge should fund activities at all stages and should encompass a range of approaches; they should also engage all appropriate stakeholders, including research organisations, business, civil society, public authorities and policy makers.
- RCUK has been concerned that as originally configured the 'Inclusive Innovative and Secure Societies' challenge, seemed to bring together a large number of disparate activities in a way that may not be the most coherent or effective. Without a clear orientation, there is a risk that this 'challenge' could lose focus and effectively operate as a collection of separate themes. Furthermore, a number of the issues that currently fall under this challenge are potentially relevant to *all* challenges; for example, promotion of coherent and effective co-operation with third countries, ensuring societal engagement in research and innovation. Suggestions to enhance clarity by having a separate challenge related to security and for horizontal action across challenges would be appropriate ways to address these concerns.
- The inclusion of social sciences and humanities is welcomed, both in the challenge mentioned above and across all challenges, including any separate one on security. However, the importance, and contribution, of social sciences and humanities to each of the challenges is not sufficiently well articulated in the original proposal. A change of approach is needed such that this is an integral and explicit element of all challenges.
- The new structure proposed for Horizon 2020, with the strong focus on multi-disciplinary and multi-activity societal challenges, will naturally require an appropriate committee and management structures. RCUK hopes that the Horizon 2020 comitology will reflect the nature of the new programme, and ensure input from all relevant parties.
- RCUK appreciates the efforts that have been made to simplify the programme, as well as to ensure continuity from current programmes where appropriate. It is clearly a positive development to have rules that apply consistently across Horizon 2020, with a degree of flexibility that allows for derogations where these are essential and justified. However, there is a risk that the scale, and potentially fragmented management, of the programme will in

reality result in a variety of approaches and interpretations, which create complexity for the participants. Simplification efforts must remain participant-focused, and should result in a programme that is easily understood and navigated, and cost effectively administered by both the Commission and participants.

- RCUK also believes that the introduction of a single flat rate for reimbursement of indirect costs is a regressive move, given the investment across Europe in developing ‘full cost’ systems; those institutions that have robust accounting systems, allowing identification of full economic costs, should have the option of indirect cost reimbursement based on this. The suggestion that VAT may be an eligible cost is welcome, but it is noted that this is a decision at the level of the Financial Regulation; without this, the proposed reimbursement regime will be considerably less attractive.
- RCUK supports the concept of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) as an integrating mechanism for the knowledge triangle, and is looking forward to the tangible outcomes of this ambitious experiment to help inform the second phase. RCUK also supports the approach of bringing the EIT into the framework of Horizon 2020, but recognises that there are a number of questions about how this will operate, particularly in view of the proposed budget increase. It is important that there is a clear articulation of the objectives, activities and mechanisms of the EIT, and how these fit with the rest of Horizon 2020. This includes clarification on where and how the EIT will derogate from the common Horizon 2020 rules, as this is an issue of potential complication for participants. Clarity on the Commission’s ambitions for Member State participation in EIT activities would also be helpful.
- Horizon 2020 should not stop at the borders of the European Union, and RCUK supports the continuation of opportunities for ‘third country’ researchers to collaborate with European researchers through EU funding instruments. It will be important to ensure that these instruments encourage best-with-best collaboration, to maximise the return both to Europe and globally.
- Finally, RCUK welcomes having had the opportunity to feed into the Horizon 2020 debate, and trusts that the European Commission will ensure regular dialogue with, and consultation of, key stakeholders as the detail and implementation mechanisms of the programme are developed.