



Paper by the British Academy in response to the consultation on the Green Paper *From Challenges to Opportunities: Towards a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation Funding*

1. The British Academy¹ welcomes the Green Paper on a Common Strategic Framework for Research and Innovation Funding as a first outline of how EU research instruments might work together to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of funding for research at both national and EU levels. However the Academy has certain concerns about some of the underlying premises. In developing its responses to the Green Paper, the Academy has consulted widely with academies across Europe, most recently at a meeting called by the British Academy and ALLEA (All European Academies) held in Brussels on 31 March 2011, and attended by representatives of 24 academies from across Europe².
2. The Green Paper incorporates, without questioning, a view of innovation in response to societal challenges which is very limited in scope. It addresses questions concerned with “smart growth”, as part of the 2020 agenda. However the 2020 issues of sustainability and inclusion are not covered with the same attention. It adopts what is called, in innovation studies, the “linear” approach, in which basic research leads to applied research, then to inventions and finally to innovation. There is strong evidence that this model is highly misleading and can be highly inefficient. Most innovation is actually the result of “learning by doing” and proceeds by small increments. There are very few so-called “disruptive” technologies and even they take many years to affect economic progress. It is still important to undertake fundamental research, because a great deal of such research has ultimately proved to produce inventions of economic value, but it is very rare for these inventions/innovations to be planned or foreseen.
3. The Academy is concerned that insufficient attention is paid to the need for EU policy to take account of the requirement for fundamental analysis of societal problems, by scholars in the humanities and social sciences, before designing policies in response to those problems. Furthermore, few of the “grand challenges” which have been identified are likely to be susceptible to technological solutions, while all of them require analysis by social science and humanities research before political action.

Grand Challenges

4. Using Grand Challenges (GCs) as a method of identifying the most important questions facing Europe in the coming years is a sensible way of focusing resources. Among the GCs mentioned as requiring attention are, commonly, topics such as dealing with climate change, food security, and the problems of an ageing population. It will be important to ensure that, in all GCs, appropriate and due attention is paid to their social and human aspects. Given awareness of the difficulties experienced in earlier FPs in attempting to establish a truly interdisciplinary approach, it will be vital to ensure a fully integrated approach to GCs, and the provision of a funding format appropriate for SSH research. For example, if the Commission and national

¹ The British Academy, as the UK’s national academy for the humanities and social sciences, focuses in this document on the opportunities for research and innovation in the humanities and social sciences (HSS).

² Academies from Belgium, Bosnia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK were represented at the meeting.

governments agreed that climate change was a major GC which should be addressed in a structured manner, it would be very important to ensure that appropriate attention was paid to the impacts on society of climate change, and to consider how these might be mitigated by suitable policy developments.

5. It is also important to build sufficient flexibility into the programme to allow rapid response to newly-emerging problems and questions which require research attention. The Common Strategic Framework must allow Europe to respond to developments across the course of its lifetime.

A Grand Challenge led by Social Sciences and Humanities

6. There is a need for a Grand Challenge which directly addresses the major policy issues raised by the changing economic, social and cultural dynamics of European societies. We argue strongly for a Grand Challenge which might be entitled *Understanding Europe*. A research programme addressing this Grand Challenge would focus upon social and cultural change and could be composed of three major sub-themes, with a focus on the inter-relationship between Europe and other regions of the world transversal to all three sub-themes.

Memory, identity and cultural change

A central challenge facing Europe over the next decades is to create an environment in which European, national and ethnic identities can coexist and be mutually enriching. This requires an enhanced awareness of the historical context of current social and cultural changes, the critical role of language, communications and technologies, and an understanding of conflict and past policy failure and future policy needs as essential preconditions of more effective future policies.

Employment, education and working lives

With increased economic internationalisation and new technologies exploiting the potential of superfast broadband, the world of work is likely to be transformed in the coming decade. Policy-makers will need a close understanding of the rapidly changing structure of employment and work, and its implications for education, skills and training, and for people's experiences of their working lives and life-course patterns, including risks of precariousness, unemployment and social exclusion.

Inequality, families and the quality of life

As the constraints on ever-increasing material prosperity become more severe, social progress is likely to be increasingly assessed in terms of the quality of people's lives. Research needs to focus on the changing extent and distribution of inequality and its implications for intergenerational justice, personal well-being and quality of life. Enhancing social mobility will become an ever more urgent issue if Europe is to make full use of its talent. This requires a deeper understanding of the determinants of, among other questions, the intergenerational transmission of inequality, in particular the role of changing family structures and the potential for policy to offset early disadvantage.

European Research Area

7. If the aim of achieving an integrated European Research Area is to be met, then more attention must be given to the question of how EU research policies operate to increase cohesiveness. While support for excellent research should remain the highest priority of the Common Strategic Framework, there is a strong case for ensuring that structures and systems do not operate against members of the EU12, which have many excellent scholars who need more infrastructural support, and who do not have the management and administration structures to meet the demands imposed by EU grants. The promotion of support for networks of scholars across Europe would be helpful. The provision of additional information and help to applicants from the EU12 would be of assistance in promoting equality of opportunity. The coordination of

Research and Innovation opportunities with opportunities provided through other channels, such as Structural and Cohesion Funds, would also be valuable.

European Research Council

8. The ERC has been one of the major successes of recent EU research funding and it should be given a higher proportion of the research budget. It has helped to develop world-class excellence across Europe, supporting the best researchers through a very competitive process which has done much to establish pan-European criteria for excellence. The focus on the principal investigator on a bottom-up basis is crucial. It may be important, however, to consider how to support teams and networks of researchers, to develop stronger cross-national research. Seed funding for less well-resourced countries would enable them to support small-scale network-building meetings, to facilitate the development of contacts and experience. In this way, they would be prepared to make later, more substantial bids. In particular, younger scholars can be helped to develop their profile by relatively small levels of funding which enable them to bring scholars to work together across Europe.

Research Infrastructures

9. Research infrastructure is as vital for HSS as for other research areas, but is different in kind. Essential infrastructures for SSH include digitised facilities for libraries, repositories, collections, GIS datasets and databases across Europe. Social surveys, longitudinal studies, historical data, and the means to gather and make available for analysis the enormous quantities of information in public and commercial databases are also important. In addition tools for analysis and access to the products of research (publications and the underlying data) are essential; such tools are increasingly sophisticated and many have been co-developed by researchers from across Europe and beyond, some in actions already supported by the Commission. There should be comprehensive mapping of research expertise, for example through decentralised but compatible research information systems. Building on the important work already achieved in ESFRI, and taking into account the many medium- and small-scale national research infrastructures that need to be networked at a European level, a strategy for providing the SSH fields with comprehensive European research infrastructure would include the elements mentioned above, as well as enduring support for data conservation and migration, mechanisms to ensure comparability of data and incentives for national participation in data collection.

Marie Curie Actions

10. Marie Curie Actions offer a valuable tool encouraging the development of expertise, strong networks across countries and disciplines, and development of research capacity. There is a good case for enhancing funding. In line with the interim evaluation of FP7, the People programme is a tool to invest in strengthening the participation of EU12 researchers in the ERA. It would be preferable to develop mechanisms to compensate for risks such as brain drain from the EU12, eg by strengthening the returnee component of the scheme. Greater flexibility over the duration and timing of the research visits (eg by allowing shorter visits, or visits of an agreed total length of time within an extended timeframe) would encourage those who would find it difficult, for personal or professional reasons, to contemplate a 1- or 2-year Fellowship. Plans to change scheme formats and require a year in business as well as academia could have major impact on HSS take-up unless definitions of possible partners are widened. For HSS, organisations such as museums and voluntary associations could provide opportunities for research training and addressing questions of innovation in different sectors. The implications of the move of Marie Curie Actions to DG Education need careful consideration. They are not just an education tool; they offer crucial opportunities for developing early career researchers, and strengthening research capacity across Europe. Mobility is vital for scientific integration.

EU Research Funding: structure and process

11. Simplification of the structure and process of EU research and innovation funding is absolutely essential. The scale of administration must be proportionate to the budget needed to conduct high quality research. This will vary from project to project and according to the type of research, with hard science research generally, although not always, requiring more costly facilities and often larger research teams. Scale of grant is also important: smaller grants can often be very productive, particularly for humanities and social sciences research, where requirements may be different from the natural sciences, and therefore they justify higher proportionate administrative costs. In addition, proposed areas of research must be attractive, addressing issues of genuine concern and allowing a flexible response. A sufficient proportion of costs must be met; raising additional funding to undertake a project may be harder in coming years, particularly in some countries within Europe, and it is important not to put off good researchers. Improvement of the time from Call to grant would also be welcomed, as would adherence to an announced timetable for decision-making.
12. There is a place for both larger and smaller projects, and it is very important to retain adequate facility to support both. Large-scale strategic projects require very significant management resource to operate; they may be overly bureaucratic and may even produce less innovative research because of the need for agreement across a wide range of diverse participants. The demands of large-scale projects may also lead to an increasing risk of dualism within the EU, as smaller countries or countries with limited research resources are often unable to provide the administrative support necessary to lead and manage the projects. Smaller-scale projects have the potential for greater flexibility and efficiency. It should also be noted that the scale of project required to address a research issue satisfactorily may vary by discipline – SSH projects may require lower funding than some natural science or technological project with a high infrastructure requirement.
13. There need not be a particular preference for curiosity-driven over agenda-driven research or vice versa; one type may be appropriate in one case, another in another. New problems – such as obesity – may need more curiosity-driven, or fundamental, research than old problems – such as demographic change – where a great deal of fundamental research has already taken place, and may require harnessing in a more agenda-driven way. It is also possible that curiosity-driven research may allow greater flexibility in dealing with emerging problems than agenda-driven research.

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