

Consultation on Green Paper – towards a Common Strategic Framework for EU research and innovation funding

Meta Informations

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User name

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Your details

on behalf of an association

I am answering as

United Kingdom

My/ my organisation's country of location is

Higher Education

My/ my organisation's main activity is

The name of my organisation is

Engineering Professors' Council

None of the above

Have you or your organisation received funding in the last three years from

No

Have you or do you intend to submit a separate written response to this consultation

Working together to deliver on Europe 2020

1. How should the Common Strategic Framework make EU research and innovation more attractive and easy to access for participants? What is needed in addition to a single entry point with common IT tools, a one stop shop for support, a streamlined set of funding instruments covering the full

innovation chain and further steps towards administrative simplification?

As has been said numerous times recently, the whole application process needs to be simplified, and most importantly a two-stage application process is desirable. The first stage should be relatively brief, and constitute an intention to bid. Any application which proceeds to the second stage should have greater than a 90% chance of success.

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

2. How should EU funding best cover the full innovation cycle from research to market uptake?

There should be a multiplicity of funding instruments dedicated to particular aspects of the process. A one-size-fits all approach will not work. The ERC is dedicated to fundamental curiosity-driven research and should remain so. The conditions (constraints) surrounding Framework programmes, such as multi-national, joint ventures with industry etc. effectively prohibit fundamental curiosity-driven research, and can largely be industry-led development programmes. For the later stages of the innovation cycle, essentially business development grants are needed, not research grants.

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

3. What are the characteristics of EU funding that maximise the benefit of acting at the EU level? Should there be a strong emphasis on leveraging other sources of funding?

EU funding is, by definition, particularly relevant to organisations seeking collaboration and networking with organizations in other EU member states. Leverage of other funding, although always desirable if appropriate, should be approached with caution as it may dilute the objectives, and give extra constraints.

Important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

4. How should EU research and innovation funding be used to pool Member States' research and innovation resources? Should Joint Programming Initiatives between groups of Member States be supported?

Pooling of resources should be encouraged for large projects covering a wide range of research topics within a given sector of industry, and for large fundamental science projects. There are considerable IPR problems with pooled resources. Any Joint Programming Initiatives should be bottom-up, not top-down, and avoid additional bureaucracy.

Very important
Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question? Should the budget be allocated to a certain number of projects? Should the budget be allocated to a certain number of projects? Should the budget be allocated to a certain number of projects?

degree of flexibility and diversity to achieve objectives of different instruments, and respond to the needs of different beneficiaries, in particular SMEs?

There should be a differentiated set of funding instruments, directed at different goals. A one-size-fits all model would be far too unwieldy. For SMEs there should be a dedicated programme which is ultra-flexible, and based around local (national) accounting conventions. SMEs have not got the expertise, or time, to expend effort complying with EU accounting systems. Universities, with dedicated teams of experts, find it difficult.

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

7. What should be the measure of success for EU research and innovation funding?

Which performances indicators could be used?

This is a very important area. Successful innovation in safety-critical industries, such as transportation and energy, require lead times of typically 15-20 years. Therefore, any performance measures, and reviews, should take this into account. There need to be appropriate performance measures introduced for each specific type of funding stream. A one-size-fit-all approach will not work.

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

8. How should EU research and innovation funding relate to regional and national funding? How should this funding complement funds from the future Cohesion policy, designed to help the less developed regions of the EU, and the rural development fund?

EU research funding should take into account regional and national funding, and avoid duplication. It should be questioned whether EU research funding is appropriate for rural development. It should be considered alongside such development funds. It is also questionable whether EU research funds should go to rural underdeveloped regions anyway.

Important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

Tackling Societal Challenges

9. How should a stronger focus on societal challenges affect the balance between curiosity-driven research and agenda-driven activities?

The two activities are largely independent. Curiosity-driven research can easily exist within an overall context of societal challenges.

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

10. Should there be more room for bottom-up activities?

YES. It is highly unlikely that any paradigm-changing research will emanate from highly constrained top-down, strategic Framework programmes. Paradigm-changing research almost invariably results from “skunk work” on an individual researcher basis, and is “off the map”. This should be the focus of the ERC, and judgements made by young researchers, who have not necessarily got world-wide reputations. Otherwise, if the research proposed confounds the establishment position, it will probably not get funded (Kuhn’s Theory of Scientific Revolutions).

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

11. How should EU research and innovation funding best support policy making and forward looking activities?

No one can foretell the future. EU research policy should be generic and enabling. Futuristic looking research will emerge, it cannot be planned. This is the role of the ERC.

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

12. How should the role of the Commission's Joint Research Centre be improved in supporting policy making and forward looking activities?

The activities of the JRC should be managed in close collaboration with the ERC, and Framework programmes, to avoid duplication, and ensure the greatest complementarity.

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

13. How could EU research and innovation activities attract greater interest and involvement of citizens and civil society?

An exceptionally difficult question. Within the UK the public awareness, and understanding of science, is in general very poor. Without a sustained public media campaign awareness of EU research and innovation will not remotely impinge on the public consciousness. Every research project proposal should have a “layman’s summary”, which should be widely disseminated. Every project should have a requirement to produce, in addition to papers for learned societies, a “popular” article(s) for public dissemination.

Of some importance

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

Strengthening competitiveness

14. How should EU funding best take account of the broad nature of innovation, including non technological innovation, eco-innovation, and social innovation?

This is a very important topic. The majority of innovation is not research-led, and arises naturally during normal business activities. Therefore, acknowledging this, and designing appropriate funding mechanisms, will be crucial to the future well-being and competitiveness of the EU. Again there needs to be dedicated funding instruments targeted at these areas.

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

15. How should industrial participation in EU research and innovation programmes be strengthened? How should Joint Technology Initiatives (such as those launched in the current Framework Programmes) or different forms of "public private partnership" be supported? What should be the role of European Technology Platforms?

Industrial participation in EU programmes within the UK is low. The UK has a very large SME (micro business) sector, which is one possible explanation for this. Engaging the SME sector in national, let alone international research, is a major long-standing challenge. A possible route would be major engagement with the employer organisations which support the SME sector, and the banking sector which provides business loans.

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

16. How and what type of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) should be supported at EU level; how should this complement national and regional level schemes? What kind of measures should be taken to decisively facilitate the participation of SMEs in EU research and innovation programmes?

There should be utilisation of relevant research into the nature of what is known as the "SME sector", what size of firms are actually involved, and what sectors etc. In the UK there are a plethora of micro businesses, and organised "research" in an anathema to this sector. Therefore, any attempts to get involvement with SMEs needs to be highly targeted, and probably positioned within industrial sectors. Programmes aimed at SMEs need to be very efficient (low bureaucracy), and flexible with the ability to join, drop out, re-join etc.

Such programmes may also have to address consortia of sector based-SMEs; although here the IPR issues will be very difficult.

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

17. How should open, light and fast implementation schemes (e.g. building on the current FET actions and CIP eco-innovation market replication projects) be designed to allow flexible exploration and commercialisation of novel ideas, in particular by SMEs?

See answer to question 16.

Of some importance

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

18. How should EU level financial instruments (equity and debt based) be used more extensively?

Don't know

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

19. Should new approaches to supporting research and innovation be introduced, in particular through public procurement, including through rules on pre-commercial procurement, and/or inducement prizes?

The linking of publicly-funded research to public procurement is desirable, to obtain the greatest leverage. The use of prizes is debateable.

Important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

20. How should intellectual property rules governing EU funding strike the right balance between competitiveness aspects and the need for access to and dissemination of scientific results?

A very difficult question, which bedevils much state-, and EU-funded, collaborative research. A general principle of what goes in governs what comes out is useful. IPR issues can dominate programmes involving SMEs and may need special provision.

Strengthening Europe's science base and the European Research Area

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

21. How should the role of the European Research Council be

strengthened in supporting world class excellence?

World class excellence should be the ONLY criteria for research funded through the ERC. Also see answer to question 10.

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

22. How should EU support assist Member States in building up excellence?

The EU should fund extensive benchmarking exercises to support member states. The benchmarking should be done with fully-funded international teams of subject experts.

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

23. How should the role of Marie Curie Actions be strengthened in promoting researcher mobility and developing attractive careers?

The Marie Curie programme has been a major success and should be maintained, or indeed strengthened. This will be particularly important in the future for post-doctoral mobility as the straightened economic times ensue.

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

24. What actions should be taken at EU level to further strengthen the role of women in science and innovation?

This is a long-standing problem area, and possibly positive discrimination may be necessary, as a last resort. Flexible programmes, and assessment criteria, are required to cater for absences from research due to family commitments. There are obvious potential areas of conflict with equality legislation.

Important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

25. How should research infrastructures (including EU-wide e-Infrastructures) be supported at EU level?

Don't know

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

26. How should international cooperation with non-EU countries be supported e.g. in terms of priority areas of strategic interest, instruments, reciprocity (including on IPR aspects) or cooperation with Member States?

This is a largely a political question. In terms of science and technology open dissemination should be the goal. In terms of subsidised, joint funded, or other strategic co-operation, the IPR should largely reside with the providing entity i.e. the EU.

Important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

27. Which key issues and obstacles concerning ERA should EU funding instruments seek to overcome, and which should be addressed by other (e.g. legislative) measures?

In general legislative measures should be avoided in a research environment.

Very important

How important are the aspects covered in this question?

Closing question

Are there any other ideas of comments which you believe are important for future EU research and innovation funding and are not covered in the Green Paper?