

Towards the 9th Framework Programme: EUA Assesses EU Competitiveness Council Conclusions

The European University Association (EUA) welcomes the conclusions drawn by the EU Competitiveness Council on 1 December 2017. The Association is pleased with its forceful commitment to the next Framework Programme (FP9) and a strong European Research Area (ERA). There are broad areas of consensus between the Council proposals and the [EUA position on FP9](#) published in November 2017. The Association, however, would like to highlight a number of matters that must be addressed to ensure that FP9 becomes a powerful successor of Horizon 2020.

Long-term policies and funding instruments for research

As R&D investment in 2016 was at 2.03% of GDP,¹ it is highly welcome that the Competitiveness Council re-affirmed its commitment to the Europe 2020 target of 3% invested in R&D annually. It is regrettable, however, that the Council did not propose a concrete figure for FP9's budget, especially in light of next year's negotiations of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF). The Council, rather, made only a short reference to the position of the European Parliament, which called for an increased budget of 120 billion euros in its 13 June 2017 resolution.² It should be noted that the growth of funding has not kept up with the growth in the number of proposals since FP6. The European Commission estimated that an additional 62.4 billion euros would have been necessary to fund all high-quality proposals for 2014-2016 alone.³

There is increased recognition among stakeholders, as EUA has been arguing, that the overall efficiency of the FP and the entire EU research funding landscape has significantly gone down due to underfunding. This situation is not adequately addressed by simply referring to "oversubscription", as proposed by the Council. At present, EUA estimates that the overall cost of applications, successful or not, are equivalent to between 30% and 50% of the funding that countries receive from Horizon 2020. In other words, the full cost of participation in FP projects remains too high and often unaffordable for beneficiaries. In addition, most of the applications are submitted by publicly-funded organisations, meaning that national budgets bear the costs of unfunded applications.⁴ The next FP, therefore, does not simply need "significant funds" as set out by the Council, rather a substantial increase of its total budget.

Reinforce collaboration and minimise discrepancies

EUA is pleased that the Council highlighted EU-level R&I collaboration as "a very successful example of European cooperation and integration" and further underlined "cooperation, excellence and openness" as fundamental principles of the next FP. The Council also stressed "the importance of achieving broader pan-European impact" and suggested to the Commission "to develop the evaluation process further by e.g. promoting diversity in evaluation panels, piloting blind evaluations, where possible, and to propose measures to promote brain circulation and facilitate openness of R&I networks".

The definition of impact, as underlined by EUA, has to be broadened and clarified. Novel ways of capturing impact beyond purely numerical measures focusing on readiness for technological implementation must be included in impact assessment. Such new indicators must aim at identifying the potential for innovation and benefit for society in the long term.

Closing the innovation gap among regions cannot be fully achieved without the involvement of national funds. This is also demonstrated by recent figures in the EUA 2017 [Public Funding Observatory](#). Different incentive mechanisms should be considered to motivate governments to invest appropriately in R&I at the regional level, also beyond the structural funding timeframe. Moreover, it is important to maintain the co-financing principle. Effective autonomy and governance reforms combined with sufficient investment in R&D, on both EU and national levels, would create a strong basis for minimising discrepancies across Europe and empowering less-performing regions.

As stated in earlier EUA positions, measures for widening participation in the next FP should include simplified rules for participation with a view to engage a wider range of beneficiaries with varied capacity for administrative and other support. They should also include supplementary funds for the engagement of emerging excellent scientists from less research-intensive member states in successful collaborative research teams leading FP9 projects.

Alignment of education, research and innovation

EUA very much appreciates the Council's recognition of the fundamental role of human talent in boosting European competitiveness. Its recommendation to establish "stronger links between the ERA and the European Higher Education Area by exploring how the successor programmes to Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 can better link shared objectives and priorities" resonates within the European university sector. This was also stressed in the [2015 Yerevan Declaration](#) under the Bologna Process.⁵

Universities have a unique institutional profile as they educate and supply highly-skilled graduates to all sectors of the economy and perform ground-breaking research, which often leads to disruptive innovation. They also increasingly engage in third-mission activities such as spin-offs, technology transfer or civic engagement. To fully capitalise on these tangible and intangible assets for the benefit of culture, society and the economy, further linkages between education, research and innovation in the next generation of EU funding programmes are needed. Universities must be placed at the centre of the knowledge triangle.

To do this, EUA has suggested considering the impact of intersectoral mobility for researchers and institutions and the dissemination of research project results through high-level teaching activities as important aspects in the next Framework Programme. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that excellent research must be at the heart of FP9 as it provides the bedrock of education and future innovation. This insight into the long-term, societal and cultural benefits of university-based research and education was rightly and prominently recognised in the October 2017 Tallinn Call for Action by the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU.⁶

Simplification, rationalisation and synergies in the EU funding landscape

The Council “encourages greater linking of R&I with other sectoral policies at EU, national and regional level”. This conclusion is also supported by EUA analyses and evidence from the university sector. Specifically, post-2020, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) should be based on clear, efficient and simple rules aligned to the next FP on a strategic and practical level. As proposed in [EUA's funding paper](#), the possibility of shifting or ring-fencing resources from/within ESIF or other EU programmes to fund more excellent FP9 proposals and enhance participation from less represented countries or regions should be considered. Using ESIF funds to endow the seal of excellence with a budget to support top-ranked, geographically-balanced collaborative consortia should also be taken into account. This would provide higher value for member state investment and help reduce the costs of unsuccessful research proposals that scored above the threshold. In addition, a greater share of ESIF should be allocated to capacity-building, career development and the mobility of researchers.

Simplification within the next FP should also allow institutions to use nationally recognised costing methodologies. It should accept institutional management and accounting practices, guarantee sufficient transparency at all stages and build a trust-based funding system, as indicated by the Council's call for “broader acceptance of beneficiaries' usual accounting practices”.

Moving towards Open Science

EUA values the Council's acknowledgment of “free movement of research data and knowledge” as an essential ingredient “for a fully functioning ERA.” The Association concurs with the view that “mandating Open Access to publications and where appropriate, research data, has a crucial role in boosting impact and transparency of R&I, and bringing science and society closer together.” At the same time, it is evident that the advantages of Open Science should be understood and taken up by researchers.

The EUA Open Access Survey 2016-2017 shows that researchers in only 31% of surveyed universities expressed a good level of strategic interest in Open Access policies.⁷ There is thus a need to provide more incentives for researchers who publish in Open Access. In addition, current research assessment systems are primarily related to quantitative metrics, particularly journal impact factors. This situation needs to evolve to recognise a variety of approaches and activities in Open Science.

In the next FP, measures should be introduced for a more competitive environment in the scientific publishing market with the main objective of decreasing prices. Open Science should be embedded in all parts of the programme by strengthening policies that require researchers to deposit their outputs in existent European repositories and databases. Measures should also be taken to reward and maximise compliance, as well as to make expenses for research data management, such as making data Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Re-usable (FAIR),⁸ eligible costs in FP9 projects. These actions must be undergirded by a coherent EU legislation package as EUA argued in its recent [statement](#) on Open Science to European institutions and national governments.

The next FP also needs to support the involvement of citizens in projects and stimulate public engagement. This approach could be piloted by developing “a common action plan to enhance communication and interaction with society and stakeholders” as suggested by the Council conclusions.

For more information on EUA positions on ERA, Horizon 2020, FP9 and Open Science, please refer to our earlier papers:

[From vision to action: EUA proposals for the next framework programme for research and innovation \(FP9\)](#)

[EUA member consultation: a contribution to the Horizon 2020 mid-term review](#)

[EUA vision for the next EU framework programme for research and innovation \(FP9\)](#)

[Ambitious funding for excellent research in Europe post-2020](#)

[New momentum for the European Research Area](#) (joint statement with CESAER, LERU and Science Europe)

[Excellence, synergies and alignment: Lamy Group sketches out future EU research and innovation programme](#)

[Towards full open access in 2020: aims and recommendations for university leaders and national rectors' conferences](#)

[Towards open access to research data: aims and recommendations for university leaders and national rectors' conferences on research data management and text and data mining](#)

Based on its past and present lines of work, EUA and its broad membership of 850 universities in more than 47 countries look forward to continuous dialogue with the member states, the European Commission, the European Parliament and all other relevant stakeholders to turn the next FP into a success for society and the economy at large.

- 1 Eurostat News Release 183/2017, 1 December 2017, available online at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/8493770/9-01122017-AP-EN.pdf/94cc03d5-693b-4c1d-b5ca-8d32703591e7>.
- 2 European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2017 on the assessment of Horizon 2020 implementation in view of its interim evaluation and the Framework Programme 9 proposal (2016/2147(INI)), available online at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2017-0253+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.
- 3 European Commission, Commission staff working document “In-depth evaluation of Horizon 2020”, Brussels 2017, p. 61, available online at [http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/h2020_evaluations/swd\(2017\)220-in-depth-interim_evaluation-h2020.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/h2020_evaluations/swd(2017)220-in-depth-interim_evaluation-h2020.pdf).
- 4 EUA, EUA’s review: EFSI and Horizon 2020: efficiency and opportunity cost, Brussels 2017, available online at <http://www.eua.be/Libraries/publications-homepage-list/efsi-and-horizon-2020-efficiency-and-opportunity-cost---an-eua-review.pdf> and European Commission, Commission staff working document “In-depth interim evaluation of Horizon 2020”, Brussels 2017, p. 60, available online at [https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/h2020_evaluations/swd\(2017\)220-in-depth-interim_evaluation-h2020.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/h2020_evaluations/swd(2017)220-in-depth-interim_evaluation-h2020.pdf).
- 5 Cf. Yerevan Communiqué 2015, p. 2, available online at <http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/YerevanCommuniqueFinal.pdf>.
- 6 Cf. Tallinn Call for Action 2017. Seize the opportunity now: research and innovation matter for the future of Europe, pp. 2-3, available online at https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/tallinn_call_for_action_2017.pdf.
- 7 First results of EUA’s 2016/17 survey on Open Access are available online at <https://www.slideshare.net/EurUniversityAssociation/eua-questionnaire-on-open-access-201617-survey-results/1>.
- 8 Cf. Mark D. Wilkinson et al., The FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship, in: Scientific Data 3 (2016), available online at <https://www.nature.com/articles/sdata201618.pdf>.

