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Royal Society statement on Horizon Europe

This document highlights Royal Society positions on current proposals for the operation of the ninth European Union (EU) Framework Programme for research and innovation, Horizon Europe. It is not a comprehensive commentary on the draft Regulation.

UK association with Horizon Europe

As a member state of the EU, the UK has contributed to a strong and internationally competitive European Research Area. Its participation in Horizon 2020 and previous Framework Programmes has been crucial to the growth and global influence of UK science. It has also benefited other member states and associated countries who have unparalleled access to UK scientists and research infrastructure. The benefits of UK-Europe collaboration are significant and flow both ways.

The Royal Society welcomes the European Commission's proposals for the next Framework Programme, Horizon Europe, to continue to support scientific collaboration between member states, associated countries and third countries around the world. The draft regulation opens the door to association after the UK has left the EU and will be received positively by UK scientists, who are eager to maintain close collaboration with colleagues in other countries.

In order to foster excellent research in the UK and across Europe, the UK should seek an association agreement that enables access to all aspects of the programme with the maximum possible engagement and influence.

Excellence

As with Horizon 2020, prioritising and promoting excellence should underpin the assessment of projects under Horizon Europe. The programme should support the advancement of both basic and translational research to increase the store of human knowledge and foster excellence, knowledge transfer and entrepreneurship across all disciplines.

Continued funding for excellent science and capacity building in the form of European Research Council (ERC) and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) grants are a positive feature of the Pillar 1 provisions. We would welcome an increased budget for these two funding streams which are hugely valuable for individual researchers working in the UK and rest of Europe.

Taken together, ERC and MSCA have accounted for about half of the total value of fellowships and investigator awards for UK researchers.¹ They also play a critical role in building partnerships. Analysis by Thomson Reuters found that while ERC does not require international collaboration, 58% of ERC funded research between 2005 and 2014 had co-authors based in other countries – a higher proportion than that supported by the UK Research Councils during the same period.²

¹ Technopolis (2017) *The role of EU funding in UK research and innovation and European Commission*

² Royal Society (2016) *UK research and the European Union: The role of the EU in international research collaboration and researcher mobility*

Horizon Europe should also assist in widening access to research infrastructures – the third item under Pillar 1 – to realise the greatest value from investments and support collaboration across the EU and beyond. Cooperation is key to ensuring the continued efficiency, productivity and excellence of European science.

Impact

We endorse the mission-oriented approach for Pillar 2 where a project's 'goal' determines the outcome that must be achieved within a certain budget and timeframe. This will encourage international collaboration on cross-cutting challenges and could add further value by aligning to wider national and EU investments, thereby multiplying impact.

The emphasis on impact more generally is a welcome addition to the draft regulation. The Society has previously stated that the linear approach to measuring research and innovation under Horizon 2020 can be overly prescriptive and that there is a need for wider measures of success. A focus on wide-ranging 'impact pathways' in programme monitoring, evaluation and reporting reflects a move in this direction.

Impact generation is also prominent in the Pillar 3 provisions incorporating the European Innovation Council. To date, the EU has been a valuable source of funding for small and medium-sized businesses.³

Public engagement

Science is influenced by culture and other developments in society just as scientific thinking and innovation influence how people live their lives. It is important that the research community engages with different groups in society and with the public in general to find out about their experiences, listen to their views and to make science part of wider conversation.

This should be reflected in Horizon Europe, and the UK, as a leader in public engagement in science, can share ideas and approaches with European partners. The Society has long played a key role in promoting the value of science around the world and so fully supports this agenda.

Diversity

Scientific and research careers should be open to all; any lack of diversity represents a waste of talent. A diverse and inclusive research workforce draws from the widest range of backgrounds, perspectives and experiences, thereby maximising innovation and creativity in research for humanity's benefit.

The provisions for Horizon Europe should be strengthened to support diversity in the broadest sense (e.g. career level, ethnicity of researchers), as well as gender diversity which is clearly written into the draft regulation.

³ 17% of the R&D undertaken by UK SMEs comes from the EU. Technopolis (2017) *The role of EU funding in UK research and innovation and European Commission, SME Instrument FAQ* [https://www.rvo.nl/sites/default/files/2014/03/Veel%20gestelde%20vragen%20H2020%20MKB%20instrument%20\(Engels\)%20deel%202.pdf](https://www.rvo.nl/sites/default/files/2014/03/Veel%20gestelde%20vragen%20H2020%20MKB%20instrument%20(Engels)%20deel%202.pdf)

Open Science

Finally, the Society welcomes the emphasis on open science in Horizon Europe. This aligns with our own policies and practices on open access and data and is critical to enhancing excellence, impact and public engagement in science.