

EUA COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday, 6 April 2016

ITEM 4b: Developing a vision for the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP9): first reflections from RPWG

As part of the policy monitoring & advocacy plan 2016/2017 on EU Funding, the EUA RPWG is developing a vision on the planning and design of the ninth EU Framework Programme (FP9). The vision is developed based on the official results of the ex-post evaluation of the seventh EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP7), published on 25 January 2016, and on the experience of European universities with FP7 and the ongoing Horizon 2020 (FP8). This briefing provides initial views on the main challenges ahead and outlines some key areas to be considered when planning and designing FP9 from the point of view of universities.

Education, research and innovation are central to the further development and growth of European society. Tackling ongoing and emerging societal challenges requires agreement on common goals and concerted action amongst public authorities and policymakers, the public and the private sector, as well as the development and implementation of coherent policies and instruments to realise Europe's vision and goals.

Universities are key partners and stakeholders in ensuring Europe's progress. They are responsible for educating citizens and future leaders, for undertaking cutting-edge research and for acting as catalysts in promoting innovation. Hence they are central to fulfilling Europe's objectives in education, research and innovation. The university sector is presently in a process of rapid change, in response to numerous complex challenges, including the impact of technological developments, greater global competition for students and researchers, as well as demographic change and migration.

In this context, the following are considered crucial in determining the future success of European universities:

- Developing and consolidating strategic local, regional and international partnerships, involving universities, research institutions, business and the public sector.
- Fully integrating digital innovation and technological advancements in universities' activities, such as developing new pedagogical methods, developing new competencies and skills and preparing students for new digital employment opportunities.
- Committing to internationalisation and the importance of global engagement and of promoting global citizenship.
- Preserving academic freedom, institutional autonomy and commitment to integrity in research and education.

The capacity of universities to innovate is of the utmost importance in a world increasingly dependent on promoting high quality research and innovation for the benefit of society as a whole. In this respect, the EU Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation have made a major contribution to building critical mass, to reducing discrepancies between different parts of Europe, and to boosting cutting-edge research and innovation across Europe. However, at the same time the divide amongst European countries in relation to their R&D-to-GDP targets is widening and thus more concerted efforts and investment at EU level are needed to increase Europe's competitiveness overall.

On this basis, and with a view to the development of the ninth EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP9), the university sector urges the European Commission to consider the following priorities:

- **Providing sustainable funding for research and innovation**

University-based research, particularly basic research, stimulates and generates innovation that benefits local, national and European economies, as well as society as a whole. Continuity of funding, policies and instruments is key to ensure that universities have the adequate conditions to undertake high quality research, education and innovation activities. It is therefore essential that grants continue to be the major financial instrument to adequately fund research and innovation, particularly fundamental research.

Other financial mechanisms, such as high-risk investments, of which EFSI and the SME instrument are examples, are mostly suitable to make capital available for research and innovation that is close to market and capital intensive, but this represents only a small proportion of research activities undertaken by universities. It is thus critical to preserve funding for less advanced Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) and basic research through grants.

- **Reinforcing collaboration and minimising discrepancies across the EU 28**

Collaboration amongst researchers from universities, companies, research organisations and the public sector, in different areas and across different European countries is essential to create a dynamic scientific and innovation system. At the same time, closing the research and innovation divide in Europe remains a crucial prerequisite to boost the competitiveness of the EU as a whole. FP9 should make combining research excellence and wider participation a priority, as well as incentivise collaborative research between universities, the private and public sectors. In addition, FP9 should focus on better leveraging and exploiting the outcomes of European research and innovation projects, by developing a unified scheme for European patents and scaling up disruptive innovations.

- **Seeking a stronger alignment of policies in education, research and innovation**

Universities have a unique role in combining education, research and innovation activities and they are the only type of institution integrating these elements into its core mission. A stronger alignment of EU policies and instruments in the areas of education, research and innovation would greatly benefit the quality of human resources being educated in universities and the social, technological and economic competitiveness of Europe. In this respect, recent technological advancements and the consolidation of the Open Science movement will have a critical role in increasing the linkages amongst education, research and innovation.

EUA considers that all European institutions, particularly the European Commission, and Member States should reassert a strategic vision of FP9 as an instrument at the service of building stronger European Higher Education and Research Areas. In this respect, it is of utmost importance that future policies, programmes and funding instruments for education, research and innovation are designed and implemented in a coherent and aligned way for the well-being of Europe's society and economy.