

European Commission Green Paper Consultation

● Green Paper on a Common Strategic Framework for future EU Research and Innovation Funding: Response from the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

The Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers) is the learned society and professional body for geography. Formed in 1830, our Royal Charter is for 'the advancement of geographical science'. The Society is a charity that seeks to develop, promote and support the discipline of geography and its practitioners in the areas of research and higher education, teaching and fieldwork, policy and wider public engagement. The Society has more than 15,000 Fellows and members, of whom a substantial number are academics and other researchers whose work we support through a range of activities. These include holding the largest geographical research conference in Europe, publishing three of the leading international peer-reviewed geography journals in the world (including *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* which is often ranked first), co-ordinating twenty seven specialist research groups, and providing small grants for researchers at all career stages. We work very closely with all Higher Education (HE) geography departments in the UK.

The Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers) welcomes this opportunity to comment on the European Commission's consultation on the Green Paper on a Common Strategic Framework for future EU Research and Innovation Funding.

Past EU research and innovation funding has been significant for geographers in the UK and across Europe. The programmes have been open and supportive of researchers working in disciplines such as geography whose perspectives and methods transcend the natural and social sciences and humanities; who are committed to collaboration and multidisciplinary; and who recognise and respect the important differences that exist at multiple spatial scales across Europe. EU research and innovation funding has served to build cross-European collaborations and stimulated thought and innovation. The resultant geographical research has yielded important new insights into topics that range across sustainable development, resource management, environment and health, territorial cohesion, migration and identity. The findings and outcomes of this work serve to inform and support initiatives to make Europe a better place to live and work, improving Europe's competitiveness, growth and job creation while tackling the main current and future societal challenges. Initiatives such as Marie Curie actions have been instrumental in training, mobility and career development for researchers at all levels.

We welcome the commitment for a step change in support for European research and innovation to address the challenges and opportunities facing Europe at this time, striving at the same time to maximise returns from research investment. We hope this will reduce administrative load and enhance efficiencies. We also support the Commission's commitment to enhancing public understanding and debate of research (broadly defined).

We do, though, wish to highlight some concerns about some of the underlying premises in the Green Paper, which will have implications for the support of social sciences and humanities and thus for the support of some geographical research.

1. Grand Challenges (GCs) as a method of identifying the most important questions facing Europe in the coming years represent a sensible way of focusing resources. Among the GCs mentioned as requiring attention are those dealing with climate change, resource efficiency, food security, and the problems of an ageing population. **It is critical that in all GCs appropriate and due attention is paid to their social and human aspects; technological solutions do not exist on their own. Intradisciplinary perspectives should be at the core of many of the Grand Challenges.** For



example, if the Commission and national governments agreed that climate change is a major GC which should be addressed in a structured manner, it would be very important to ensure that appropriate attention is paid to the effects of behavioural change and/or impacts on society of climate change at multiple spatial scales, and to consider how these might be mitigated by suitable policy developments. Geographers are particularly well qualified to provide such expertise and insights.

2. In addition to ensuring that social sciences and humanities are appropriately embedded in the existing Grand Challenges, **Grand Challenge which directly address the major policy issues raised by the changing economic, social and cultural dynamics of European societies should be developed.** A research programme addressing Understanding Europe would need at its core an understanding of the spatial dimensions of social, cultural, economic and political change, as well as environmental change.
3. Flexibility needs to be built into the programme to allow **rapid response to newly-emerging problems** and questions which require research attention through the course of the programme.
4. The Green Paper incorporates, without questioning, a view of innovation in response to societal challenges which is 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.
5. The Green Paper also adopts an inherently "linear" approach to research and innovation; in which basic research leads to applied research, then to inventions and finally to innovation. While this is one model, it is also important to recognise that not all inventions/innovations are planned or foreseen at the outset of a research programme. Thus fundamental (**'blue skies' or 'curiosity-driven'**) **research, which may also ultimately result in economic value, improved quality of life, improved policies etc, also should be supported.**
6. Moreover, few of the "grand challenges" which have been identified are likely to be susceptible to technological solutions alone, while all of them require analysis by their societal causes and consequences. EU policy should take account of the need for fundamental analysis of societal problems, by scholars in the humanities and social sciences, before designing policies in response to those problems. It is therefore essential for FP8 (or whatever it is called) to incorporate social sciences and humanities from the outset. **Geographical perspectives which provide a unique spatial perspective, considering local, national and regional patterns and processes, are critical** in this regard.

Working together to deliver on Europe 2020

1. *How should the Common Strategic Framework make EU research and innovation funding 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?*

Achievement of the suggestions outlined in the question would go a long way towards making EU funding more attractive. **Simplification of the structure and process of EU research and innovation funding is absolutely essential. In particular, the scale of administration needs to 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. Scale of grant is also important: smaller grants can often be very productive, particularly for some aspects of disciplines such as geography and other of the social sciences and humanities, where requirements may be different from some of the natural sciences, and therefore they may 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. Improvement of the time from Call to grant would also be welcomed, as would adherence to an announced timetable for decision-making.

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

The definition of the full innovation cycle here does not adequately cover the full range of research across all disciplines and for all purposes, nor does it fully cover the uses of research into social issues of policy concern. We support the notion that priority should be given to research which addresses problems faced in Europe. The significant value-added of EU funded research is in bringing a range of researchers together, from a range of different perspectives and experiences. **While research should address different aspects of the “innovation cycle”, a broad definition of that cycle is needed that incorporates public policies that improve the welfare and quality of life of EU citizens, not just marketable products.**

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?

The vital feature of research at EU level should be to **enable trans-national research bringing together researchers from a range of backgrounds with different national experiences, thus enhancing the quality of the research and its outputs, and ensuring a better understanding of the EU itself. It should focus on overcoming the fragmentation of EU research cultures, and on the importance of comparative study to understand spatial differences.** EU funding should be able to draw upon international networking for scientific innovation, for cohesive research engagement, and to help strengthen research capacity across the whole of the EU.

The question of whether there should be a particular focus on strengthening capacity in the EU12 to ensure greater cohesion is a more difficult question. This does not necessarily mean support for either large teams or large scale projects, but easier access to information, simpler application procedures and levels of project funding that can be managed by the less well resourced administrations in those countries. The expectation that large sums of money will be leveraged from elsewhere may be risky and lead to inadequately-funded projects.

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

There may be a significant difference between the wider interests of the EU and the interests of individual member states, so **there will always be a variety of views on priorities to be addressed. It may be more helpful to think in terms of aligning and coordinating research rather than pooling resources.**

5. What should be the balance between smaller, targeted projects and larger, strategic ones?

There is a place for both larger and smaller projects, and it is very important to retain **adequate facility to support both.**

6. How could the Commission ensure the balance between a unique set of rules allowing for radical simplification and the necessity to keep a certain degree of flexibility and diversity to achieve objectives of different instruments, and respond to the needs of different beneficiaries, in particular SMEs?

Simplification and flexibility are two key issues which must be addressed. **Bureaucratic complexity is a significant bar to participation not merely by SMEs, but also by other potential partners relevant in the geographical research agenda, such as non-governmental organisations, community groups and charities.** It may be impossible and inappropriate to have a single set of rules, rather guiding principles which might include, for example, simplification of accounting procedures and consistency of reporting requirements.

7. *What should be the measures of success for EU research and innovation funding? Which performance indicators could be used?*

In the UK, measurement of output and impact are of increasing importance, and there has been substantial work on identifying the best indicators of these. **It is important to avoid over-cumbersome measures that require long-term administrative follow-up with a consequent heavy bureaucratic burden. It should also be noted that measures vary between disciplines.** In terms of dissemination of ideas, review should take account of achievement over at least a ten year period rather than just in the shorter term, while dissemination to the wider community and adoption in government and non-governmental organisational policy are also relevant in many cases. Ongoing or extended research collaboration, development of networks, and demonstration of increased mobility may also be markers of success.

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 programmes?*

The EU should concentrate on **the value-added contribution as being of the highest importance.** It should enable the investment at national and regional level to be augmented by Europe-wide research activities, coordination of national and regional activities and dissemination of results. Excellence should remain the key determinant for research support under the Common Strategic Framework.

Tackling societal changes

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

Societal challenges are, by definition, problems which require analysis by experts in the social sciences and humanities. Geographical perspectives are unique in their insights into spatial differences at multiple scales. Curiosity-driven and agenda-driven research both are important to support.

Europe provides a very interesting context for the geographical (and other social science and humanities) research since similar problems have led to very different solutions in different countries (examples include the diversity of health care systems or pensions). In this context comparative research has significant value,

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

There should be a **place for both bottom-up and top-down activities** in EU funding for research and innovation activities. The success of the European Research Council has been in attracting bottom-up applications of the highest quality, and it has helped to establish pan-European criteria for excellence. Furthermore, ERC-funded projects can be led by researchers based in central and eastern Europe, who often do not have the administrative infrastructure and experience to lead on large projects.

There is also a strong case for supporting bottom-up capacity within other funding streams, and not restricting it to the ERC programmes (which, being led by an individual, do not necessarily have the capacity to ensure wider engagement of interested networks of researchers). Joint Programming Initiatives may also be an example of how bottom-up activities arising from national interests can help to shape European research agendas.

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

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A crucial role of the Framework Programmes has been support for European policy development. **Policy must be defined broadly: it includes not only responses to global and European Grand Challenges such as climate change or food security, but also the needs of other parts of the Commission's work, such as Employment and Education.** Policy-making requires sound information, evidence, which takes a long time to gather. For the most part, the research and the knowledgeable experts need to be in place and to have produced results before demands to assist policy-makers arise. Europe needs knowledge of social trends and knowledge of the way policies are implemented and become effective.

12. *How should the role of the Commission's Joint Research Centre be improved in supporting policy making and addressing societal challenges?*

The role of the Joint Research Centre in providing scientific and technical advice to inform EU policy and legislation is important. However, assessment of policy impacts and the scoping of the need for research inevitably bring in questions raised by the social sciences, and specifically disciplines such as geography. **As mentioned above, societal challenges, by definition, present problems which require analysis and interpretation by experts in the social sciences and humanities as well as by scientific and technological experts, and by those (for example geographers) whose expertise transcend these perspectives and are sensitive to local, regional and national differences.**

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

Wider consultation with informed and relevant communities might be one way forward. **The establishment of groupings of interested bodies – which might include representatives of organisations** such as learned societies, charities and NGOs – to identify key needs and requirements could be helpful. The media may have some role to play too. Specific elements of wider dissemination could be included in all substantial grants for research from EU sources.

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?*

EU funding should be devoted to research which helps us to understand Europe's environments, societies and economies and the change which has taken place in them at multiple spatial scales. That might at least tell us what policies have not worked in the past and/or in different parts of Europe.

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 Programme) or different forms of 'public-private partnerships' be supported? What should be the role of European Technology Platforms?*

No specific answer.

16. *How and what types 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?*

In relation to parts of geography, and the humanities and social sciences more generally, **philanthropic bodies, non-governmental organisations, community groups etc need to be included on a similar basis to SMEs in relation of technology.** These bodies are often end-users of geographical/HSS research and have a contribution to make in assessing the value of research, in contributing to the funding and in the collaboration in the conduct of research.

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?*

No specific answer

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

No specific answer

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?*

No specific answer.

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?*

No specific answer

Strengthening Europe's science base and the European Research Area

21. *How should the role of the European Research Council be strengthened in supporting world class excellence?*

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 world-leading 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.

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

The promotion of support for networks of scholars across Europe would be helpful. Organisations such as EUGEO, which bring together geographical learned societies and professional bodies across Europe, may be useful organisations to also work within this regard. The provision of additional information and help to applicants from the EU12 would be of assistance in promoting equality of opportunity.

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

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**. Plans to change scheme formats and require a year in business as well as academia could have major impact on take up from some aspects of geography, and the HSS more generally, unless definitions of possible partners are widened. **Organisations such as museums and voluntary associations could provide opportunities for research training and addressing questions of innovation in different sectors.**

