

Position Paper of Iberian Universities

Design of FP9

The Framework Programme for Research and Innovation is the most important Pan-European programme for research and innovation, not only in size, but also in terms of excellence, international cross-cutting and interdisciplinary collaboration, which makes it very popular among universities.

Crue Universidades Españolas (Crue) and CRUP (Conselho de Reitores das Universidades Portuguesas) wish to contribute to the design of the 9th EU Framework Programme (FP9) for Research and Innovation and therefore agreed to elaborate and present their vision in this position paper.

We believe that an increased budget sufficient to face the challenges of European research, development and innovation in the next years would be crucial for FP9.

Excellence Science Pillar

Excellent cross-border and curiosity-driven research and innovation, promotion of internationally outstanding talents and access to world-class research infrastructures must remain the cornerstones of EU funding in the future. Thus, we believe that EXCELLENCE should be the most important criterion in the evaluation process of the proposals.

The Excellence Science Pillar should be reinforced in FP9, this pillar promotes the development of excellent science and research and it should have a true measurable impact in the universities and research institutes all across Europe. This pillar should also reach a wider spectre of research centres by increasing funding, so that a higher number of projects are financed.

It is very important to increase the number of starting and consolidator ERC grants in order to avoid a large number of excellent projects, presented by young scientist, being rejected. In addition, we believe that the time lapse for being eligible as Principal Investigator for ERC StG and COG should be extended. Furthermore, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and the co-fund programmes included in this pillar, should be reinforced too and focused on young researchers¹.

Open Science and Open Access

As stated on the EUA position on the FP9, Iberian universities strongly support the open science and open access movement as a link between education, research and innovation. Open Science and open access are bound to improve scholarly communication, promote

¹ Spain's position paper on the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020

interdisciplinary research, enhance research driven education, accelerate academic knowledge by society, the public and private sector, and embedded more education, science and innovation in society.

Societal Challenges

Apart from the societal challenges already considered and due to the EU pressing problems (immigration, refugees, national identity, values, citizens, security, etc.), a specific pillar for Social Sciences, paying special attention to “people” and citizens, should also be necessary².

We should also focus on the knowledge and communication of the European cultural roots, as well as the elements linking cultural identity and language, that are the core of European culture. This research field is of great interest not only for European countries but also for non-European research partners in order to increase multidisciplinary research.

Reducing the Technology Readiness Levels

We consider that Pillars 2 and 3 are too focused on higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs), which limits the future absorption of disruptive innovations that are still in the pipeline of research projects with lower TRLs. Moreover, we believe that the required levels of TRLs, exclude non-technological forms of innovation generated by fundamental or applied research, particularly from Social Sciences and Humanities. According to the League of European Research Universities (LERU)³, the TRLs 1-3 are strongly underrepresented in the pillars “Industrial Leadership” and “Societal Challenges”. Due to this, more funding is needed for lower TRL projects, especially in the pillar “Societal Challenges”, where projects are expected to drive innovation and technological progress, but are underpinned by basic research.

Creating synergies between FP9 and Structural Funds

Synergies of H2020 and Structural Funds have proved to be less operational than expected. For example, RIS3 may fund activities such as infrastructures or networks, that are non-eligible in H2020. It should be necessary to design new instruments in FP9 in order to reinforce synergies with structural funds. However, the current areas considered strategic and a target for funding, would not have to be necessarily areas that generate economic benefits.

The dependence of the national and regional authorities to manage the structural funds makes difficult the successful co-funding with other programmes. It would be convenient to adapt the existing rules concerning the administrative and financial management to the ones ruling H2020.

² Spain’s position paper on the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020

³ League of European Research Universities (LERU)³. 2016a. The strength of collaborative research for discovery in Horizon 2020.

Improving the role of PPPs and JTIs

Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) and Joint Technologies Initiatives (JTI) contribute to promote greater private investment in research and innovation. Nevertheless, we feel that new PPP-JTI should be shaped in order to tackle topics that are crucial for Europe.

An Important aspect to guarantee equity in these initiatives is transparency, and ensuring a balance in the interests of all counterparts. It seems that large industries have taken over this initiative jeopardizing the incorporation of SMEs and it would be necessary to analyse this trend. Moreover, we claim for Universities to have a stronger voice in decision forums to ensure the contribution of these institutions as providers of science, which is critical for the innovation and technological progress.

Simplification

EC has considerably simplified the Framework Programme for R&I, in general, and the management of its funds, in particular. We also believe that the two-step procedure makes calls more attractive as there is not as much administrative burden, and the previous proposals are not too long.

However, some aspects should be considered in order to get an added value for the next framework programmes:

- Clear rules about the eligibility of internally invoiced costs are needed, to not leave it to the decision of the auditor and to improve certainty.
- Clearer and easier guidelines about legal and financial aspects in the preparation of proposals should be elaborated to enhance the participation in future FPs.
- The Participant Portal should be as user-friendly as possible, especially for newcomers⁴.

Clear evaluation criteria for the Impact section.

Spanish and Portuguese Universities consider that one of the barriers for university researchers to get funding is the impact section. In this section, exploitation and market orientation have become the real challenge for Industrial Leadership and Societal Challenges of Horizon 2020. This criterion limits research which is essential to develop technology transfer. This part is not easy to be assessed and may be evaluated too bureaucratically leading to incorrect results⁵. We suggest it is necessary for the FP9 to better define this

⁴ Spain's position paper on the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020

⁵ Position Paper of Iberian universities. The mid-term review of Horizon 2020 and the design of FP9

section, including clearer criteria thus avoiding subjectivity. Although we think it is difficult to accomplish a regulation about the meaning of impact, we propose a discussion about the main areas Europe should focus on⁶.

We should also improve in the communication of projects and achievements beyond their impact in industries and markets, by focusing as well on their scientific and social impact and influence over time.

Lump sum

The use of lump-sum in FP9 may be positive in order to reduce the cost of reporting and audits.

However, the rules governing the use of this type of funding should be well defined by the EC, as well as clarified in the following aspects:

- The definition of criteria for assessing activities and consolidating received funds, as well as by whom and how such evaluations shall be carried out.
- Whether the elimination of cost reporting will entail a more thorough technical justification.
- Whether the EC will allocate a defined amount to each beneficiary or whether the coordinator will bear all responsibility for the distribution of funds among the partners, depending on the fulfilment of activities. In this sense, it would be very difficult for universities to accept projects without knowing in advance the funding they will receive.

European innovation Council (EIC)

We agree on the creation of the European Innovation Council (EIC) to support research-driven innovation. There is a wide variety of roles that this council could take on. It is very important that the launch of a new council could include simple and transparent decision-making procedures, enabling as well an effective representation of universities and companies in the governing board. Particular attention should be paid to avoid duplication of current initiatives. The activities of the board should consider interdisciplinary research projects with the possibility of radical innovation.

Widening

⁶ Position Paper of Iberian universities. The mid-term review of Horizon 2020 and the design of FP9

In this regard, we believe that the participation of EU13 can be expanded through better distribution and easier access to the structural funds. These funds should play a valid and important role in supporting research and innovation capacity in Member States.

Open to the world. Cooperation with third countries

We propose the following suggestions to be considered:

- The linkages between priorities of the Member States, the Commission's Multiannual Roadmaps for third countries and the Work Programmes of FP9 should be aligned.
- Third countries should be more involved in the setting of policy priorities to make the future FP9 calls for proposals more attractive for organisations from outside Europe
- The Commission should consider making it easier for participants from third countries to join on-going projects on an ad hoc basis, especially if they do not qualify to receive EU funding.
- The administrative burden should be reduced for third country partners not receiving EU funding.
- National Contact Points (NCPs) in third countries should have access to dedicated support mechanisms, such as twinning activities with NCPs in EU Member States/Associated Countries.

Large/Small Projects

Spanish and Portuguese universities find appropriate to reconsider the size of consortia, in order to avoid projects with excessive management costs, which may hinder the development of research and innovation themselves. European Commission should give clear and direct indications on the optimum expected size and budget of the consortia.

Defence

The defence industry is characterized by economic and technological elements which are important factors in European industrial competitiveness.

The European Framework Program for Research and Development (R&D) pursues only civilian objectives. However, certain technological areas (e.g. materials and information and communication technologies (ICT)) can contribute to the improvement of the defence technological base and to the competitiveness of this industry. Therefore, the needs of the defence industry should be incorporated into the implementation of the Union's research policy.