

## **UK Research Councils' Response to the European Commission's Consultation on the EU2020 Strategy**

1. The seven UK Research Councils (RCUK; <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/default.htm>) fund research covering the full spectrum of academic disciplines, from the medical and biological sciences to astronomy, physics, chemistry and engineering, social sciences, economics, environmental sciences and the arts and humanities. UK Research Councils welcome the opportunity to comment on the EU2020 strategy; this is the co-ordinated response of all seven Councils.
2. The UK Research Councils particularly welcome the fact that generation and exploitation of knowledge is an integral component of the EU2020 strategy. The main drivers of this – research, education and innovation – are all deeply embedded within the strategy. In order for this strategy to be effective, however, it is crucial that there is a shared understanding between the EU and its Member States of what is meant by research, education and innovation, and how they complement and differ from one another. This is important in formulating coherent future policy.

There already exists a complex landscape of policies and programmes, comprising both EU and national initiatives. A full evaluation of the synergies between the current research, education, and innovation programmes should be encouraged, and further detailed consultation undertaken. Such consultation and evaluation should precede any future plans for improving the framework conditions for creativity and innovation. It is hoped that the next phase of development of this strategy will not only take into account the responses to this consultation, but also the many other consultations and evaluations that have taken place within the competitiveness arena of late.

3. The UK Research Councils are supportive of the three priorities set out in the strategy paper, that is 'creating value by basing growth on knowledge', 'empowering people in inclusive societies' and 'creating a competitive, connected and greener economy', but

recognise that the present document represents more of a broad vision than a detailed strategy. It is hoped that stakeholders will be fully consulted on the subsequent implementation plan and proposed actions, when these emerge in the next Communication. In addition to a need for transparent dialogue between the Commission, Member States and all stakeholders on all aspects of the strategy, there is a need for quantifiable targets, which are noticeably lacking in the current vision document. Such targets are necessary so that progress can be measured during its ten-year duration.

4. It would be useful if the strategy reflected current EU-level policies, as agreed by Member States. For example, at present there is no reference to the Lisbon Strategy in the paper. Given that the EU2020 strategy will replace Lisbon as the main EU policy-driver, it may be useful to include explicit consideration of how it will build upon and improve what was achieved under Lisbon. More specifically in the field of research, the EU2020 strategy could better reflect recent policies such as the 'grand challenge' approach set out in the Lund Declaration, the Ljubljana process and the ERA 2020 Vision. This would ensure that major policies were adequately embedded into the strategic framework.

The Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development are the main EU-level tools for creation of the European Research Area and, as such, reference in the strategy might be useful. This is particularly the case given that several of the EU education programmes – Erasmus, Leonardo and Erasmus Mundus – are explicitly referenced. Furthermore, the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) could be recognised as an integral element of the 'partnership' approach advocated within the document.

5. The strategy paper highlights the need to raise research quality in Europe. It should be recognised, however, that within Europe there already exists considerable research excellence and that many institutions are currently of world-leading standard. It is essential that such excellence is fostered and supported, in addition to capacity-building measures. It is not feasible that excellence is equally spread across all institutions, and it is essential that the best institutions and research groups are not disadvantaged by any policies or instruments. Policy initiatives could ensure that across Europe researchers have access to centres of excellence, as opposed to advocating any redistribution of the excellence that currently exists.

6. There are a number of issues mentioned within the consultation paper that will need significant further consideration. This includes in the area of policy towards universities where it is essential that diversity and autonomy are fully respected and that it is not assumed that a pan-European 'one size fits all' approach is necessarily appropriate. The document states that Europe has some of the best universities in the world but fails to recognise the variability between countries as to their location; this is not a level playing field. Furthermore it must recognise that these all operate under different funding systems and therefore their interaction with national as well as pan-EU agencies are necessarily different; these elements are essential in considering how this research excellence should be harnessed and built upon. An essential component must be the greater understanding of the position of Member States as regards this aspect of development.
7. In terms of research, there should be a thorough evaluation of existing instruments, including Public Private Partnerships, before more are proposed as part of this strategy. Also on research, RCUK is pleased to see that the importance of access to state-of-the-art research infrastructures has been noted in the vision. The Commission should be encouraged to strengthen the role of scientific experts in setting policy and legislation, thus ensuring that policy is underpinned by evidence. This includes dialogue when drawing up regulations and directives that impact on research, such as legislation relating to physical agents, clinical trials, animals in research, and tissues and cells. Aside from the present consultation document, the proposal to appoint a Chief Scientific Advisor is welcomed, and should facilitate representation of researchers' interests across all policy areas.
8. RCUK welcomes the reference to attractive career prospects for researchers as a factor underpinning the performance of Europe in research. The wording of the second priority 'empowering people in inclusive societies' is particularly appropriate to researchers and we hope that the themes it contains are followed through in the research(er) aspects of any subsequent implementation plan.
9. Across both education and research, the strategy should reflect the fact that under the principle of subsidiarity EU initiatives are intended to complement and add value to

Member State-level actions, rather than *vice versa*. It should also be recognised that whilst interdependence is crucial and there can be clear benefit to Europe working collectively, there are also times when Member States will need to work independently. New policy and initiatives should be evaluated in terms of the appropriate level of intervention.

10. Adequate funding for research and innovation is essential if Europe is to effectively overcome the challenges associated with the current financial crisis and to meet its targets in relation to global competitiveness. Consequently, research should be given a high priority when future EU budget allocation and re-allocation are being discussed, to ensure that there is sufficient funding to meet the ambitious strategic objectives and to leverage funding from Member States.

A key issue has to be balance between the unalloyed quality and excellence measures, as adopted by the European Research Council and most national funders, as opposed to the aspects of national development core to the EU. Mechanisms exist within the EU to support wider structural development goals, but there is a need for research funding that is based on excellence alone and which is not conditioned by geographical location.

11. Once again, UK Research Councils thank the European Commission for providing the opportunity to feed into the development of the EU2020 strategy and would welcome the chance to provide further input as more detailed objectives and plans are developed.

*UK Research Office  
15 January 2010*