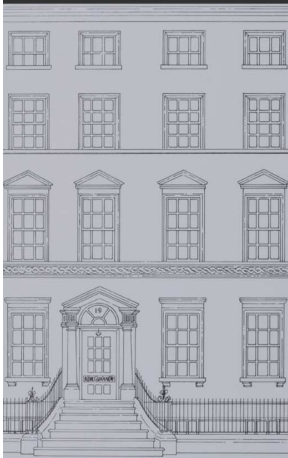


ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY



RESPONSE BY THE ROYAL
IRISH ACADEMY TO THE
EUROPEAN COMMISSION
CONSULTATION ON THE
GREEN PAPER 'TOWARDS A
COMMON STRATEGIC
FRAMEWORK FOR EU
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
FUNDING, 19 MAY 2011

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ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY

Response to the national consultation on the European Commission Green Paper ‘Towards a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation Funding’ (2014-2020)”

1. Introduction: The Royal Irish Academy, the national academy for the sciences, humanities and social sciences in Ireland, is pleased to respond to the consultation on the European Commission Green Paper ‘Towards a Common Strategic Framework for Research and Innovation Funding’ (2014-2020). The Academy's submission has been drawn up in discussion with the Academy President and Officers. In addition, the Appendices to this document detail specific responses and comments submitted by the Academy’s Committee on Chemical and Physical Sciences and the Committee for Geographical Sciences..

2. About the Academy: The Royal Irish Academy/Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann is an all-Ireland, independent, academic body promoting study and excellence in the sciences, humanities and social sciences in the higher education sector. It is the principal learned society in Ireland and has over 420 members. Election to membership of the Royal Irish Academy is the highest academic honour in Ireland. Membership is decided by peer election and is open to people who have attained distinction in scholarship and research.

The Academy was established in 1785 to promote scholarly discussion and the exchange of ideas and learning on scholarly matters in the sciences, polite literature and antiquities. Today, it is both a national Academy advancing the interests of scholars, scholarship and research on the island of Ireland, and a learned society promoting and supporting excellence in research and scholarship in the sciences and the humanities. As a national academy it is also part of an international network of academies representing scholars and researchers all over the world. The Academy is ideally placed to act as a conduit to academic expertise for government and draws upon the expertise of the network of scholars, researchers and practitioners within its membership and Academy Committees to inform its contributions on policy issues. As part of its policy advisory and information role, the Academy

responds formally to consultative and policy documents that have a bearing on its mission.

Summary of response

1. The CSF should build on the strengths of the Framework Programme particularly the European Research Council (ERC) in raising excellence in European research, of the Marie Curie programme in training excellent young researchers for academic and business careers, and of Collaborative Research Projects in fostering enhanced European and international networking and collaboration of leading experts across scientific fields.
2. Excellence should continue to be the primary factor driving the allocation of funding for research and innovation. The emphasis on excellence-driven research adopted by the European Research Council is strongly supported by the academic research community who would welcome measures to strengthen and broaden its range of activity.
3. Bottom-up and curiosity-driven research is vital to support long-term innovation potential. Funding will be required for all stages from basic research to the development of marketable products in order to maintain a world-class knowledge base for innovation.
4. Using Grand Challenges (GCs) as a method of identifying the most important questions facing Europe in the coming years is a sensible way of focusing resources.
5. The Academy supports calls for a Grand Challenge which directly addresses the major policy issues raised by the changing economic, social and cultural dynamics of European societies.
6. The Commission must develop a diverse portfolio of criteria to capture non-linear research career paths if it wishes to further strengthen the engagement of those who follow non-traditional research career pathways particularly, women in science and innovation.
7. A portion of R&D funding should be ring-fenced to support general public education and outreach activity as a means of generating greater interest and involvement of citizens and civil society in research and innovation.
8. Future EU funded research frameworks should require all publicly funded researchers to deposit AVI data, archives and other data

sources (as appropriate) in national and international e-repositories and digital archives to support wider access and availability of research data and resources for the general public.

3. General comments on the Green Paper

A. Programmes and Instruments

- In drafting the next framework for EU research and innovation the Academy would like to reiterate the importance and need to review and clarify the overall framework programme's role and aims. It notes the lack of detail given within the Green Paper as to how the proposed Common Strategic Framework would operate, what it would cover, its budget, and how themes etc would be chosen. Strategic leadership and the preparation of the work programmes need to be carried out by discipline experts within DG research.
- The Academy supports suggestions that the Commission organise an annual online consultation before drafting the work programme to give researchers and stakeholders an opportunity to highlight new topics and challenges.
- As recent evaluations showed, FP7 is a big success in many structural aspects. In particular the prominent role of the ERC in raising excellence in European research, of the Marie Curie programme in training excellent young researchers for academic and business careers, and of Collaborative Research Projects in fostering enhanced European and international networking and collaboration of leading experts across scientific fields, were praised in the reviews and it is hoped that the CSF will continue to build on these strengths.
- The social sciences and humanities (SSH) have been effective in using more peripheral funding streams, such as COST, ERA-NET and Marie Curie. If such funding streams are abolished in the CSF, it is important that their replacement allows sufficient room for SSH researchers to bid for research funding.

B. Innovation and R&D

- Funding will be required for all stages from basic research to the development of marketable products in order to maintain a world-class knowledge base for innovation.
- The route to innovation is not direct and the timeframe varies between different fields of research.
- The Academy believes that support for fundamental, bottom-up and curiosity-driven research is vital to support long-term innovation potential.

C. Support for fundamental / breakthrough / basic research

- Future framework funding programmes should preserve and strengthen support for basic research emerging through bottom-up procedures and funded primarily on the basis of research excellence.
- An overemphasis on supporting business needs may potential damage the research eco-system in general and carries particular hazards for disciplines in the SSH and the natural sciences given their reliance on public research funding sources.

D. Grand Challenges and Support for the Humanities

- Using Grand Challenges (GCs) as a method of identifying the most important questions facing Europe in the coming years is a sensible way of focusing resources.
- The Academy supports calls for a Grand Challenge which directly addresses the major policy issues raised by the changing economic, social and cultural dynamics of European societies.

This arises in part from concerns regarding future funding for the Humanities, which do not readily lend themselves to justification either in strictly economic terms or in terms of instrumentalised policy outputs as is the case with the social sciences. It is of paramount importance that humanities disciplines be central to the research mission of the European Union. It is through the activities of literary scholars, historians, cultural theorists that citizens of EU

Member States are made aware of the multiple interconnections between Member States and the broader intellectual and historical importance of the European Project. At a time, when in certain quarters, there is a level of indifference to or disengagement from the notion of a shared European Project, humanities disciplines have a crucial role to play in furthering dialogue, reflection and creative interaction. Only when there is a genuine culture of long-term reciprocity can progress be achieved in creating an overall sense of research purpose across the European Union.

RIA Response to specific consultation questions

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

- Excellence should be the guiding principle for all research activity funded through the CSF regardless of whether it is occurring within the public or private sector.
- At the core of any measurement system should be clarity. The CSF must be clear about the outputs, outcomes and impacts of research, what it means by these, how and when it will measure them and what, if anything, they imply.
- The European Commission should develop a diverse portfolio of criteria to capture non-linear research career paths.

An over-reliance on publications and citations as researcher metrics for excellence may overly negatively impact on those researchers who have taken ‘time out’ from their research careers e.g. maternity leave, to fulfil caring responsibilities, etc. This issue must be addressed if the EU is serious in its expressed intention to further strengthen the role of women in science and innovation as it is disproportionately female researchers and scientists who follow such non-linear career paths. Similarly, the Academy’s recent publication *‘The appropriateness of key performance indicators for the arts and humanities: Ireland’s contribution to the European debate’* (2010) highlights the diversity of research outputs and the expectations held by academics within the arts and humanities as to the appropriate methods and ways of assessing research excellence for their disciplines.

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

The Academy supports the position advanced by the British Academy in its submission to the European Commission on the Green Paper particularly its focus on the use of grand challenges as follows:

“Using Grand Challenges (GCs) as a method of identifying the most important questions facing Europe in the coming years is a sensible way of focusing resources. Among the GCs mentioned as requiring attention are, commonly, topics such as dealing with climate change, food security, and the problems of an ageing population. It will be important to ensure that, in all GCs, appropriate and due attention is paid to their social and human aspects. Given awareness of the difficulties experienced in earlier FPs in attempting to establish a truly interdisciplinary approach, it will be vital to ensure a fully integrated approach to GCs, and the provision of a funding format appropriate for SSH research. For example, if the Commission and national governments agreed that climate change was a major GC which should be addressed in a structured manner, it would be very important to ensure that appropriate attention was paid to the impacts on society of climate change, and to consider how these might be mitigated by suitable policy developments. It is also important to build sufficient flexibility into the programme to allow rapid response to newly-emerging problems and questions which require research attention. The Common Strategic Framework must allow Europe to respond to developments across the course of its lifetime.”

A Grand Challenge led by Social Sciences and Humanities

There is a need for a Grand Challenge which directly addresses the major policy issues raised by the changing economic, social and cultural dynamics of European societies. We argue strongly for a Grand Challenge which might be entitled Understanding Europe. A research programme addressing this Grand Challenge could be composed of three major sub-themes, with a

focus on the inter-relationship between Europe and other regions of the world transversal to all three sub-themes.”¹

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

The Academy supports the call for bottom-up activities to remain a significant and strong part of the EU funding system. Future framework funding programmes should preserve and strengthen support for basic or curiosity-driven research.

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

The EU is far more than an economic integration area and *Europe 2020* recognises this stressing the importance of social and territorial cohesion. The Academy supports the suggestion within the national consultation that a portion of R&D funding should be ring-fenced to support general public education and outreach activity. The development of e-infrastructures and trusted digital repositories (as described in the roadmap developed by the European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures) offers significant opportunities to support the building of more meaningful connections by the general public. Initiatives such as the Irish National Audio-Visual Repository funded under the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions, will allow the general public to discover, access and interact with a wide-variety of multi-media resources in the SSH, providing a common portal for discovery and access to a range of digital archives and institutional repositories containing SSH resources such as photography, film and video, audio files and transcripts of social science interviews, ethnographic field notes, architectural and engineering drawings, social sciences, archaeology and other datasets, historical papers, and research publications. The Academy suggests that future EU funded research frameworks should include as appropriate a mandatory requirement to use national and international e-repositories and digital archives to

¹ Position Paper by the British Academy in response to the consultation on the Green Paper *From Challenges to Opportunities: Towards a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation Funding*.

support wider access and availability of research data and resources for the general public.

Finally, the Academy would welcome further support for the development of structured PhD programmes which incorporate an internship model and target partnerships between academia, civil society and industry: the Humanities Serving Irish Society structured PhD programme, in which the Academy participates and which is funded through Ireland's Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions Cycle 4, offers a model for such programmes.

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

The ERC has been very successful and gained high prestige within a very short lifetime. The ERC's emphasis on excellence-driven research is vital to increasing the human capital of the EU community and to structuring an ERA capable of supporting the innovation culture. Its role as a source of funding for basic and curiosity-driven research should be preserved. It should be ensured that all researchers directly and indirectly funded by the ERC are supported in their career development.

Q. 22: How should EU support assist Member States in building up excellence?

In a general sense, participation in European collaborative research networks and projects allows for benchmarking between the best in Europe and mapping of research fields. It provides prestige and motivation for participants, supports capacity building at the national level and enables the development of relations, networks, and collaborations between research groups across the ERA.

European mapping and strategy forums such as the European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) encourage strategic, joined-up thinking by member states and institutions in the development of research infrastructures of pan-European interest for the benefit of the European research community and wider public and can have an important role in influencing national research funding priorities. The 2006 ESFRI Roadmap specifically identified the

need for a sustainable digital research infrastructure to support ICT-based research practices across the SSH and arts. The priorities identified within the ESFRI roadmap were subsequently used to inform decision-making at a national level for example, in Ireland, it informed the decision by national research funders to support Ireland's engagement with DARIAH (Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities) and subsequently to fund the development of a national e-infrastructure for the humanities and qualitative social sciences, the National Audio Visual Repository (under Cycle 5 of the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions). Another example is offered by the Marie Curie Actions, including the Initial Training Networks (ITN's), which have proved in Ireland in shaping practice in the development of research career paths for PhD candidates and early career researchers.

Q. 23: Role of Marie Curie Actions

Future European research funding schemes should continue to support for researcher mobility initiatives such as those offered by the Marie Curie Actions. In Ireland, disciplines such as mathematics and the SSH have been particularly effective in using and accessing more peripheral funding streams, such as COST, ERA-NET and Marie Curie, and it would be deeply concerning if such funding streams disappear in the proposed new framework.

Q. 24: What actions should be taken at EU level to further strengthen the role of women in science and innovation?

Measures should be introduced to increase the proportion of excellent female researchers by addressing any barriers to funding them. The Academy notes the initiative recently taken by the ERC to improve the gender balance amongst evaluators in addition to the introduction of measures to make project grants flexible in length where time out of research is needed, perhaps due to caring responsibilities. Similarly, consideration should be given to the impact which an over-reliance on publications and citations as researcher metrics may have on those researchers who have taken 'time out' from their research careers. A more diverse portfolio of criteria to assess researcher excellence and potential is needed to capture non-linear research career paths.

Q.25: How should research infrastructures (including EU-wide e-Infrastructures) be supported at EU level?

The Royal Irish Academy wishes to express its hope that future European research funding schemes will continue to offer support for the development of research infrastructures. The roadmap for research infrastructures that emerged from the European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures has proved most valuable in the Irish national context in shaping policy and funding priorities with a particularly positive impact on the development of e-infrastructures for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Enquiries

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20 May 2011

Appendix 1: Submission by the Royal Irish Academy Committee for Chemical and Physical Sciences in response to the European Commission Green Paper *From Challenges to Opportunities: Towards a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation funding*

A meeting of the Research Working Sub-Group (henceforth, the Group) of the **RIA Chemical and Physical Sciences Committee** to discuss the responses to this document was held on Wednesday 20th April. In attendance were the following persons:

Dr Teresa Curtin, University of Limerick
 Prof Paul Maguire, University of Ulster
 Prof John Donegan, Trinity College Dublin
 Prof Martyn E Pemble, Tyndall National Institute and University College Cork (Convener)
 Apologies: Prof Patrick Guiry, University College Dublin

1. Summary of Responses

- We welcome the proposed increase in expenditure to 3% GDP
- We welcome the simplification of application procedures and recommend that users are encouraged to provide ongoing feedback through the development phase
- We wish to highlight that curiosity based research is a strong and proven progenitor of innovation and would welcome strengthening the resources for curiosity driven research.
- We wish to highlight that wide participation and diversity of thinking is a very important element of successful R&D and the EU should continue to encourage this.
- Fourth level education is a critical element of EU R&D advancement and this element needs further encouragement and support within the proposed structures.

2. General Comments:

The Group wishes to emphasise the strongly held belief that curiosity is the progenitor of innovation (bullet point 3 above). This belief has influenced many of the views expressed here. In addition the Group notes that contrary to the view expressed in the Green Paper, the deliberate pulling together of large groups of researchers cannot artificially create genuine innovation- excellence is not born out of research concentration- a fact which is easily seen if one considers our main competitors in the US or Japan.

The Group also believes that the Green Paper presumes too much. Genuine innovation and excellence do not necessarily require trans-national cooperation. Trans-national cooperation may be needed in those cases where an appropriate skill set for a programme of research is not available in one centre or one member state. Cooperation for the sake of cooperation is a waste of resources.

The overall target of spending 3% of GDP by 2020 is challenging but praiseworthy and very encouraging. Innovation requires research. Research

requires funding. Without funding there will be no research and hence no innovation. Precious funding should not be wasted on prescriptive projects as determined by the latest 'agenda' items- everyone knows what the challenges are. Let researchers decide how to tackle these challenges.

The Green Paper fails to mention of third level education and training while the whole area of doctoral training, either through structured PhD or thematic PhD programmes is also not mentioned.

The EU seems to regard that training begins at postdoctoral level (e.g. the Marie-Curie programmes). The EU should have a proper policy of supporting younger researchers, e.g. graduate students, since these are the researchers, and entrepreneurs of the future.

3. Responses to Specific Questions Posed in the Document

(Note the Group only felt able to answer those questions where they could draw on their direct experience of the Framework Programmes).

Section 4.1. 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?

The entire process, from applying for funding through to running the project and reporting must be simplified and made easier. Applications must be shortened - who wants (needs?) to write 100 pages to justify a project? Why ask for the 'European dimension' if the project clearly meets the Call- the Call has already been selected because of the European dimension? This simply makes work for those persons who can write these 'woolly parts' of the proposal for the applicants. Judge the proposal on the Science, the Methodology and the likely Outcomes.

Another issue is the length of time between the Call for proposals and the start of the project. Shorter applications (based on the above suggestions) should cut this time (faster proposal writing, quicker evaluations etc...).

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

Don't focus on concentration. Large projects are not necessarily good projects- they tend to end up as administrative nightmares. The EU should actively seek to exploit diversity of thinking. Again the Group emphasizes that curiosity-based research hugely important- not just industry driven. There must be space to explore interesting ideas, not just fashionable themes. Smaller targeted projects are also important in that they offer wider participation and are much more flexible in terms of responding to innovative ideas.

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

Responsibility for reporting on likely exploitation should rest with the industry partners who are receiving a subsidy for work that may result in an increase in their profitability. For too many projects this reporting is left to the Coordinator (nearly always an academic). Large projects in particular, must show value for money: more than just company profits? Generally speaking the Group feels that Companies don't spend enough on exploiting research that emerges. Not all academics want to form spin-out companies: don't treat this issue as a 'given'.

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?

In theory the idea of relating national and EU funding together is a good one, but in practice it will not work because it would be impossible to gather all the necessary information. Yes the EU should be aware of national funding strategies but it should not try to influence these. There is no harm in duplication of subject matter- particularly if the issue in question is an important one. Let a number of good ideas be explored, at national and at EU level.

Section 4.2 Tackling societal challenges

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

The Group has repeatedly emphasised the need for high-quality curiosity driven research. Successful researchers will already be aware of what the key 'agenda' items should be. The EU does not have to be prescriptive about this. The prescriptive approach hasn't worked thus far and so the Group feels that the quality of the science, from a curiosity-driven perspective, should always form a key component of every programme offered. Challenges are difficult to address- they require breakthrough concepts. Prescriptive, incremental ideas are unlikely to succeed. A key aim of the EU- the establishment of research 'excellence', cannot be forced into being by any Strategic Agenda. Excellence arises through individual or collective ideas, and the resources to explore the same.

Section 4.4 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 Group feels that this is the one programme that deliberately sets out to foster excellence, and is pleased that it relies entirely on curiosity-driven research by individual groups and teams. The Group suggests that the EU greatly expands this programme, and puts less reliance on trans-national consortia- driven projects, unless there is a well-defined need for such consortia due to the project requiring a mix of skill sets. Don't force people to collaborate when collaboration is not always needed.

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

The Group believes that the answer to this question lies partly in the response to question 21, i.e. instruments such as the ERC programmes. For individual member states to grow in terms of the 'excellence' associated with their research communities the criteria for the ERCs need to be examined in detail and much more credit given to genuinely novel ideas-high risk but potentially very high gain. In the experience of some members of the Group far too much emphasis is placed on past Track Record, Hirsch Indices and other similar factors. Many good ideas never see the light of day because of this.

Another possible strategy, which would aid member states in this respect, would be to issue Calls targeted only at researchers from certain member states. The Group believes that this would not work in terms of delivering either 'excellence' or necessary technological innovations. The EU should not be concerned that some states are less 'excellent' than others- this is just reality. Rather the EU needs to demand value for money in terms of job and wealth creation. However, the Group notes that to some extent the EU can support Member states in building up excellence through participation of young researchers in COST actions.

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

The Group felt that the document assumed that it was universally recognised that the schemes were very successful, whereas from personal experience the Group felt that like all such initiatives, the outcomes were variable. Some projects/persons succeeded whereas others did not. The Group got the impression from the document that trans-national researcher mobility was the answer to all our needs- and the Group disagrees with this view. Training at graduate student level was regarded as of equal if not more importance. It is also important to include more mature applicants who wish develop new skills or applicants who wish to return after a career break.

However, the view in general was that since these programmes were highly over-subscribed then more resources should be allocated to them in the future.

24. What actions should be taken at EU level to further strengthen the role of women in science and innovation?

The Group felt that women are compartmentalized at a young age into thinking that jobs in science, technology and engineering were not for them and that life choices confronting women added to the negative pressures. This should be tackled both at a national level and at an EU level by promoting these subjects and publicizing the exciting career paths such disciplines may offer. The Group was not in favour of forcing quotas of women researchers onto research projects. The Group felt that asking researchers to talk about the 'Gender Balance' of their proposals at application time was merely an attempt at political correctness and that the quality of the science and technology and the degree to which truly exploitable material was produced by the project had nothing to do with

Gender Balance. There is scope however for encouraging women back into high level research (following career breaks for example) through programmes such as the Marie Curie actions.

26. How should international cooperation with non-EU countries be supported e.g. in terms of priority areas of strategic interest, instruments, reciprocity (including on IPR aspects) or cooperation with Member States?

The EU may wish to aid non-EU countries by helping them to develop their scientific base- this would be a laudable aspiration. However it should not try to achieve this by insisting that certain countries are included in bids. As expressed throughout this comment document, the over-riding factor influencing the funding of a project should be the quality of science and technology, the methodology (and quality of applicants) and the plans for exploitation and dissemination.

In the area of IPR the Group were aware that researchers in the US were able to publish without prejudicing possible patents, for a limited time period. This gives US researchers a major advantage over those based in the EU, who are often faced with the dilemma of publish or patent- not both. The EU should seek to alter patent law, so as to create a level playing field for its researchers.

27. Which key issues and obstacles concerning the ERA should EU funding instruments seek to overcome, and which should be addressed by other (e.g. legislative) measures?

See point 26 regarding patent law.

Prepared by:

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www: <http://www.ria.ie/Our-Work/Committees/Committees-for-Science/Chemical-and-Physical-Sciences-Committee.aspx>

21st April 2011

Appendix 2:

Submission by the RIA Committee for Geographical Sciences to the European Commission Green Paper ‘From Challenges to Opportunities: Towards a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation funding

The **Royal Irish Academy National Committee for Geographical Sciences** considers that in view of European needs of social and cultural cohesion, and the maintenance of a European social model and European identity based on its history, culture and multilingualism, it is necessary to enhance and support research endeavours in the social sciences and humanities.

The biggest issues facing our society are economic, social, cultural and political. The nomenclature of most government departments highlights the importance of social science issues for society and public administration: ministries of *finance, transport, health, education, social welfare* etc. The discipline of Geography especially across Europe contributes a lot of research to government departments much of it on very limited funding.

In a general sense Europe encompasses values such as social and cultural cohesion, social innovation, democracy and participation, gender equality, maintaining quality of life and the European social model. Striving for these values, and tackling existing and emerging societal challenges by European policy makers and civil society requires a sound scientific basis which only social science and humanities researchers can deliver. Historical and spatial analyses are important in highlighting geographical and social inequalities and assisting policy makers in taking effective steps to reduce exclusion across Europe’s regions.

Spatial sciences like Geography aim to monitor changes in regional inequalities and such things as land zoning with reference, for instance, to the future of cities and rural regions. Applied research on spatial processes and their effects on social and economic development in member states are concerned with the capture, storage, management, analysis and display of spatial data. Currently Geocomputation and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) represent some of the most strategically important contributions by the geographical social sciences to government and government policy in helping states understand what is going on in their societies, economies and landscapes.

There is already much collaboration between geographical and social science researchers on one hand and policy makers and public authorities on the other. Researchers cannot give simple answers, but highlight sound criteria according to which decisions should be taken and clarify consequences of policies. They thus enable policy makers and other actors to make decisions based on scientific evidence.

Why does research funding need to come from the European Union?

It makes sense to try and understand the society we live in and not to do everything based on anecdote and uninformed discourse.

The European Research Area aims to create a European-wide open space for knowledge. Without European funding, cooperation projects with four to ten European partners would not be carried out. European research projects offer expertise to European actors such as policy makers and institutions.

SSH build on comparison over time and space, necessitating transnational projects. We live in a time of fast societal changes. Therefore, research objects in SSH change rapidly, creating the necessity for interaction with colleagues from various countries to transfer insights to various Member States. Hence, there is a clear added value in European-wide collaborations which only become possible through European funding.

Geographical science, for instance, has engaged partners across Europe in the issue of Climate Justice. This is an issue which requires a broad European approach to internationalize the European Research Area and research links outside it. Historically Europe bears some responsibility for the creation of climate change, and now has a duty to reach out to the developing world in an effort to mitigate the most severe impacts. This can only be effectively undertaken at EU level and research in this area needs to be actively supported at European level.

In addition, International Relations theory and Geopolitics have been primarily concerned with the foreign policy postures of the Great Powers, yet most of the world consists of minor powers. EC supported research developing an account of the international strategies of minor powers would help to raise an appreciation of the potential for progressive engagement of smaller countries of Europe with the international world of states, multilateral institutions and transnational corporations.

SSH research has only begun in the 5th Framework Programme (FP5), but has seen a huge success in the scientific community. Trust in the stability of European funding needs to be sustained. SSH researchers themselves are an important part of civil society. Especially in the case of societal tensions and difficult political relationships, researchers can contribute to dialogue across groups with opposing views or borders.

Does not this cost too much?

Most public money is spent on social science issues and problems. Employment, economy, housing, environment, crime, health, planning, etc all require evidence-informed policy based on fundamental research aimed at understanding the issues in conceptual and practical terms. But in spite of the primacy of social, economic and cultural issues for government, most research funding is spent on ... Science. There should at least be disciplinary parity in funding. Science may create innovations that lead to jobs, but most jobs are service jobs, and most issues are socio-economic. It makes sense to try and understand the society we live in - not to do everything on the basis of anecdote and uninformed argument. You can't have a smart economy, without a smart society and smart policy.

Though 50% of academic staff in most universities work in Social Science and Humanities, less than 2% of the Cooperation budget in FP7 was devoted to social science and humanities - €0.6 billion for SSH versus €9.1 billion for ICT).

The Interim Evaluation of FP7 by the independent expert group has shown that SSH projects reached the highest evaluation scores, both regarding the average total evaluation score and also specifically the criterion of scientific excellence. Despite these outstanding results, out of 3004 signed grant agreements, only 134 were channelled to SSH projects. This means that a large number of excellent research proposals could not be carried out due to funding limitations.

Therefore, the budget for the specific Cooperation programme for SSH needs to be doubled in FP8, i.e., a budget of €1.2 billion needs to be allocated for the specific theme SSH, maintaining its status as independent, not auxiliary, to themes and programmes of the natural sciences or engineering. Even then, SSH would remain the least expensive theme in Cooperation and, assuming a total budget for FP8 of €90 billion, still receive less than 2% of the total budget of FP8.

SSH projects have proven to be very cost effective, in most cases, requiring only one to five million Euros. This demonstrates the added value through European funding: the European Union can foster world-class SSH research by using only a minimal share of its funding. When carrying out impact assessments of various FP7 instruments, the substantial difference in funding should be taken into account, as some individual projects and initiatives in FP7, which focused on natural science and engineering, received more than the entire SSH Cooperation budget.

Increasing the budget for SSH would also allow striking an improved balance of projects in social sciences on the one hand and humanities on the other.

It is of utmost importance that SSH will continue to have a budget independent from natural science and engineering, with an annual or biennial work programme dedicated to SSH projects in order to be able to address the multiplicity of societal issues facing European society. Topic selection should be made using a combination of a bottom-up (by the research community) and top-down (by the European political institutions and other relevant stakeholders) approach.

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<http://www.ria.ie/Our-Work/Committees/Committees-for-Science/Geographical-Sciences.aspx>