

NHS European Office

Response to the European Commission consultation on 'A common strategic framework for EU research and innovation funding'.

May 2011

The National Health Service (NHS) is one of the largest publicly funded healthcare systems in the world, providing the majority of healthcare in England. The NHS is committed to the principle of universal access to healthcare which is free at the point of use. Every 36 hours the NHS sees over one million patients who make use of a wide range of health services ranging from primary care, in-patient care, long-term healthcare, ophthalmology and dentistry. The NHS is also the largest employer in Europe with more than 1.5 million people on its payroll.

The NHS has a strong track record in research and innovation at local, national and European level. Many of our University Hospitals in particular have significant experience in EU-funded research and innovation projects and we welcome the cross-border collaboration and opportunities for shared learning amongst Member States which involvement in such projects brings. We recognise the value that EU funding can offer the NHS in researching innovative new ways to deliver high-quality and cost-effective healthcare, and in facing up to the social and economic challenges of the 21st century.

This response has been coordinated by the NHS European Office¹ in consultation with NHS organisations. Only those questions of most relevance to the NHS are covered in this response.

Consultation response

Working together to deliver on Europe 2020

The questions in this section correspond to Section 4.1 of the Green Paper.

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 CSF needs to be clear in terms of what it can offer potential participants. It should be relevant to as broad a cross section of civil society as possible, and be open and transparent in its priorities and processes. The best means of achieving this would be to ensure that priorities and application procedures for research and innovation funding are set following consultation with European stakeholders so that they have a sense of 'ownership' over the framework and a vested interest in its success.

In addition, the CSF should be as accessible to those with no prior experience of applying for EU funding as to those who have applied successfully for EU funding in the past. The language and the procedures associated with the CSF should be clear, simple to understand and as light on bureaucracy as possible.

¹ The NHS European Office was established in September 2007 to represent the English National Health Service to EU decision-makers. Its role is to inform the NHS of EU affairs and to ensure that the NHS contributes positively to EU developments.

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A one stop shop and a streamlined set of funding instruments as proposed within the Green Paper would support this recommendation.

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

There has been a great deal of EU and national investment in piloting activities in the field of innovation in recent years. There is now a need to scale-up the more successful of these projects or to apply them beyond their initial test settings. Only when there is sound evidence that an innovation can be implemented effectively and is worth the financial investment, can successful market uptake be realised.

In the UK the Small Business Research Initiative² (SBRI) is a good example of how the full innovation cycle from research to market uptake can be carried out. In the East of England the SBRI has been used to engage the NHS and industry in finding new technological solutions to existing clinical needs. SBRI's enable companies to bid for development contracts for innovative technologies that will help to meet current health challenges. Through the SBRI's NHS organisations can procure new technologies faster, while companies are guaranteed paid contracts, and a phased development programme to design and create new 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?

EU funding enables participants to work outside of their immediate locality. It offers an opportunity to share expertise with counterparts in other European regions and fields of specialism. This encourages the development of innovation and novel approaches as it can bring together ideas and experts who may never meet otherwise. However, it is important to note that the value of smaller or more targeted/ issue specific projects are not lost in the context of a broader 'European objective'. In particular it is important to note that while the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy are extremely valuable in terms of top-level policy, they should not be prioritized at the cost of less over-arching, yet equally important issues such as disease specific areas, mental health, or health inequalities.

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

Joint programming initiatives are a useful mechanism for supporting health and research resources amongst Member States. In terms of Member State research and innovation resources, while we would support measures at EU level which encourage cooperation between Member States, we would not be in favour of formal obligations on Member States to pool their resources. Scope should remain for Member States to set national and sub-national research and innovation priorities according to national and local need and to decide the extent to which they can contribute to and enhance various future JPIs .

² <http://www.innovateuk.org/deliveringinnovation/smallbusinessresearchinitiative.ashx>

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

There must be scope for smaller, less strategic projects to be developed in order to support specific areas of research which would benefit from cross-border collaboration and EU funding. As mentioned above, it is important to note that while the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy are extremely valuable in terms of top-level policy, they should not be prioritised at the cost of less over-arching, yet equally important issues.

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?

Close collaboration and negotiation with civil society including specialist interest groups from, for example the healthcare sector, SMEs or local government as well as the research community would be vital to the success of this objective. The development of the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing over the next months could be used as a useful tool to test such an approach.

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

It is vital that a revised framework is as open and accessible to as many potential applicants from across the EU as possible. The extent to which a broad cross-section of civil society applies for EU funding via the CSF would therefore be a useful indicator of the success of the structure and application procedures of the framework. In addition consideration should be given to the longevity and the social impact of projects for example via demonstrating how a project has benefited local health outcomes or fostered regional social and economic regeneration beyond the life of the project.

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 funds?

EU research and innovation funding should complement regional and national funding. Taking this point into consideration it is all the more important that the CSF and its priorities are established in consultation with regional and national stakeholders in innovation including specialist interest groups such as healthcare providers and those responsible for managing the Structural Funds.

Tackling Societal Challenges

The questions in this section correspond to Section 4.2 of the Green Paper.

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

We welcome a stronger focus on societal challenges, and a cross-disciplinary approach to research in general. However any recommendations to consider societal challenges must not be to the detriment of areas of research which require a stricter agenda-driven focus. There must be flexibility within the CSF for research activities to be undertaken in a manner which is most appropriate to their subject area.

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

Greater emphasis on bottom-up activities would engender more interest and greater involvement in projects by local and regional stakeholders and would help to demonstrate a practical link between agenda setting at EU level and activities undertaken at local level. By making more room for activities carried out at local and regional level the European Commission may become more aware of emerging areas of research or expertise which could contribute to the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy.

Tools which can be readily applied at a grass roots level such as online project management mechanisms or EU data collection kits would support this approach.

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

While it is important that there is a correlation between policy priorities and research and innovation funding, it is important that funding does not become restricted simply to areas where the EU foresees policy or legislative activity between now and 2020. This could cause smaller, more specific, but vitally important research fields to be overlooked for the sake of a more generalised and strategic agenda. It would also run the risk of undermining the importance of long term research planning.

12. How should the role of the Commission's Joint Research Centre be improved in supporting policy-making and forward-looking activities?

The development of systems to assist applications for funding and data sharing would be welcomed.

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

The European Commission has an opportunity to harvest the interest that already exists amongst citizens and civil society towards the research and innovation agenda. To date this interest has been hampered by a funding application process that appears complex and administratively burdensome. A simpler, more streamlined CSF for research funding will attract greater interest and involvement of citizens and civil society particularly if it has been developed in consultation with them and contains priorities which can be addressed at local, national and European level.