Third meeting of the High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU research and innovation programmes
Meeting report

4 and 5 April 2017, Brussels

1. Nature of the meeting

The meeting was non-public.

2. Approval of the agenda

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming the participants. The agenda of the meeting was adopted without changes.

3. Discussion with external stakeholder organisations

At the request of the High Level Group (HLG), a dedicated discussion session was held with a group of invited external and EU institutional stakeholder organisations (Business Europe; European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises; European Association of Research & Technology Organisations; European University Association; Science Europe; Committee of the Regions; European Economic and Social Committee).

The session was structured around four questions prepared and communicated to the stakeholder organisations in advance:

- 1). How could the impact of future EU R&I programmes be maximised?
- 2). How could the EU funding landscape for R&I be rationalised?
- 3). What would be your top three priorities for the next Framework Programme?
- 4). How could the societal relevance of EU R&I programmes be boosted?

Questions were posed by HLG members on the following topics:

- How to foster interdisciplinarity in education (and research)?
- What are your views on non-grant based financing and regulation as a stimulus for innovation?

1 Published in the Register of Commission Expert Groups and Other Similar Entities, code number E03484.
• How to reconcile the openness agenda with the fact that we effectively train our international competitors through this approach?
• On the connection between national and EU R&I funding, can we fully centralise or decentralise?
• What is meant by impact? How do you measure it?
• How to tackle oversubscription within calls in practice?
• What are your views on the current approach towards Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) within Horizon 2020?

4. Working dinner with ERC, EIT and HLG Innovators

At the request of the HLG, a working dinner took place at which the invited guests were Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, President of the European Research Council (ERC); Peter Olesen, Chairman of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Governing Board; and two members of the recently-established High Level Group of Innovators, Marjolein Helder and Kinga Stanisławska.

5. HLG meeting – ideas to improve the current R&I system in Europe

The session was devoted to a discussion on ideas for improving Europe’s performance in R&I through the future EU programme, based on the evidence considered to date and the prior discussions held at HLG meetings.

Mark Ferguson’s presentation touched on issues including:

• Scientific excellence and impact.
• The balance between bottom-up and top-down funding.
• Ways to promote disruptive innovation.
• The concept of collaborative grants and challenge-based funding.
• The potential and limits of peer review.
• The importance of the EU to experiment with new approaches in funding and peer review.

Nevenka Maher’s presentation touched upon issues including:

• The measuring and valuing of intangible assets.
• Investment in human capital.
• Governance of the European R&I ecosystem.
• Diffusion and transfer of knowledge in addition to its production.

A subsequent discussion amongst the HLG took place, covering issues including: the challenge of identifying what could be a disruptive innovation (especially within an evaluation); what could be the future ‘Man on the Moon’ project for Europe which would resonate and provide a compelling a strong mission?; and on the role of SSH and interdisciplinarity as part of a mission-driven approach.
DG RTD then presented some key emerging findings from the Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020.

6. Working lunch with Commissioner Vestager

The Chair explained the Group’s mandate and explained its interest in the role of competition policy as a very important enabler and framework condition for research and innovation.

Questions discussed with Commissioner Vestager included:

- The contribution of competition policy in opening markets to innovation.
- The role of state aid clearance in Europe in fostering investment in R&I in the EU.
- The administrative capacity of national and regional authorities to enforce state aid rules and the role of precedents in creating greater legal certainty.
- The global versus European perspective of EU competition policy and the importance of creating global frameworks for competition policy.
- The importance of science and innovation ministers steering governments’ economic policy.

7. HLG meeting – afternoon session

A first discussion was held on potential recommendations to include in HLG report, and the potential narrative structure, in the presence of Commissioner Moedas.

8. Next meeting

The next meeting will take place on 6 and 7 June 2017 in Brussels.

9. List of participants

HLG members present: Pascal Lamy (Chair), Martin Brudermüller, Mark Ferguson, Lykke Friis, Cristina Garmendia, Iain Gray, Jan Gulliksen, Harri Kulmala, Nevenka Maher, Maya Plentz Fagundes, Lucyna Woźniak, Milena Žic Fuchs.