

Framework Programme 9: Russell Group key priorities

Russell Group universities are active participants in EU Research and Innovation Framework Programmes, which have supported excellent research over many years, leading to important breakthroughs and discoveries with significant positive impacts in the UK, EU and globally.

Our universities especially value the opportunities to develop long-lasting relationships with fellow scientists and organisations across Europe through joint research projects, researcher mobility and EU networking platforms. Between 2007 and 2014, the UK made over 150,000 collaborative links with EU partners through the FP7 programme and under Horizon 2020 the 24 Russell Group universities have fostered over 9,300 high-value collaborative links in the first two and half years of the programme alone.

Although the UK is preparing to leave the EU, we want to continue to bolster European science through our universities' contributions to EU research. Above all, we would like to ensure the good relationship between the UK and the EU on science can be maintained and we hope the UK Government and the EU can reach an agreement which will allow the UK to continue to engage constructively with future research projects and programmes.

The Russell Group's top five key priorities for the next Framework Programme, FP9, are:

1. **Excellence** – allocate funding on the basis of excellence to drive up the quality of the science base across the EU and to ensure the best return for public investment – particularly through the ERC
2. **Supporting the entire research and innovation ecosystem** – ensure a sustainable balance of funding between fundamental, curiosity-driven research and closer-to-market activities, with appropriate support across all discipline areas
3. **Budget** – increase the budget for cutting-edge research and innovation to support growth and jobs in the EU, focusing on grant funding for university research rather than loans
4. **Simplification** – streamline funding instruments and introduce a lighter audit burden
5. **Global reach** – ensure FP9 is truly open to the world with more flexibility to work with excellent research partners across the globe to maximise the impact of research funding for wider benefit.

Excellence

To boost the science base and knowledge economy across Europe and make the most efficient use of public funds, the next Framework Programme must continue to allocate funding on the basis of excellence. An excellence-based programme drives up the quality of research by fostering competition and ensures the whole of Europe benefits from innovation, brain circulation and internationalisation.

The success of the European Research Council (ERC) in particular demonstrates the value of focusing EU funding on excellent research. The ERC should be a central part of FP9, along with the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, which provide valuable support to excellent young researchers.

FP9 should continue to help boost research capacity across Europe through partnerships between organisations in more and less research-intensive regions. The 'Spreading excellence and widening

participation' budget could be spent more efficiently and effectively, in particular allowing a more flexible, bottom up approach and fostering innovative approaches to research management support and networking.

Options should also be explored to optimise the use of European Structural and Investment Funds, which should be the main source of funding to develop research and innovation capacity, including developing better synergies between these funds and FP9.

Supporting the entire research and innovation pipeline

FP9 should retain a comprehensive approach to the research and innovation pipeline to facilitate the development of new ideas, products and services which bring jobs and growth across Europe. It is critical that FP9 prioritises continued investment in fundamental, curiosity-driven research to ensure there is a sustainable pipeline of new ideas to underpin future innovations and address global challenges.

The European Commission should support initiatives to bridge the gap between research and innovation more effectively and ensure that excellent EU-funded projects are able to reach their full potential in terms of impact. Consideration should be given to setting up a proof of concept fund across FP9 similar to that already run by the ERC.

The next Framework Programme must be designed in a way which ensures social sciences, arts and humanities are properly recognised for the valuable contributions they make to tackling global research challenges; they must be funded adequately alongside biomedical, physical sciences and engineering.

Budget

Investing in research and innovation delivers economic, social, health, environmental and other far-reaching benefits. The EU should seek to increase its level of investment for the next Framework Programme to underpin a competitive knowledge-based European economy for the future. Financing cutting-edge research through the ERC in particular, and developing skills of top researchers through Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, will allow the EU to respond with agility to emerging challenges.

Research should be funded through non-repayable grant funding and the Commission should strongly resist changing funding from grants to loans as this would represent a dynamic shift in the kind of research and innovation activities the next programme would be able to support.

Simplification

We welcome the progress that has been made to simplify the architecture, funding rules and application process of Horizon 2020. We would like the Commission to go further in FP9 to streamline funding instruments and to reduce the audit burden on institutions. In particular we would support a more risk-based approach which reduces the requirements for institutions with a proven track record of participation and clean audit in EU programmes.

The Commission should also consider ways to ensure success rates are at a level which is efficient and which ensures the programme remains attractive to the best researchers. They could consider making changes to the two-stage proposal system to generate efficiencies for both researchers and evaluators.

Global reach

The impact of FP9 can be enhanced by improving opportunities for collaboration with partners from around the globe. Being truly open to the world with increased flexibility to work with excellent partners in non-EU countries would facilitate research collaboration with a wider pool of top international researchers and expertise, improving outcomes and boosting jobs, growth and productivity.