



Response to the consultation exercise for a Common Strategic Framework for future Research and Innovation Funding submitted.

Position paper prepared by the RISE group.

The RISE group brings together a number of Europe's leading specialist institutions for teaching and research in social sciences and economics.¹ The members are among the most active participants in European research programmes. The RISE group came together to share concerns over the long-term wellbeing of European social science research as a result of changing research policy in Europe. Our commitment is to ensure that socio-economic research is placed on a sustainable footing both intellectually and in respect of resourcing and so can continue to play a major role in contributing to better understanding of European social and economic conditions. We welcome the opportunity presented by this consultation over the green paper to be more active participants in the debate over the future of European research and to be advocates for the place of a high quality and independent social science research programme.

In order to deliver the growth and social cohesion ambitions set out in *Europe 2020 Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*, the role of institutions and institutional reforms will be fundamental. The good functioning of political and economic institutions is an important factor in the comparative advantage for the competitiveness of Europe. Social and political innovation will be key factors for the success of delivering on Europe 2020 alongside the need for innovation in technology. The contribution of social science and economic research will therefore be at the heart of transforming Europe in the next decade.

An independent Social Science research programme

The future of long-term funding of research programmes in social science seems less secure now than it has ever been. RISE group members believe it is important to ensure that social science research will continue to have an independent space in European research. Placing social sciences research under 'grand challenges' focussed on technological approaches to finding technological solutions will ensure that social science research becomes driven by the priorities of other disciplines and not those that are emerging questions in social science. Some argue that it is precisely the concept of 'grand societal challenges', which preserves the place of social science research, and places it at the heart of Europe's research and innovation strategy. But supporting only applied research connected to defined 'challenges' does not allow support for the theoretical and methodological development and innovation across wider set of questions. It is this broad base of support which is needed to sustain the development of social science disciplines over time. The renewal and sustainability of social science research is undermined in this framework and this is to the detriment of the long-term well being of a high quality European research base, which must be equipped to help achieve Europe's long-term ambitions.

¹¹ Bocconi University, Central European University, Deusto University, London School of Economics, Science Po, Stockholm School of Economics and Tilburg University.

Research Excellence

The RISE group strongly supports the general principle that ‘excellence’ should continue to be the fundamental criterion in allocating research investment and not only in the social sciences. European level funding represents less than 10% of the total public research spending in Europe but it is a major contributor to ensuring that Europe’s research base is globally competitive, that European scientists are able to participate fully in international academic networks and that Europe can grow its academic capital. It is the most significant supporter of transnational collaborative research into European level issues. Any weakening of the prioritisation of ‘research excellence’ in the allocation of funding under the next framework programme will soon begin to undermine the standing of European research. High quality research, which has impact within the academic community, is also more likely to achieve impact in the wider stakeholder community. Excellent research will therefore continue to be the key driver of innovation. If Europe is to compete globally over the next 10 or 20 years any weakening in the investment in high quality research will gradually undermine European innovation and competitiveness. Under the review of the 7th Framework programme, published in November 2010, Social sciences research has been shown to be producing research proposals of among the highest scientific standards; in both overall proposal quality and scientific quality social science research proposals rated higher than in other programme areas. The cooperation programme is a major support of high quality research and we therefore argue to retain the principle of excellence in the allocation of funding.

Applied research versus ‘frontier’ research

There are considerable pressures on those developing proposals for the new framework programme to ensure that scarce public resources are seen to be deriving immediate return or are directly engaged with solving problems. We believe there is a strong case to be made for support to fundamental or ‘frontier’ research, which is often not seen as having the required direct and immediate impact. Long-term funding for basic research is necessary to ensure the regeneration and renewal of disciplines and their theoretical and methodological foundations. Without ongoing support for the disciplinary foundations the developing applied fields and multi-disciplinary approaches will be weakened. In the 7th Framework programme the European Research Council has been a real success in addressing this issue. The RISE group strongly supports continuation and extension of its programme. We would advise caution in any policy to link the ERC’s programmes to the broader ‘innovation agenda. We are concerned that this would only distract and dilute the mission of the ERC. It is an increasingly valuable asset to European research.

Innovation

Technological Innovation is no longer the only answer to the ‘grand societal challenges’ and the RISE group supports a wider definition of innovation to encompass services as well as technology. Innovation is also about unmet social needs, tapping creativity and other unused sources, addressing societal challenges while blurring the boundaries with economic innovations. Private sector ‘social entrepreneurs’ as well as public bodies need to be more involved in formulating the strategic agenda for social innovation as well as technical innovation. Europe of 2020 and beyond will require as many advances in non-technical social innovation as has been provided by previous technological ‘revolutions’. The new common framework asks whether non-technical innovation should form part of the new framework. The RISE group of social science research institutions would argue most strongly that it should be a fundamental component of the new common strategic framework.

RISE also supports a new wider definition of ‘industry’ to allow the inclusion of think tanks, activist groups, NGOs and others. Many of these organisations already play an important role in the process of knowledge transfer and dissemination of social sciences research into a more applied and measurable impact for public benefit.

Full cycle funding

All innovation requires the communication of knowledge between knowledge creators and innovators. We support the view that more encouragement needs to be conveyed to support the transfer of knowledge from academia to a wider audience of stakeholders. We welcome the initiative to encourage and support activities to help ensure that research outputs are used. More can be done to ensure that research results do not remain on the shelf and inaccessible to use because of overly restrictive IP protection. Publicly funded research should be made more readily available for use. However, we do not support the view that all projects should contain an 'innovation' component forming a second phase of original research projects. We invite the Commission to consider this is a separate second phase. Not all projects are in the position to show potential for immediate 'application' of research. It may be possible to describe possible pathways to future influence or impact of the research but not to complete the 'cycle' in a single project. The second phase of a project – understood as the knowledge transfer phase – should be funded on the basis of further applications for a new second phase project submitted towards the end of the first phase.

Grand Challenges

We discussed the detrimental effect on social science research of the 'grand challenges', however, we have a wider concern that this is not the best form to support high quality research in general. The first concern is that the greater part of the funding will inevitably be targeted towards applied or policy focused research that responds to short-term needs and is driven by external political agendas. We recognise that there are indeed major challenges for Europe and that gathering talents in multi-disciplinary research teams will be necessary. However, we must also highlight the detrimental effect this could have on renewal and sustainability of European research and in particular social science research. Placing the greater part of research investment into a small number of focussed 'challenges' will inevitably reduce the opportunities for support to many research areas and more generally to the fundamental theoretical and methodological developments. Selecting priority areas on the basis of questions identified today risks stifling the research undertaken in areas not directly connected to the small number of grand challenges. There is evidence that suggest that the most innovative knowledge societies are flexible and 'innovative' precisely because they can draw on a wide base of research. Much of the work will have been undertaken not because of an identified immediate application but because it represented questions worthy of investigation. The outputs of research contributing to the general body of knowledge which is drawn on at the time it is needed provides the best guarantee of Europe maintaining its place as a leading knowledge based innovation community.

Early career and junior researchers

RISE institutions share a real concern for the next generation of scientists, particularly in social sciences and economics. Funding cuts at all levels are seriously limiting institutions in their mission of training the next generations of postdoctoral and junior researchers. These young researchers are often trapped in complex recruitment systems in higher education or vicious cycles of short-term contract research on projects where they are restricted from developing their own research agendas. This is precisely the point in a young researchers career when they ought to be developing new and innovative approaches to research.

The members of the RISE group call on the Commission to develop a more deliberate investment in early career scientists; for example by strengthening the Marie Curie programme. Some junior fellowships could also encourage recruitment at home institutions facilitating dynamics of recruitment for European scientists.

Life-long funding opportunities for researcher

Bottom-up fundamental research is very important for economic, social and technological growth. RISE acknowledges that the importance of basic research has been recognised through the institution of the European Research Council, however, we strongly suggests a revision of the rules underpinning the application procedures. The ERC rules foresee the possibility for researchers to benefit from the ERC grants only once in a career, twice in the unusual case of a Starting Grant followed by an Advanced Grant.

A Principal Investigator should be allowed to apply to new ERC calls, perhaps one or two years after the end of the previous funded project, as it happens with similar US institutions such as the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Health.

The RISE group thanks the European Commission for opening this consultation and thereby providing the research community and other stakeholders with a place to set out views and arguments on the priorities for Europe's flagship research investment policy. We hope to continue to provide inputs over the future formation of Europe's flagship research programme.

RISE Group