



Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology

UK Position Paper on the 10th EU Research and Innovation Framework Programme

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Introduction

The UK is pleased to have been associated to Horizon Europe since the start of 2024, and as such, we have been following the developments around its successor Programme with interest. The 10th Research and Innovation Framework Programme (FP10) will be tasked with harnessing excellence-based research and innovation to support delivery of European security, sustainable prosperity and competitiveness. The global nature of Horizon Europe is vitally important. It allows likeminded countries with shared goals, such as the UK, to pool resources in support of scientific collaboration of the very highest quality with our European partners and other associated countries to address global problems and improve the lives of citizens.

The UK Government's shift to a Mission-driven approach embraces innovation, ambition, and relentlessly driving towards outcomes that matter to citizens and society. We therefore wholly support the EU's focus on tackling complex societal challenges to better prepare for the future. We share the EU's aims to support a whole range of public, private and civil society players to deliver research and innovation which will enable our systems to adapt to tackle issues from economic growth and net zero to security, improving health outcomes and opportunity for all.

The UK's collaboration through EU Framework Programmes is rooted in longstanding ties of friendship, shared expertise, and common values. Scientists and innovators from the UK and EU are working together on critical issues facing our societies – from climate and the clean energy transition, to supporting our common economic resilience. We want to strengthen these ties with our neighbours and allies and explore areas where we can boost our shared prosperity and security through mutually beneficial agreements.

Having associated to Horizon Europe, we want UK scientists, innovators, businesses, and institutions to continue to work together in pursuit of excellence with partners across Europe and hope that the developing proposals for FP10 will support this collaboration. The UK will, of course, be interested in potentially associating to FP10 assuming it is open, relevant and provides good value for our research community and the UK taxpayer. As such, we are keen to support discussions as FP10 takes shape and engage in its development from the outset. This paper sets out the UK Government's initial views on FP10 as a first step to working together for good across our continent, for peace, for security, and for prosperity.

Framework Programme 10

The next Framework Programme will have a critical role in realising sustainable prosperity, competitiveness and security in the EU and in the UK and other associated countries. Cooperation through Horizon Europe and its successors of the broadest and deepest alliance of democratic and likeminded countries will assure that we are at the forefront of what is a global competition, combining the deep strengths of our R&D systems for wealth creation and resilience.

From the opportunities it offers individuals, teams and organisations, through research and innovation, and the adoption and diffusion of their outcomes, FP10 has the potential to be transformative for R&D across the European continent and beyond. These objectives are closely aligned with the UK's own Missions to champion economic growth, make the UK a clean energy superpower, improve health outcomes, create safer communities and break down barriers to opportunity. Delivering on ambitious and transformational goals will only succeed if the R&D system delivers the science and innovation needed for each of them, and so supporting R&D and R&D talent is vital.

We would therefore particularly support an FP10 in which:

- Excellence remains at the very core of the Programme, with stable and predictable support for all proven instruments which deliver excellence through Horizon Europe funding.
- The entire research pipeline is supported, from fundamental research to high Technology Readiness Level (TRL) innovations, ensuring effective translation of research into impactful outcomes.
- Clear thematic priorities are set out which ensure benefits to citizens.
- The three-pillar architecture of the current Framework Programme is maintained to aid understanding and engagement.
- The impact and effectiveness of structures and governance arrangements, especially those in Pillar 3, are reviewed.
- Common research security is strengthened without hindering genuine need and appetite for collaboration with trusted partners.
- Associated countries can participate from the Programme's inception.
- Barriers to collaboration are removed, enabling equal participation of likeminded associated countries.
- Simplifications are delivered, where feasible, to reduce the administrative burdens on applicants, participants and partnerships.

Excellence and widening

Promoting and attracting excellence from across the globe is fundamental to harnessing the full potential of Europe's research and innovation capabilities through the entire research pipeline. As such, the UK strongly believes that excellence should remain at the very core of FP10.

Excellence and capacity building and the support of talent through widening activity is vital for harnessing the continent's potential and should continue to be addressed. However, the widening instruments alone cannot close the innovation gap. There may be merit to exploring a regional rather than a national lens to contribute greater benefits to European research excellence given the wide diversity of regions across Europe and the range of institutions not currently reached by EU funding.

FP10 also presents an opportunity to build upon existing work on gender equality in Horizon Europe by ensuring equality, diversity and inclusion beyond gender is considered and addressed to further support the pursuit of excellence.

Openness and Security

The UK welcomes the involvement of non-EU countries as associated members of the Framework Programmes. Future Programmes should preserve this principle of global openness to those who share common goals and values, supporting the best research and collaboration to tackle shared societal challenges.

The design of FP10 should remove barriers to this collaboration and enable the equal participation of likeminded associated countries in all areas of the Programme from its very inception. This should recognise and seek to complement the ways in which many Member States and associated countries like the UK already work closely together on shared security and technological challenges in support of our mutual defence.

As set out in the EU's Joint Communication on a European Economic Security Strategy (June 2023), the wider global geopolitical context places an imperative on democratic nations to strengthen our common research security and we support the Commission's focus on this issue as plans for FP10 emerge. Equally, it is important that the effort to protect research from misuse by malign actors does not close off genuine opportunities for likeminded countries to cooperate. There is scope for Member States and associated countries to pool our collective experience to facilitate research, safeguard research security and protect research integrity while minimising these risks. Enhanced clarity over well-defined ethical criteria will be crucial to support research being developed in a way that supports both security and technological advancement across Europe.

The UK also recognises the need to ensure that research with dual use applications is conducted safely and in a way which supports the common values we share with the EU and other democracies. To drive forward the region's competitiveness and tackle the range of policy priorities facing Europe, it is critical that likeminded countries work together to progress and strengthen Europe's security agenda, whilst utilising the power of new technologies to improve the lives of citizens through a continued commitment to civil research.

Budget Distribution

To date, Horizon Europe has struck a careful balance in providing funding activity across the entire value chain. To maximise its effectiveness and ability to respond to present and future global challenges, FP10 should seek to preserve stable and predictable support for proven excellence-based elements within Horizon Europe.

It is critically important that there is still a place for discovery-led, curiosity-driven science of the type funded by the European Research Council (ERC) and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) which so strongly contribute to international recognition of Europe's research strengths. To deliver on EU and associated countries' competitiveness through its impact on networks and markets, FP10 will also need to support industry-led applied R&D designed to address the shared societal challenges we face – from climate change to future pandemic prevention and the potentially transformational impact of higher TRL/innovation funding.

Clear thematic priorities ensure a focus on key priorities in order to benefit citizens. The UK Government's priorities including the five Missions demonstrate that we recognise and support the need for FP10 to prioritise the green and digital transitions, the strengthening of our collective resilience and competitiveness (especially in new and emerging technologies), and the continuing drive to deliver solutions for societal challenges.

Learning from recent shared crises and complex challenges, there would be clear benefits to creating a programme with sufficient flexibility to address emerging threats to the health and security of citizens. Introducing stronger networks or instruments which are aimed at facilitating exploitation of results across pillar structures could also support impact and the effectiveness of the research pipeline if adequately supported and well-understood by the research community. This could, for instance, allow the outcomes of Research and Innovation Actions to feed into subsequent Innovation Actions with results shared across the projects as technology is developed from low to high TRL or strengthening routes for successful MSCA projects to be further developed and commercialised.

Scale of ambition

To date, the scale and ambition of the Framework Programmes have enabled unparalleled research and global collaboration, resulting in clear benefits from the pooling of our shared resources and expertise through the world's largest research collaboration programme. The decision on the budget for FP10 will, of course, be a decision for Member States in conjunction with European institutions and informed by input from associated countries. In a world of constrained resources third countries will then, of course, need to consider the affordability of association to the next Framework Programme and the terms of the framework for participation. Irrespective of scale, its value to our collective long term scientific endeavour should be protected by ensuring FP10's budget exclusively funds research and innovation.

Structure

There is real value in maintaining and evolving structures that already work effectively, which are well understood, and which provide a range of funding options for the different types of applicants or organisation. Examples of this include the bottom-up curiosity-driven nature of an independent ERC, the capacity of Pillar 2 to mobilise multinational consortia in pursuit of solutions to global challenges or the long-term nature of the Framework Programmes themselves which allows for sustained investment over many years. For this reason, the UK supports evolution under FP10 rather than revolution. The continuity of the well-established three-pillar architecture in the next Framework Programme will aid understanding and engagement.

There are areas where we think improvements can be made. There should be space and flexibility for bureaucratically light-touch experimentation and novel mechanisms, such as broadening the opportunities for collaborative activity throughout the research pipeline to better facilitate R&D impact.

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Through the development of FP10 there is also the scope to consider how the governance arrangements can coherently deliver on funding priorities, avoiding duplication and complementing the diverse range of national funding systems. One example would be ensuring greater strategic coordination across any thematically-related activity.

To contribute better to our collective growth and competitiveness there may be scope to build more effective linkages or configurations between the very best elements of Pillar 3 to support international connectivity, innovation eco-systems and to provide more opportunities for both consortia and SMEs to identify, develop, scale-up and grow. In a fast-developing landscape

there is a clear benefit to ensuring that innovation funding is flexible enough that it can support all topics and technologies. Maintaining a balance between grants and equity, rather than further shifts towards equity finance, will also ensure support for a range of innovative SMEs at different stages of commercialisation.

The future of Partnerships and Missions

The UK supports the continuation of European Partnerships, which are an important tool for funding excellent R&D in collaboration with priority R&D actors, especially businesses, in targeted areas where a long-term and joined-up approach are particularly important to de-risk investment. However, the existing array and variety of Partnerships can appear overly complex, especially the administrative requirements. FP10 would benefit from greater transparency of Partnership funding and prioritisation, a clearer delineation between the purpose and work of Partnerships and the core work programmes, especially Pillar 2, and careful consideration of the administrative structures to ensure they can deliver impactful research and innovation.

We recognise and support the transformative potential of a mission-led approach to deliver impactful outcomes. Given the scale of ambition, the EU Missions will need time and consistent focus to deliver results, and therefore should continue to be funded through FP10. However, the Mission governance structures are opaque, making it difficult for stakeholders to feed in.

Accessibility

The development of FP10 also provides an opportunity to address the difficulties applicants and participants face which reduce the attractiveness of some instruments and potentially dissuade excellent researchers or resource-constrained businesses, especially SMEs, from participating. We would support efforts to review and reduce administrative burdens and streamline FP10's application landscape through the entire project life cycle to ensure excellence is the key driver of funding allocations. Streamlining applications, providing more clarity on evaluation criteria, or supporting new applicants with more specific feedback could serve to increase participation and success rates, especially for businesses and SMEs.

The design of FP10 should incentivise organisations, and in particular businesses, to collaborate across value chains and support their work to access global markets and internationalise. It is important that the Programme responds to the technological and security challenges, and market demands for truly global solutions by facilitating open and demand driven R&D cooperation between all participants in the Programme.

Association

The UK supports continued expansion of associated country status to likeminded countries as a tool to maximise the impact of R&D funded through FP10. The recent additions of New Zealand, Canada, South Korea to date (and the ongoing negotiations between the EU and Switzerland) increases the pool of excellent researchers, innovators, businesses and institutions who can participate in Horizon-funded projects bringing additional expertise and opportunities for international collaboration.

We recognise FP10 will seek to deliver maximum impact through synergies with other EU Programmes but this should not come at cost of overcomplicating or limiting access to FP10 funded activity for participants from associated countries, if this risks reducing the attractiveness of the EU's FP10 offer to R&D intensive countries. Care should be taken to ensure there is a level playing field for researchers and innovators from associated countries when it comes to access and eligibility to FP10 calls from the outset, recognising the significant financial contribution that they will make to the total budget.

Work to ensure third countries can swiftly participate would also maximise FP10 impact and ability to deliver on its strategic priorities.

Conclusion

We would welcome opportunities for future discussion with researchers, innovators, businesses, institutions, the Commission and Member States as FP10 develops given our many shared priorities. The UK is keen to support the harnessing of excellence-based research and innovation for our collective security, sustainable prosperity and competitiveness. We are confident that the strengths of the UK's R&D system and our long history of collaboration can help contribute to these shared endeavours.

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