



**Receiver(s):** Ministry of Higher Education and Science

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**Consultation on Position Paper on the EU Framework Programme for research and innovation (FP10)**

Aarhus University welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the Position Paper from the Ministry of Higher Education and Science on the EU Framework Programme for research and innovation (FP10).

Aarhus University finds the positioning paper to be well-balanced and representing the needs of Danish research and society.

The current structure of Horizon Europe has proven to be an efficient framework for European research and innovation. Aarhus University supports maintaining the overall structure, but at the same time making adjustments in fields where the current Framework Programme has been unsuccessful. Further, the new geopolitical situation and the global challenges like the green and digital transition call for new approaches to international R&I collaboration, which should be reflected in the next Framework Programme.

Aarhus University strongly agrees with the Ministry's statement on firmly standing behind the principle of excellence. Excellent research must be the backbone of all pillars of the Framework Programme as this is the path for securing European scientific leadership in the global knowledge society.

During Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe Aarhus University has been observing a rising pressure for earmarked funding for specific purposes or for specific groups only, thereby undermining the competitive and excellence-based selection processes.

Aarhus University calls for an ambitious budget for FP10 based on a proper balance between predictability and flexibility in order to safeguard R&I. A predictable budget for FP10 should be ensured, maybe even ring fenced, to avoid unnecessary frustration among potential applicants and wasted planning efforts in the Programme Committees and not least to be protected from cuts unrelated to research and innovation.





Changes in the geopolitical situation and the needs for strategic autonomy should be addressed, but not by closing off the Framework Programme to international R&I cooperation. It might be worth working with a segmented approach to international collaboration. Even when association to the Framework Programme is not achieved, the framework conditions for international collaboration are under threat due to incompatibilities when it comes to working with data, GDPR, security, compliance, governance etc. This is especially true for cooperation with the UK and the US.

Most of the grand challenges facing the European population today have been created by humans. This calls for a need to acknowledge the important contributions made by researchers from social sciences and humanities, – and in many areas there is a need to make technology and humans walk hand in hand by ensuring a real integration of SSH and by providing better opportunities for SSH-led projects.

Aarhus University supports the suggestions from the Ministry to enhance clear structures and simplified rules for participation in FP10 and streamlining the landscape of EU programmes supporting R&I.

Based on these positions Aarhus University has the following suggestions and recommendations:

- Aarhus University recommends that the next Framework Programme regulation provides a clear and explicit definition of excellence due to diverging positions among and within EU institutions and various stakeholders to Horizon Europe and the resulting risk of diluting the concept of excellence.
- It is essential to ensure transparent and competitive calls by using competitive and excellence-based selection processes rewarding the highest scientific quality.
- Ambitions for investment in frontier research must be high. The Excellence pillar should as a minimum maintain its budget. When it comes to ERC almost half of the excellent projects do not receive funding because of budget restraints. ERC should at all costs maintain its independent role. MSCA offers a consistent and systematic approach to researcher mobility with significant impact on research careers, hence MSCA should (like the ERC) remain a cornerstone of pillar I.
- The EU R&I funding landscape needs more funding for fostering strategic cooperation among the best research teams in Europe allowing them to focus their work on longer-term research projects.



- Ensure thematic collaborative research on low TRL levels (1-4) to rebalance the Framework Programme. Topics on low TRL levels should be relatively broad and less descriptive. Topics with higher TRL could be more prescriptive on expected outcomes and impact.
- The width of topics and their related budget should allow for reasonable success rates. In Horizon Europe there are topics where only one project will be funded through one call with no further calls opening.
- An approach acknowledging the important contributions made by researchers from social sciences and humanities. This includes a stronger involvement of SSH in interdisciplinary collaborations and better opportunities for SSH-led projects. The draft Strategic Plan emphasizes the need to integrate SSH from the drafting of topics to the selection and evaluation of projects by evaluators with demonstrable SSH expertise.
- The evaluation system should be improved among others by including briefings on the evaluation of the interdisciplinarity section and by including SSH experts in evaluation panels. Furthermore, flexibility to prioritise and concentrate on one or more categories of impact depending on main focus of the project should be allowed for applicants.
- An initiative to address the important challenges concerning export control, dual use, data sharing and other challenges for research cooperation is needed. A joint agreement on how to cooperate and clearing obstacles between the EU, UK and US would be a good starting point, but only if such an agreement results in an operational and un-bureaucratic set-up.
- For Aarhus University partnerships are important instruments addressing strategic, European agendas by bringing together different stakeholders. This approach needs to be prioritised also in the future. Though to increase the transparency of the European Partnerships and to avoid earmarked funding calls should in general be open. The funding model of Co-funded Partnerships has apart from its legal challenges also proven to be cumbersome especially for smaller Member States with proportionally smaller national funding agencies which are not always in a position to prioritize the European Partnerships. The national set-up for providing sufficient unbureaucratic co-funding is also a challenge seen from a Danish perspective.
- Aarhus University recognizes that the Missions have experienced problems in the start-up phase, but finds that progress has been made and we recommend Missions to be an integrated part of the next Framework Programme. The



Horizon Europe Regulation clearly states that Missions shall “encompass activities from a broad range of TRLs, including lower TRLs.” In the next Framework Programme a clear research component must be present also on low TRLs.

- The main part of European Innovation Council (EIC) support should be for excellent, open projects. There is a need for re-orientation of innovation activities (EIC) to focus on knowledge creation rather than market deployment of technologies, and for FP10 to provide the right conditions to empower universities to further develop knowledge valorisation activities.
- The concept of ‘Open Innovation in Science’ as a natural continuation of the spectrum started by Open Science practices can help bridge useful in-depth collaboration between Research Performing Organisations and industry. Such collaboration in open spaces at precompetitive levels build both trust and speed into the discovery process and can therefore help bridge the valley of death between research and innovation.
- Aarhus University agrees on the concerns about the evolution of EIT being increasingly focused on business activities. If EIT is to stay in the Framework Programme more opportunities of research component integration must be present, meaning a refocusing of EIT.