



The Guild's response to the ITRE Committee's draft report on the assessment of Horizon 2020 and the proposal for Framework Programme 9

The Guild welcomes the recommendations of the European Parliament's ITRE Committee for the next Framework Programme, based on a careful review of how Horizon 2020 has succeeded in its mission to foster excellent science, respond to societal challenges and boost industrial leadership in Europe. The Guild strongly supports the draft report in addressing the Framework Programme as being a key initiative in supporting the development of a knowledge society that serves its citizens, with the scientific community and industry being crucial actors in the sustainable and inclusive development of Europe. The Guild agrees with the report that ambitious contributions are needed from stakeholders and Member States to achieve the target of investing 3% of the GDP in research and development in the EU by 2020. The EU has a chance to show global leadership in fostering the development of a competitive knowledge society by providing the next Framework Programme with an ambitious budget: for this, 100 billion euros for research and innovation should be a floor, not a ceiling.

The Guild makes the following remarks on the draft report:

Excellence

The Guild agrees with the report that excellence should remain the core value and key evaluation criterion across the three pillars, and its unique role cannot be challenged. For this reason, there cannot be any element of geographic proportionality: to introduce such a criterion for allocating funding would mean that some researchers would get funding because of their country of residence, not because of excellence, and it would reduce them to second-class status. It would also reinforce rather than reduce the capacity gap in research and innovation between high and low performing regions.

Societal impact

The Guild agrees with the draft report that the future programme should emphasise the importance of collaborative research in addressing today's pressing societal challenges. Challenges in the areas of health, migration, inequalities and climate change among others are global by nature, and therefore the Guild calls for aligning the challenges addressed in FP9 with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. Producing knowledge and solutions on these challenges require a strong contribution from Social Sciences and Humanities, which need to be included in genuinely interdisciplinary projects fostered by the third pillar. This would also allow European researchers to have improved opportunities to international collaboration and science diplomacy.

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Widening participation

For the target of 3% of the GDP invested in R&D to be achieved, the draft report rightly refers to the importance in addressing regional divisions in investment for research and development as well as the urgent need to improve the supply of highly qualified human capital, technological infrastructure and university-business collaboration in regions lagging behind. The Guild calls for strong and effective instruments to address the participation gap and demands increased opportunities for cross-border collaboration in R&I through structural funds.

The Guild is strongly committed to enhancing excellent science and innovation across all of Europe. For the next Framework Programme we need to take many of the ideas that have been developed over the past few years (e.g. ERA chairs, TEAMING Actions, the Seal of Excellence, and the ERC's Norway-EEA initiative for Widening) and examine carefully how they have succeeded, and how their effects can be improved further in fostering excellent science, innovation and collaboration across borders. FP9 has to attract the talent from across the entire European Research Area and foster excellence and genuine collaboration across disciplines.

The Guild is committed to collaborate with the European Parliament and provide the expertise of its member universities in addressing the challenge of R&I divide existing between European regions and the participation gap that has escalated in the course of Horizon 2020.

Innovation

Bridging the gap between research and innovation is a crucial challenge that needs to be better addressed in FP9. The Guild supports the aim of facilitating SME's participation in the programme by bringing together different instruments in the form of an European Innovation Council (EIC). The budget for the EIC should not be taken from the overall budget for FP9 at the cost of excellent science and responding to societal challenges, but it should be funded through the research and innovation budget of EFSI.

Enhanced SME participation under the aegis of the EIC cannot be done at the cost of further deepening the gap between basic research and close-to market innovation projects. Funding programmes for innovation must recognise and be inclusive to different players in the innovation ecosystems and the unique role of universities in fostering science based innovation. In addition, the Guild agrees that funding calls that target lower TRL levels should be increased in the second and third pillar.

Projects implementing the principles of Open Innovation need to be fostered in the next Framework Programme, for it focuses on finding new solutions to challenges experienced by citizens through collaboration between researchers, the public sector, private companies and citizens (according to the quadruple helix collaboration). Universities are in a unique position to facilitate these processes, in all the regions of Europe. They can maximise the public good through collaborations enabling universities to develop innovative solutions to challenges experienced by hospitals, schools or inhabitants of a certain region by bringing together students (today's and tomorrow's innovators that they educate), citizens, companies and the public sector. We need to do more to articulate the genuine European added value for EU support, and this relates not only to Open Innovation and the EIC, but also to how the regional and national innovation ecosystems, where universities play a critical part, can be enhanced through European co-ordination and support.