

Green Paper Consultation on Toward a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation Funding

Response on behalf of:

UK Council of Professors and Heads of Departments of Sociology,¹ British Sociological Association,² and European Sociological Association,³

We welcome the Green Paper on a Common Strategic Framework for Research and Innovation Funding as a first outline of how EU research instruments might work together to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of funding for research at both national and EU levels. However, we have very major concerns about how the research challenges are framed.

- We are concerned about the adoption of a problematic, 'linear' understanding of research and of 'technocratic' solutions to problems which, however technical they may seem, will always be socially embedded.
- We believe that there is a need for much greater recognition of the importance of social sciences research within EU funding of research and innovation.
- We are concerned about the seriously reduced engagement with civil society actors and their agendas with regard to the challenges facing Europe.
- We believe that addressing the major issues for Europe requires research by social science on understanding the world beyond Europe; this is integral to responsible, mutually beneficial relations with rapidly growing countries and developing countries outside Europe.
- We are concerned about the increased emphasis on 'directed' research; we are strongly in favour of the 'responsive' mode as an important means to ensure excellence in innovative research.
- We also strongly in favour of investments in social science research infrastructure, such as Marie Curie style mobility programmes and vital "infrastructure" initiatives such as the European Social Survey.

¹ The UK Council of Heads and Professors of Sociology was set up in 1998. It is open to all professors of sociology and senior academics who are heads of department or represent sociologists in higher education in the UK. The Council provides support for its members to discuss matters of common interest relating to the administration and management of sociological teaching and research. <http://hapsoc.wordpress.com/about/>.

² Founded in 1951, the British Sociological Association promotes sociology, supports sociologists, and is the public face of sociology in Britain. The Association represents UK sociology on key bodies both nationally and internationally and works closely with allied organisations to influence policies affecting sociology within the wider social sciences remit.

³ The European Sociological Association is a non-profit Europe-wide association made up of over 1500 members. It was established in 1992, following deliberations and consultations among sociologists from a diverse range of countries. Its aims are to facilitate sociological research, teaching and communication on European issues, and to give sociology a voice in European affairs. <http://www.europeansociology.org/>.

- We strongly favour the streamlining of the complexities of the Framework Programme application process to make it easier for the best researchers to participate.
1. Research is the basis for innovation and the training of new generations of scholars, without which European research will lag behind other regions of the world, economically and otherwise. We believe that investment in research is vital for international competitiveness. However, we do not believe that economic growth can be delivered directly through research funding. Nor do we believe that economic goals are the only important aims of research. The Green Paper incorporates, without questioning, a view of innovation in response to societal challenges which is very limited in scope. It adopts what is called, in innovation studies, the "linear" approach, in which basic research leads to applied research, then to inventions and finally to innovation. In contrast, most research shows that the mechanisms of translating research into practical applications are non-linear and not predictable at the funding stage. In this context, there should be a general recognition of the economic importance of good research for the economy, while funding that which is strongest in intellectual terms. It is important that funding be directed toward the long-term future health of research and not toward short-term goals.
 2. The European Sociological Association wrote to the Directorate General for Research and Innovation in January 2011 about the downgrading of research in the social sciences and humanities and we continue to be concerned about the level of funding assigned to these areas and the tendency to treat them as mere adjuncts to other sciences. The plan to abolish broader, long-term integrated projects in social sciences and humanities will reduce the capacity of the programme to achieve its stated goals. Research in the humanities and social sciences makes up a very significant part of the research activity of Universities across the EU. We believe that it is essential to wellbeing and cultural innovation and that it should receive commensurate funding within the research budget of the EU.
 3. While we also believe that social scientific research is essential to support economic growth, the focus on 'grand challenges' is very narrow, as currently conceived. For example, we are concerned that there seems to be no strong commitment to issues of social and cultural cohesion in Europe. Indeed, we are also concerned that the partnership with industry and policy-makers receives rather more emphasis than engagement with civil society actors. For example, one of the grand challenges is 'Science for society' where civil actors set the agenda, but this tends to be elided in the more developed statements around the evaluation of FP7 and looking forward to FP8. In our view, there is a need for a grand challenge which directly addresses the major policy issues raised by the changing economic, social and cultural dynamics of European societies.
 4. We argue strongly for a grand challenge which might be entitled *Understanding Europe*. However, we do not believe that this could be achieved without addressing the wider global context and developing research *beyond* Europe as well as *within* Europe and with partners outside Europe. We agree with the submission by the British Academy that this could

usefully be organised in terms of three themes: **Memory, identity and cultural change; Employment, education and working lives; Inequality, households and the quality of life.**

5. We also support the idea of a greater emphasis on a larger number of small and medium sized projects for the humanities and social sciences, rather than the move towards a few mega-projects, which are more appropriate for the hard sciences. We accept the need for major, directed funding of projects such as cohort studies involving international comparisons. However, in many other areas in the social sciences, the variety of different approaches and different ideas is better suited to a number of small and medium sized projects (although we recognise that there would be added value in networking them in some way). We are in favour of the idea of grand challenges so long as they are identified across a broad spectrum of society and the research community.
6. We are strongly in favour of maintaining and developing social science infrastructure through interdisciplinary research with multi-national research teams. The mobility programmes are important for the circulation of staff and students to build a real European Research Area. The infrastructural projects are very important for pooling European resources such as data archives or the European Social Survey, which would be otherwise too costly for one country to support (especially small countries). FP8 could be a way of consolidating the excellent work of the European Social Survey (a key resource for scholars and policy makers) so that this becomes an institutionalised part of European funding to an even greater extent than it is now (eg by ensuring funding of the survey in each EU country and co-ordination of the survey across countries). This kind of coordination is outside the remit of any single country and can only take place at a European level.
7. Finally, simplification of the structure and process of EU research and innovation funding is absolutely essential. The scale of administration must be proportionate to the budget needed to conduct high quality research. Scale of grant is also important: smaller grants can often be very productive, particularly for humanities and social sciences research, where requirements may be different from the natural sciences, and therefore they justify higher proportionate administrative costs. In addition, proposed areas of research must be attractive, addressing issues of genuine concern and allowing a flexible response.

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