

Royal Irish Academy  
submission to  
Ireland's National  
Position Paper on  
the EU 9<sup>th</sup>  
Framework  
Programme

The Royal Irish Academy welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the deliberations of the Cross Government High Level group on Horizon 2020 as it prepares Ireland's national position paper on the 9<sup>th</sup> EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

As a member of the All European Academies (ALLEA) FP9 Working Group<sup>i</sup>, the Academy works with sister academies within the European Research Area and Associated Countries to identify meaningful solutions and future pathways to strengthen the excellence of European research.

## Achieving an optimal mix between bottom-up and top-down calls

- Enhanced investment in and support for the European Research Council (ERC) which has established itself as the premier hallmark for frontier research excellence across all disciplines.
- Expansion of the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MCSA) to promote greater mobility and stronger research networks between European Union (EU) member states (MS) and Associated Countries to offset the loss of research collaborative networks that may follow the exit of the UK from the EU.
  - The UK is a significant international research collaborator for Ireland in terms of awards won and co-authored publications.
  - Ireland will need to actively target additional and/or stronger networks with EU MS to ensure suitable additional partners are primed and ready to work with Irish researchers to target FP9 funding.
- Inclusion of additional funding mechanisms to support Principal-Investigator driven funding schemes to build the pipeline of future researchers.
  - In a 2017 survey of early-mid career researchers, twice as many rated PI-driven mechanisms as significant in funding their work compared to collaborative mechanisms.<sup>ii</sup>

## Deepening the participation of the humanities and social sciences

- In its communications with the European Commission, Ireland should identify models of good practice for FP9 in terms of examples of FP8 funded research projects driven by or with significant input from the humanities and social sciences (HSS). For example, the focus on cultural heritage within Horizon 2020 is considered a positive measure by the HSS community.
- A relative shift in funds away from large scale collaborative projects towards more single principle investigator (PI) driven funding schemes would benefit HSS research in which the

principal investment is in human capital rather than expensive infrastructures and/or consumables.

- FP9 Evaluation Panels must be allowed to bring in additional expertise as necessary to cover more sub-disciplines. Asking a historian to assess the excellence of a legal scholar is akin to expecting a botanist to credibly assess the excellence of an astrophysicist.

## Improving gender balance in participation

- Introduce a gender balance requirement in FP9 research framing and design mechanisms, and assessment panels. Ireland can point to the Irish Research Council's gender policies as a model of good practice.
- The roll-out of the Athena Swan Programme by Irish higher education institutions should be promoted as a positive measure to promote gender equality.

## Structuring Societal Challenges for greatest Impact

- The ALLEA FP9 Working Group supports an enhanced strategic approach to the framing of work programmes and definition of research questions and calls through the inclusion of a greater diversity of voices and bottom-up contributions at the initial design stage.

## Specific proposals to strengthen FP9

- Increase in Principal Investigator driven research funding opportunities.
- More widespread use made of a two-stage application process for funding (i.e. applicants complete the documentation for second stage assessment only if they pass the first stage evaluation). This will enable researchers to more effectively manage time and minimise the loss of research productivity.
- Removal of the current system of pre-registration of reviewers as recommended by RISE (2017, 92).<sup>iii</sup>
- Extend understanding of impact beyond economic value to include value of education and research to societal wellbeing.
- Mandatory adherence to the ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity<sup>iv</sup> (revised, 2017) for researchers and research performing organisations applying for FP9 funding.
- Dedicated funding stream for research and innovation policies and tools (e.g. Open Science) rather than current inappropriate placement within Societal Challenge 6.

**Specific proposals to enhance Ireland's participation in FP9**

- Implementation of the 2016 Strategy for Funding Higher Education<sup>y</sup> recognising the higher education sector as the premier source of frontier and applied research, and industrial innovation.
- Survey of researchers to identify necessary additional measures to strengthen post-award research management supports, particularly financial management of large grants.
- Advance work with academic, research and industry communities during 2017 – 2019 to identify and develop text for likely programme calls and promote opportunities and supports for those applying to co-ordinate programmes.
- Investment in domestic pipeline to ERC competitiveness e.g. reorient a percentage of R&D funding to build competitiveness of early career researchers to compete for ERC Starter Grants. Replicate key EU eligibility/success criteria e.g. research must have an international collaborator, be multi-disciplinary, gender balanced. Such programmes need not necessarily have very large sums of money attached.
- Survey of researchers to identify additional national-level measures to support research applications.

## Further information

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### *Endnotes*

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<sup>i</sup>For more information on membership of the ALLEA FP9 Working Group see <http://www.allea.org/framework-programme-9-working-group/>

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<sup>ii</sup> In the 2017 FENS Kavli survey, 92% of respondents rated PI-driven grants as  $\geq 8/10$  in importance for funding their work, fully double the number who similarly rated collaborative grants (46%). PI-driven funding mechanisms were believed to allow the best researchers to pursue their most creative ideas and keep up with conceptual and technological innovation (RISE, 2017, 68).

<sup>iii</sup> European Commission DG Research, 2017, *Europe's Future – Open Innovation, Open Science, Open to the World. Reflections of the RISE High Level Group*.

<sup>iv</sup> Publication available at: <http://www.allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ALLEA-European-Code-of-Conduct-for-Research-Integrity-2017.pdf>

<sup>v</sup>Department of Education and Skills, 2016, *Investing in National Ambition: a strategy for funding higher education. Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding of Higher Education*. Dublin: DES.