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“Simple for whom?”

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21 research-intensive universities

Universiteit van Amsterdam
Universitat de Barcelona
University of Cambridge
University of Edinburgh
Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg
Université de Genève
Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg
Helsingin Yliopisto (University of Helsinki)
Universiteit Leiden
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
Imperial College London
University College London
Lunds University
Università degli Studi di Milano
Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
University of Oxford
Université Pierre et Marie Curie
Université Paris-Sud
Université de Strasbourg
Universiteit Utrecht
Universität Zürich

- LERU universities are competitive players in FP
 - 8 LERU universities in top 10 (ranking # FP contracts)
 - FP6 budget to LERU (2003-2006) ~ 1.0 B€
 - FP7 budget to LERU (up to 2009) ~ 1.2 B€
- EU funds constitute 5% to 10% of research budgets of LERU members
- Estimated up to 25% of administration costs spent on EU projects: disproportionately high

‘Towards an effective 8th Framework Programme for Research’

- Advice paper, prepared by the LERU community of European research project managers (ERP-C)
- <http://www.leru.org/index.php/public/publications/>

LERU recommendations towards FP8

1. Create a balance between directed (thematic) and non-directed (bottom-up) research funding
2. Establish excellence as main driver for funding R&I
3. Simplify financial regulations
4. Use a high-trust and risk-tolerant approach to fund research

⇒ *incl. feedback on COM(2010)187 and COM(2010)260*

Excellence as main driver

- Create a transparent, harmonised peer review system encouraging excellence (in science and/or innovation)
- Ensure transparent and effective governance
 - Of FP8 and related programmes (incl. topic selection)
 - And Joint Programming (common rules and procedures)
- EC as gatekeeper
 - No technical rule should prevent internationally recognised excellent research groups from participating

Question 1

- Is output based funding a solution for the administrative burden?

Simplify financial regulations (I)

General remarks:

- Recognise the inherent uncertainty and risk of research
- Ensure financial sustainability for universities
 - Matching funding leaves univs with serious funding shortfalls
 - Perspective for FP8 should be full costing, but recognise the variations in ability to implement full costing

Simplify financial regulations (II)

STRAND 2

- Accept nationally approved accounting & management
 - Incl. calculation for cost of effort: no timesheets
 - Use of lump sums, based on current cost tables, should be an option, but not mandatory

STRAND 2

- Limit the variety of financial rules in FP8
 - Less funding instruments and activity types
 - Maintain differentiation: academia – industry (*no one-size-fits-all*)

Tolerable Risk of Error

- Increase of TRE to 3,5% is welcome
- More importantly: analyse the reasons for errors: detailed requirements and differing rules per programme
- No interest on pre-financing; make non-refundable VAT an eligible cost
- Simpler procedure for the exclusion of malfunctioning partners: write off the loss

Move to a high-trust, risk tolerant approach for funding research (I)

- “Less paperwork and more focus on results” (IP/10/629): YES !
- But avoid a radical shift towards output-based funding
 - Adaptation phase, complexity for researchers may increase
 - Output indicators: compatible with unpredictability of research, discouraging the bold and risky projects?
 - Risk of not being payed if no proof of ‘best effort’?
 - Risk of being liable for under-performing partners?
- Question: *shift to output-based approach still relevant if cost-based approach would be drastically simplified?*

Move to a high-trust, risk tolerant approach for funding research (II)

- LERU supports: high-trust certification for beneficiaries
 - Fact: universities are very commonly controlled and audited
 - Accept nationally approved accounting ⇒ institutional certificate
 - Reduced reporting for beneficiaries with reliable track record
 - Output-based control to detect dysfunctional projects

Thorough stakeholder consultation required to exactly define ‘output’ and how it would be measured !

Question 2

- Is the introduction of lump sums desirable?

Move to a high-trust, risk tolerant approach for funding research (III)

STRAND 3

- 1. Lump sum against agreed output/results
 - Clear definition of output / best effort needed
 - Clear rules on liability (realistic?)
 - The absence of a scientific result can be a result in itself
- 2. Pre-defined for highest scientific output
 - Excellence as driver? Financial sustainability for univs & SMEs?
 - Most suitable for market- or technology-driven research?
- 3. High-trust award approach with lump sums
 - Most consistent with frontier research

Transparency of choice

- Fundamental choice is excellence or control
- Make a clear policy choice and stick to it
- Be clear about it, if a low control approach is not feasible

Question 3

- How could the complexity best be reduced?

Create a balance between directed and non-directed research funding

- Invest massively in science-driven frontier research
 - Build on the strengths of ERC and Marie Curie Actions: important sources of new ideas and excellent people
 - Research is the primary focus, facilitate innovation
- Tackle the Grand Challenges
 - Through a Cooperation-like scheme
 - That also invests in bottom-up research within the GC
 - Avoid restrictive regulations disrupting the delicate balance in collaborations between industry and academia

Harmonize the ERA framework

STRAND 2

- Harmonize the implementation of EU programmes
 - Uniformisation of rules for the Framework Programme, Joint Technology Initiatives, Public-Private Partnerships, external agencies, JPIs
 - COM(2010)260: “EU PPPs could apply national legislation”: is this simplification for the PPP participants?

Question 4

- timing

Simplify now and later

STRAND 1

- “Streamlining proposal and grant management”
 - Further invest in user support (IT) tools and clear instructions
 - Invest in uniform interpretation / application of rules by staff (from DG Research *AND* external agencies)
 - Simplify management: two-stage submissions, accelerate selection, smaller consortia,...
- Many simplification efforts yet to be made (*towards FP8*)

Roadmap to FP8: a university's perspective

- Generate new ideas
 - ERC, bottom-up calls
- Attract/train the brightest people
 - ERC, Marie Curie Actions, R&I Schools?
- Tackle the Grand Challenges
 - Leave room for creativity and bold new ideas