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Tuesday, August 6, 2013 9:07:48 AMResponse Modified:
Tuesday, August 6, 2013 11:00:59 AM

1. Name:

2. Organisation (if applicable):

University of Sheffield

3. Email address:

4. Address:

5. In responding, it would be helpful if you could indicate whether you are responding as

a research or educational body

6. Keeping in touch

Please keep me informed by email of the progress of this review, and other BIS Balance of Competence reviews.

1. 1. Where has EU action had a positive impact for the UK on research, technological development, innovation or space? What evidence is there for this? Has EU action encouraged national action in any areas?

Through European Framework Programmes in particular, EU action has had an extremely positive impact on the UK research environment. The levels of funding acquired by UK Universities has been huge, and has facilitated new collaborations, new approaches, and even projects that would not have been possible on a sole nation basis. In particular, the introduction of the European Research Council in 2007 has allowed for investigator driven excellent science - in all disciplines - in a way that has not been possible in the UK context for many years. One prime example of this is the current work of Konstantin Novoselov in the development of Graphene. Other examples include the University of Sheffield's success in the area of Ageing, led by Professor Alan Walker. This work has had huge complementarities with the agenda pursued by the UK Research Councils through programmes such as New Dynamics of Ageing and Growing Older. Major research agendas of relevance to the UK have been developed in the European context, with examples including economic migration, human rights issues, and cultural heritage within the SSH domains, and also the Virtual Physiological Human initiative in the life sciences.

2. 2. Where has EU action had a negative impact for the UK in these fields? What evidence is there for this? Has EU action prevented potentially useful national action in any areas?

It is difficult to think of areas where a genuinely negative impact has been felt. Although there is no denying that European research funding has, in the past, been heavily bureaucratic, it is still our view that the benefits outweigh the obstacles. The preservation of the Haldane principle in the UK means that national funding bodies are still free to fund excellent research, with very few exceptions. Of course, some EU laws and regulations may be problematic in some fields of research (stem cells, etc) but there are ethical arguments justifying, in part at least, the EU position.

3. 3. How and where has UK engagement with partner countries or international bodies, both within and outside the EU, been helped or hindered by EU involvement?

European Framework Programmes are the only funding mechanisms that allow for genuine collaboration on an attractive (i.e. viable) financial basis. Because of the financial cooperation of the EU member states (and in the research context, associated countries), the major stumbling block of national funding bodies only funding the work of their own researchers. While RCUK will fund the travel costs of overseas collaborators, and in some cases the staff costs, indirect costs are not regarded as eligible for non-UK partners. Seeking funding for the same project, from two different national funding bodies in different countries, is extraordinarily difficult. Within the European context, this problem is relieved. We need more international funding bodies that, like EU Framework Programmes, fund the full cost of research in multiple countries.

4. 4. What benefits or difficulties has the objective of a European research area (ERA) delivered for the UK?

It is our view that the UK is a definite beneficiary of the ERA, due to its attractiveness to researchers. It has allowed pan-European synergies to be explored and allowed the UK to strengthen its research base by facilitating free movement of researchers. It has also helped to accelerate progress towards genuine gender equality.

5. 5. How has the EU sought to coordinate the policy instruments at its disposal across different policy areas to create an enabling environment for researchers and innovators? How successful has this been?

This is still very much an area where improvements could be made. The distinction between all of these areas of teaching, research, innovation has been problematic for many universities and the complexity (and differences between) of the financial rules and regulations has caused some problems. The sheer size and complexity of the EU means it is very difficult to achieve synergy and obtain maximum value from various policy instruments. The integration of many of these instruments into Horizon 2020 will, we believe, be beneficial in the long run for researchers and innovators. In practice though, it only reasonable to expect some difficulties along the way.

1. 6. What could the EU most helpfully do to promote scientific and technological progress and innovation (including in the space sector)? - How could the EU use its existing competence differently to deliver more in your area? - How might a greater or lesser degree of EU competence deliver more in your area? - How could improvements to existing EU activities make them more effective and efficient?

As an institutional response, we consider this question as being focused around world-leading research with the potential for achieving major societal impact. Greater funding for investigator driven research under ERC type schemes (and a stronger balance between disciplines) would be hugely beneficial. More bottom up project-type grants funding research collaborations (in the same model as RCUK responsive mode grants work) would be very welcome too - this is a major gap in provision. Additionally, some 'follow-on funding' mechanisms to help researchers develop the impact of their work would be very beneficial - there is a perception among many researchers that EU funded collaborative projects result in a report to the commission that becomes 'lost in the bureaucracy'.

2. 7. Where might future EU level action be detrimental to your work in this area?

The increasing focus on the 'innovation union', while to an extent worthy, needs to be managed carefully. There is a danger that genuinely excellent research becomes squeezed as a result of the EU seeking innovation. There also needs to be scope within European funding to challenge the concept of the 'innovation union', as adherence to this concept may restrict funding for various areas of Social Science and Humanities inquiry.

3. 8. Where might action at national rather than EU level be more appropriate / effective?

We do not believe that a general answer to this question is appropriate, nor that it would be helpful. Each area should be considered on its own merits, with the starting point that coordinated action on a European or global scale is, in almost all cases, a positive thing in supporting excellent research.

4. 9. How could EU and national policies and funding streams interact better?

One major area of policy conflict relates to the mobility of researchers, and in particular migration policy. The UK immigration policy could be improved to ensure the best researchers and students, supported by EU funding, are able to come to the UK. Greater synergy between UK doctoral research funding and European mechanisms (such as Marie Curie Initial Training) would be beneficial. Additional UK driven networking funding would further help to consolidate the UK's position as a leader in European research.

5. 10. What impact would any future enlargement of the EU have on this area of competence?

One of the difficulties with European research funding relates to the bureaucratic financial rules, which are often justified through differing accounting and financial systems in each country. More should be done, if any future enlargement takes place, to alleviate these difficulties in specific countries, rather than creating more red-tape for countries such as the UK, France and Germany in pursuit of a one-size-fits-all approach.

6. 11. Are there any other points you wish to make which are not captured above?

We would like to reiterate our support for the European research funding programmes, and although more can always be done, believe that they complement UK funding very well. As noted in our response above, Framework programmes are the only major funding mechanisms to support cross-national cooperation in research on an attractive financial basis. More should be done to facilitate international research cooperation that incorporates funding of the full costs of research.

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