

Evidence from Academy of Social Sciences

Impact on the national interest

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?

EU action has been unequivocally good for the UK in research, technological development and innovation. Not only has the UK received far more in EU funds than “juste retour”, but EU actions have brought UK scholars and researchers into close touch with research groups throughout Europe; this has been particularly important in encouraging comparative research in the social sciences and humanities, where the expertise and experience of other European nations is very relevant to the analysis and solution of national problems. Cross-national research across European partnerships has contributed to greater internationalisation of European social sciences and more efficient dissemination of ideas and approaches to issues and problems. Close international collaboration of this kind is a distinctive advantage for UK research in comparison with the USA and other English-speaking countries.

The BIS (2013) R and D document accompanying this consultation makes no specific reference to social sciences, but the UK has benefited ‘disproportionately’ from EU funding in this area. ERC figures on the number of grant holders by country of host institution per call year for the last 5-6 years, show the UK as having around twice the number of grantees as the country ranked second on number of grantees (see attached). UK social scientists have also benefitted greatly from funding under FP7 and its predecessors.

The Academy of Social Sciences put out a call to Academicians requesting examples of the role of EU funding in their work and received a strong and positive response. EU support was seen as additional and complementary to UK research resources, and as strengthening the quality and stature of cross-national research in social sciences, facilitating international networking.

For example, EU involvement has led to a large body of cross-national research on the policy implications of demographic change to be funded, carried out and fed into policymaking, building on UK expertise and creating international collaborative networks (e.g. http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/066_en.html; http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/hiep_ok_eur22088_fandwpolreviewfinal_en.pdf; <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=502&langId=en>).

EU money from FP7 has also enabled interdisciplinary research projects to gain support which may have fallen between natural science and social science funding sources in the UK (e.g. research at the University of Surrey which use computational modelling and text mining to gain understanding of extortion racket systems – for example, the Mafia; the Surveillance advisory project which involves UK researchers in giving advice to technology developers, manufacturer and end-users who want to discuss the ethics and fundamental rights implications of their work). Research in language-learning and linguistics has also benefited from cross-disciplinary European funding, as have studies bringing together social and ecological aspects of sustainability and development.

EU funding was cited by some as a source of growth in R and D income, enabling institutions to become recognised as international leaders in their field and supporting the employment of postgraduate and post-doctoral researchers, thus facilitating significant capacity-building in the UK research base.

Researchers also mentioned the benefits of the Marie Curie scheme for hosting research fellows. This encourages international networking and understanding, and also increases capacity. Jean Monnet funding from the European Commission was also valued for supporting teaching and learning, further enhancing the strengths of UK higher education institutions.

As EU funding concentrates on issues that are high priority across Europe and addressed by Community policies, the links between research and policy are often strong and lead to direct contact with policymakers at home and abroad.

European funding was also identified as less risk-averse, and more likely to support innovative projects and methodologies than domestic Research Councils. Academicians valued ERC Advanced and Junior Investigator awards which enable individual researchers to develop 'blue skies' ideas.

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?

There is no evidence of negative impact of EU action for UK social sciences.

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?

EU funding for Framework Programmes has greatly helped UK researchers, in a variety of fields, to work with partners within and outside Europe. It would have been extremely inefficient to have pursued such links through bilateral actions.

EU involvement has meant that research evidence has been used in support of specific Europe-wide policies, with recommendations taken up by other recognised operators to set international standards. For example, Nottingham researchers involved in research into work-related stress have seen evidence incorporated into a best practice European framework for management of psychosocial risks in the workplace (PRIMA-EF) and included in the WHO Healthy Workplaces Model in 2010; the MARATONE project which is training young scientists to meet the demands of the 2009 EU Parliament Resolution on Mental Health.

Our community did not cite any instances where EU involvement has hindered relationships with partner countries or international bodies. It has, by contrast, much enhanced these. Being funded by EU institutions and gaining recognition in the EU context, can work to raise status with third countries and international organisations, beyond what could be achieved as a 'national' leader in the field

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

The concept of an ERA is somewhat diffuse, but in so far as it means free movement of scholars and researchers and the development of trans-national research activity in pursuit of common goals, it has been beneficial to the UK. It is credited with delivering extensive benefits for researcher mobility and the creation of new networks of interest and collaboration.

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?

The EU has not been as successful as it could have been in integrating the social sciences and humanities with other science disciplines in approaching European problems and challenges. This is partly because it has adopted an overly technocratic approach to the problems and has not realised that many of them require behavioural rather than technological solutions, although this limitation is shared with some UK funders. The continued support of cross-disciplinary projects should be encouraged to meet this challenge.

The operation of the Marie Curie People programme has been beneficial to both inward and outward mobility, including mobility for researchers beyond the EU. The co-ordination of research funding has created opportunities of scale and ambition that could not be realised from UK national funders.

The EU has usefully directed some of its regional funding to build up R&D and innovative capacity in the weaker regions – especially with regards to industrial and technical innovation – to enable them to participate in the Framework Programmes as well as underpinning a policy of economic growth based on innovation. There have been some very useful investments in the UK regions to develop centres of excellence both in universities and in the not-for-profit sector which has raised UK capabilities generally.

The Climate KIC (Knowledge and Innovation Community), established under the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, includes a regional component – a UK-led initiative - which involves local government, NGOs and SMEs in finding solutions to climate change, and which addresses cultural as well as technical aspects of innovation.

Future opportunities and challenges

6. What could the EU most helpfully do to promote scientific and technological progress and innovation (including in the space sector)?

The Horizon 2020 programmes should require the involvement of researchers from the social sciences and humanities throughout the planned activities. It is always important to reduce as far as possible the complexity and bureaucracy of the programmes, but substantial progress has already been made in this area.

Horizon 2020 may benefit from avoiding a continued move towards top-down selection of topics. Under FP6 and FP7 it became more difficult to propose innovative projects because topics were set by the work programme. There was also a push towards large-scale projects and networks of excellence which were not particularly appropriate for the social sciences. A lighter touch in terms of steering researchers towards particular areas of research would be appreciated in future.

We endorse the view expressed by the University of Warwick that the EU should extend its promotion of greater collaboration between researchers and industry, bringing together researchers and end-users and pursuing links between academics and the business community, notably SMEs.

The EU could perhaps do more to ensure that the findings of EU-funded research are widely disseminated, and that further funding capitalises on innovative discoveries, developments and approaches. At a national level, more attention should be paid to the findings of EU-funded research, and the lessons for policies gained from cross-national research evidence.

- 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?

Given current economic constraints it is unlikely that the EU could be asked to invest more in R&D; the current balance of competences, whereby EU investment does not curtail or prevent national actions in R&D is important to the UK research infrastructure, which would be impoverished without EU funding on current terms.

Any major change in balance of competences that moves us further from EU engagement could have serious consequences for social science research (broadly conceived to include humanities) and commercial enterprise with social science input. UK researchers are involved in EU-funded projects bringing in millions of euros and maintaining engagement in EU-wide intellectual and enterprise networks. Funds and ease of contacts could begin to dry up, were the UK to loosen its partnership arrangements with Europe.

There have been some major advantages to civil society to the competences that have influenced European policy already – in public health, work/life balance, human rights etc.. Standards in research ethics have also benefited from the balance of competences.

Uncertainty regarding our relationship with Europe may weaken the UK's ability to influence future investment in R&D and innovation, and we may lose protection offered by key involvement in the larger EU. This involvement can serve UK interests and offer stability in uncertain global markets. Growing HE and research investment in China and emerging economies places the UK in a highly challenging and competitive environment, where European sources of funding are important to preserving and enhancing our position.

7. Where might future EU level action be detrimental to the UK interest in this area?

There are no obvious examples of EU action as detrimental to UK interests in this area. However, the UK should not be complacent about the benefits EU research funding has brought, or its competitive advantage in this context. Domestic research excellence has attracted international money and recognition, but we continue to invest less nationally in R and D than other comparable countries. As other EU countries adopt similar funding and assessment models to the UK – writing proposals in English and publishing in internationally recognised journals - competitive pressures increase.

For the social sciences, it remains important that all funders recognise the distinctive features of our disciplines; social science excellence rests on networks of expertise, built cross-institutionally and relationally, in contrast to the geographic concentration of large team/big infrastructure-sharing models of the natural sciences.

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

A besetting sin of national policy-makers is failing to learn from the experience of other countries. The European Union is a natural laboratory and should be exploited for this purpose. This requires collaboration and there are no obvious areas where national action would be more appropriate. EU funding adds a new dimension that complements UK research and creates potential for comparative research, new ideas and new networks. EU-funded social science is a fraction of all social science research in the UK and the nature of the funding is such that it supports internationally comparative work and is unlikely to fund research purely in the UK national interest.

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

There should be constant discussion with the European research councils, organised through ScienceEurope, to ensure that policies and funding schemes are coordinated, while recognizing the value of diversity in ensuring that innovative work is not frozen out by excessively detailed central planning. EU social science research programmes still represent a small fraction of current European spending on social science research, but they do have a vital function in promoting collaboration by researchers across Europe and, through the European Research Council, ensuring that the highest quality research is funded.

UK funding is focused on the needs of the UK, and the EU provides a framework for comparative research. If national governments get too involved in specifying the context of Horizon 2020 funding there is a risk that we lose the flexibility and capability for innovation and the value added from EU funding is reduced.

Reciprocal UK agreements and the removal of barriers to 'double jeopardy' in UK Research Council grant review could be beneficial.

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

It would enhance collaboration with a larger number of researchers, but in practical terms this is unlikely to make much difference, since the candidate countries are already included within research programmes. Given the profile of current and prospective members of the EU, impact on expertise may not be major. The advantages for

increased collaboration would need to be supported by funding to prevent the R and D budget being spread more thinly.

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

Academicians expressed concern in terms of research excellence and international reputation, should there be doubt over UK commitment to the collective R&D pool for social science and policy research.