

First input from the University Alliance Stockholm Trio, to the planning of the Framework Programme (FP) for research and innovation, 2028–2034 – “FP10”

February 2023

THE UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE STOCKHOLM TRIO EMPHASISES the importance of the EU and its framework programmes for research and innovation in promoting excellent science and research collaboration, as well as of the conditions of the researcher and of research. With this paper we offer our first opinions and ideas, based on our combined and vast experience from the current and previous framework programmes, on how to improve on Horizon Europe, and its eventual successor Framework Programme 10 (FP10).

Make research an EU-policy priority in its own right

Since research is essential in building a sustainable, healthy, and resilient society, it must thus contribute to such political priorities at EU level. In addition to research contributing to political priorities, WE ARGUE that supporting excellent frontier research should be a priority on its own and not only as a means to deliver on other policies. As we do not know what challenges the future will hold it is important that we build a resilient society by supporting excellent curiosity driven research, free from short term political influence, to ensure that we have enough knowledge to be able to find solutions. An illustrative example is from the recent pandemic where vaccines could be developed rapidly based on previous research undertaken long before the acute need emerged. The European Research Council (ERC) and its curiosity driven Blue-sky research was a large contributor to this and is a key instrument in making Europe prepared for future challenges.

Substantially increase the budget for the coming framework programme to fully capture available potential in Europe and globally

There is an urgent need to substantially increase the budget for the coming framework programme to fully capture available potential in Europe and globally to create new knowledge and innovate on solutions for current and future challenges. WE SUPPORT that the Commission maintains its flexibility within the budget to be able to quickly respond to crises, as was excellently shown during the pandemic.

Evaluate the effectiveness of decentralisation and the Executive Agencies

WE SUPPORT the efforts for more efficient management and implementation of the framework programmes. However, we see a risk for a gap between policymaking and implementation in the Commission. Previously, DG RTD was responsible for the whole chain of events, from preparing the framework programme to the implementation of projects. Today, we have two types of bodies involved: DG RTD and the Executive Agencies. WE

ARGUE that, before the next framework programme, it would be appropriated for the Commission to carry out an evaluation of the decentralisation effects.

Strengthen international collaboration and aim for HORIZON GLOBAL

WE ACKNOWLEDGE the unique possibilities that the framework programme provides for our researchers to collaborate with other actors from all over Europe and beyond. WE STRONGLY SUPPORT the further development of international collaboration and WE URGE the Commission to ensure association of Europe's strong R&I partners. Global research and innovation collaboration is particularly essential for solving health and climate challenges, as these are truly global in nature.

In light of the current geopolitical situation, WE APPRECIATE the Commission's efforts to ensure that measures to strengthen security and EU autonomy does not conflict with the need to maintain and expand international academic cooperation. WE URGE the Commission to help universities to keep academic channels open.

Increase collaborative and interdisciplinary fundamental science to understand and address complex challenges

WE EMPHASISE the importance and added value of interdisciplinary and multi-actor collaborative fundamental research to understand and address complex current, as well as future, global challenges. WE CALL for the Commission to reinforce the framework programme as an excellence research programme by strengthening the interdisciplinary perspective and SSH-integration, and by having more calls on collaborative fundamental science at low TRL:s in pillar 2, i.e., to introduce Research Actions alongside RIA and IA. WE RECOMMEND the Commission to keep challenge based topics, and add Research Actions with an open scope (non-prescriptive approach) to capture researchers' and other actors' creativity in defining and searching for solutions. In addition, WE ARGUE for a more developed portfolio approach with many, but smaller, projects, rather than calls for very large consortia which are more difficult for researchers to participate in, and too often considered unattractive for them to coordinate.

Keep the clear structure of Horizon Europe and remove obstacles for researchers to participate in partnerships and Missions

WE WELCOME the clear structure of Horizon Europe with the three pillars and horizontal actions. However, the research funding landscape is in reality getting more complex with European partnerships and additional instruments such as Missions, which both have their specific conditions and separate work programmes. While WE RECOGNISE the importance of diversity in research funding instruments, WE RECOMMEND the Commission to reduce the complexity.

With the same objective, WE ADVISE the Commission to separate Widening participation and Strengthening the European Research Area (ERA) to two distinct parts of the

programme, in order to make it more clear and easier for researchers when applying to specific widening action or actions related to the ERA.

WE WELCOME the development of the partnership programmes to have more coordination between EU funding and national/regional programmes and the private sector. However, it is often difficult for researchers to find information about calls in some partnerships and there are too many different portals and special rules for a university to be able to manage. WE URGE the Commission to increase transparency of the partnerships, starting by bringing in all partnerships to the Funding & Tenders portal, and that the implementation of the partnerships is further streamlined.

WE SUPPORT the concept of the Missions, which is inspiring, however the themes overlap somewhat with global challenges and the governance structure is considered complex. WE URGE for clarification and reinforcement of the research element in the Missions to ensure university researchers' contributions in coming Mission actions.

Ensure the continuation of Pathfinder

WE EMPHASISE that Pathfinder is the most important action for universities in Pillar 3 and a unique opportunity to bring outstanding innovation, that would be too research-intensive and high-risk for other actors, to society. WE RECOMMEND the continuation of the Pathfinder in the future framework programme in order to ensure the close connection between basic research and close to market innovation that underpin technological breakthroughs.

In addition, WE RECOMMEND the continuation of the overall EIC concept; providing comprehensive support for science-to-technology research, from the idea stage at low TRL levels all the way through to market entry. We value its connections to Pillar I, which encourages exploration and development of the innovation potential of results arising from ERC's frontier research grants.

Widening participation whilst safeguarding excellence

We agree that widening efforts should be strengthened, as it is clear that low R&I performing countries have more difficulty to compete in Horizon Europe. With that said, we emphasise that the goal of the widening programme should be to become superfluous, as one day the widening gap between member states will be closed. In June 2022, the European Court of Auditors evaluated the measures for widening participation in Horizon 2020 and suggested that the Commission should evaluate the effects of the widening measures and advised that national efforts are necessary to achieve sustainable changes. We PROPOSE that the scope of widening activities in coming framework programmes should be decided on considerations of this.

Address the inequality of funding due to the 25% flat rate for indirect costs

WE APPRECIATE all simplification measures but stress that they should benefit all types of participants. Thus, WE HIGHLIGHT the unequal effect of the flat rate of 25% for indirect

costs, where some beneficiaries with for example expensive infrastructures have much higher indirect costs, whilst others can have indirect costs lower than 25%. WE ASK the Commission to look into the inequality in funding with the present system, where some researchers in practice receive 100% of full cost, and some considerably less.

Properly evaluate lump sums before full roll-out

WE ASK the Commission to be cautious about rolling out the lump sum model before proper evaluation of its effects. The model is not necessarily a simplification for all participants, as lump sum projects require greater efforts in budget preparation at the proposal stage due to less flexibility once the grant agreement is signed. THERE IS A RISK that this will affect the project design and partner choice and possibly lead to less scientific risk-taking. The extension of the lump sum funding model based on current evidence is therefore premature, and WE URGE for a proper evaluation before full rollout.

Synergies with other research and innovation related programmes should mean same rules for participation

From a university point of view, the most important aspect of synergies is to have the same rules for participation for researchers, regardless of programme, whether it is Digital Europe Programme or EU4Health, or other. Therefore, WE ASK the Commission to agree internally to use the same kind of actions as in HEU, such as RIA, IA, CSA, et cetera, in calls where researchers are expected to take part.

Synergies with the European Education Area (EEA) has also become more important through, in particular, the European University Initiative (EUI). The research 'component' of EUI was added on at a later stage, which is why WE ASK for the agreement on a common approach between DG RTD and DG EAC as regards the EUI and any other joint activities.

About the University Alliance Stockholm Trio

The University Alliance Stockholm Trio forms a dynamic academic environment that promotes the interaction between different disciplines and raises the quality of the international research and educational environment that the three universities – Karolinska Institutet, KTH and Stockholm University – form in the capital of Sweden.

Sweden has a strong strategy of investing in academic research. In the capital of Stockholm, the three public universities complement, reinforce and challenge each other in terms of education and research. Subject areas range from medicine, social sciences and humanities, to science, technology and engineering. Together we work across almost all academic fields and form a creative hub for innovation and development, and a strong connection between education and research ensures a high quality.

Read more about Stockholm Trio on the websites of either of the three alliance partners:

[Karolinska Institutet](#) | [KTH Royal Institute of Technology](#) | [Stockholm University](#)