



The voice of the Universities of Applied Sciences in Europe < Statement on the mid-term review Horizon 2020 >

Brussels, 10 January 2017

This document lays down the views of UAS4EUROPE on the Horizon 2020 (H2020) Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. UAS4EUROPE is a networking platform launched on 31 May 2016 to act as the voice of Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) in the field of applied research and innovation. Our ideas for cooperation with the European Commission were identified in our first position paper on ‘Smart Partnerships for Regional Impact’¹. UAS4EUROPE represents UAS which have been strongly involved in European research and innovation programmes since FP7. UAS4EUROPE would like to take the opportunity to share our opinion regarding H2020 based on the experiences of UAS researchers who have participated in the programme.

This statement will address the overall design and structure of H2020, the funding instruments available and the Work Programmes, the submission and evaluation of proposals and the outlook for FP9.

Overall design and structure

1. UAS4EUROPE believes it is positive that for the first time there is an **integration of research and innovation** activities, thus covering the full research and innovation cycle. Horizon 2020 has a **clear structure** along the three pillars of Excellent Science, Industrial Leadership and Societal Challenges. UAS4EUROPE would like to see such a **structure maintained while keeping a flexible mind** to gradually expand or on the other hand, merge the sub-programmes if needed to avoid overlapping.
2. Next to the three pillars of Horizon 2020, the EIT, JPIs and JTIs offer additional funding opportunities. We believe that although it is in general a good idea to accommodate the applicants in having multiple opportunities at hand, the **European research and innovation landscape has become too complex**. A further simplification of programmes would be advisable by **giving clearer guidance** where researchers and innovators can find their areas of interest. On call level, UAS scientists would welcome a **greater balance of scope**: the scope of some calls is broadly designed whereas other calls are so specific that hardly anyone is eligible.
3. UAS4EUROPE supports the calls being more open and bottom-up than in FP7, which in theory gives applicants better opportunities to come up with their own ideas while not having to take into account predefined topics. The EC should however take proper care of keeping H2020 as a very attractive programme: The open nature of the calls attracts many proposals, many of which might be only marginally relevant to the call. This reduces overall success rates and creates frustration for the proposers who do not understand why their proposals have been rejected. Therefore, **UAS4EUROPE**

¹ <http://uas4europe.eu/files/UAS4EUROPE%20Smart%20Partnerships%20for%20Regional%20Impact%20FINAL.pdf>

suggests including fewer topics within the calls. These topics should be broad in scope and should be provided with large enough budgets to allow for several projects per topic to be funded.

4. In general, a more adequate balance between the number of topics, which should be broader in scope and the funding available is suggested. We are of the opinion that openness is one of the key features of Horizon 2020 but it should not lead to uncertainties as to who can participate best in the calls (i.e. some universities of applied sciences find it hard to know where exactly to apply). UAS4EUROPE identified that over time, more public-private partnerships were launched (Bio-Based Industries, Shift2Rail, etc.), eating away the budget for collaborative projects. In addition to that, participation in PPPs is quite complex and expensive and thus less suitable for UAS. UAS4EUROPE believes **that Horizon 2020 should place a stronger focus on collaborative, bottom-up projects with clear guidelines and expected outcomes** as this allows for genuine open competition and generating excellence in science and innovation. Hence, some more targeted guidance for the calls as to what the expected outcomes should be, would be advisable.

Instruments and Work Programmes

1. Horizon 2020 has different types of funding instruments, such as grants, procurement and prizes, but also loans. Increasingly, loans are being used as an alternative funding method next to grants. We believe that, given the nature of the universities of applied sciences, Horizon 2020 should first and foremost offer **grants as the main funding method for public organisations**. Loans are not a suitable instrument for UAS, as national laws make it impossible for universities to take out loans.
2. Regarding **simplification**, the simplification of the rules for participation is appreciated however the **use of own accounting practices has to be introduced** again. In general, further simplification is needed since while being a lot less complex than previous programmes, Horizon 2020 is still a very complex programme, which is a huge challenge especially for UAS which struggle with low resources. UAS4EUROPE is of the opinion that the **process of creation of the work programmes** could be dealt with in a **more transparent** way by more clearly identifying which partnerships, experts groups and advisory groups are asked at which moment in time to give input. A more structured way of collecting input would increase transparency and credibility. On the other hand, the structure of the work programmes is much appreciated. Biannual work programmes allow for having more time for preparation.
3. Therefore, UAS4EUROPE suggests to take this even further and to gradually move towards **having open calls without deadlines**, allowing for even more flexibility and better preparation. In the case that cut-offs and deadlines would be maintained, UAS4EUROPE advises to have multiple cut-offs and to not plan deadlines during or just after holidays (August/December).

Proposals' submission and evaluation

1. UAS4EUROPE is of the opinion that the mid-term evaluation of Horizon 2020 should have a critical look at the advantages and disadvantages of **single versus two stage submissions**. Although some improvements were made for the 2016-2017 calls, it remains important to note that the success rate at the second stage should be much higher than at the first stage, in order not to put off researchers to continue developing their application for the second stage. In addition, there is no "one size fits all"

approach and every programme has to find the right balance between single and two stage submissions and evaluations.

2. Moreover, Horizon 2020 for the first time includes Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs). The **UAS are pleased with the TRL** as an indicator, particularly because applied sciences foster close-to-market research and therefore having such an indicator as TRLs is helpful to guide UAS researchers to the right type of actions to participate in.
3. Regarding the time-to-grant, **UAS researchers are pleased with the shortened time-to-grant** and would like this to be maintained and if possible (without it having an effect on the quality) to be further decreased.
4. Regarding the evaluation process, **evaluation criteria should be clearer and the whole evaluation process should be more transparent**. We recommend keeping the three evaluation criteria of excellence, implementation and impact but the expected impact should be described much clearer within the call text. The current approach leads to complex projects which require cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral consortia, whilst also working along the entire innovation value chain. This structure is difficult to apply and difficult to participate in.
5. Regarding the **Evaluation Summary Report (ESR)**, researchers are of the opinion that in many cases it includes **very general feedback**, or feedback which is contradictory to the final score. The most important information to receive is, whether the basic project idea should be followed up or doesn't fit into the EU-strategy. It would also be useful to know if the threshold was fixed in advance or depending on the number of applications / oversubscription rate. We suggest that evaluators are given more defined instructions on how to write an ESR and that they spend more time in giving more extensive feedback (e.g. a minimum amount of words). A better/more detailed evaluation report of rejected proposals would be very helpful, in a written form, or via videoconference with the evaluators. Ideally, a final meeting between the EC, the PO or the NCP would be most helpful to examine in more detail what could be improved, especially if the ESR showcases a too low score to be eligible for funding. Such meetings would be especially useful for unsuccessful stage-2-proposals. In this way, the proposers can learn from the experience and improve their subsequent submissions. Therefore, we suggest that the European Commission selects more experts from UAS who have a good understanding of the logic and nature of applied research.

Outlook for FP9

UAS4EUROPE would like to take the opportunity to propose some ideas for the successor of Horizon 2020, FP9.

1. First of all, an **increase of the budget** for FP9 should be ensured. Besides that, harmonising the use of resources within common policy (e.g. funding for the automotive industry vs. low-carbon activities) in order to merge industrial and societal interests, or at least harmonising them instead of creating a contradictory situation, would be reasonable. This can be justified as there is ample ground for investing money in the European knowledge base. A stronger budget for applied research would be appreciated, not in the least place because such research can have a direct impact on Europe's society at large.

2. Secondly, Horizon 2020 is, to a great extent, a programme for big consortia, involving many partners in many countries. In some cases, smaller consortia with specific knowledge and profile could play an important role in a more efficient way. Within bigger consortia the costs for adjustment and friction losses are much higher than in smaller ones. Given the UAS' good relations with industry and SMEs respectively and their expertise in working mainly in smaller projects, **calls requiring smaller consortia** would be a good way to stimulate stronger participation of UAS in the forthcoming Framework Programme.
3. Thirdly, it should be pointed out that although Horizon 2020 has a broad coverage in terms of themes, **themes of importance to UAS should be included, such as arts, design, architecture, linguistics and social work** as they play a very important role in developing new approaches and solutions to societal challenges. Social sciences, on the other side, are often already addressed in Horizon 2020 calls under the process of "embedding SSH". They should however receive a greater focus by raising the amount of calls addressing specific social concerns (e.g. migration) as a central theme.
4. Fourthly, we believe that FP9 has to find an **even better balance between fundamental research, applied research and the different forms of innovation**. The ERC must be maintained to fund excellent research, the EIC should tackle disruptive innovation (UAS4EUROPE is a supporter of the EIC²) which is still missing, collaborative projects must still make up the core of FP with a strong focus on applied research, but FP9 should also maintain enough support and funding for incremental innovation (the one must not exclude the other).
5. Fifthly, UAS4EUROPE expresses a wish for **further simplification** and strongly supports the suggestions presented for example in the European Commission's "Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the financial rules (...)":³ amongst others a single set of rules for all programmes, clearer guidelines, and cross-reliance on audits.
6. Sixthly, UAS4EUROPE would also like to ask the EC to work together with the UAS to provide opportunities for better UAS participation. We therefore introduce the concept of '**Smart Partnerships for Regional Impact**' (SPFRI). UAS bring excellent networks with regional industry to the table. In order to increase the innovative strength of Europe a close cooperation between science and industry is essential. This successful concept in Horizon 2020 should be continued in FP9 and SPFRI can serve as a means for ensuring that the projects have the required impact by getting UAS (and their networks and applied research and innovation skills) on board.
7. Finally, under current conditions, participating in the European Framework Programme is a huge step for many UAS, especially if they do not have experience in international cooperation. Big consortia, a complex structure and lots of requirements discourage even willing scientists to apply. So a part dedicated explicitly to newcomers, some kind of initial or introductory programme with smaller consortia which should comprise UAS as well as SMEs, and fewer requirements could be a good way to bring UAS researchers to the other, bigger parts of the framework programme. UAS conduct application driven research, often in interdisciplinary collaborations and therefore UAS4EUROPE is of

²

http://uas4europe.eu/files/Contribution%20UAS4EUROPE%20on%20the%20European%20Innovation%20Council_final.pdf

³ http://ec.europa.eu/budget/mff/lib/COM-2016-603/COM-2016-605_en.pdf

the opinion that Europe as a whole will profit more from the know-how of the UAS, if Horizon 2020 and FP9 would further acknowledge their expertise.



swissuniversities



UAS4EUROPE is a joint initiative from EURASHE, UASnet, swissuniversities, Hochschule Bayern e.V. (supported by Bavarian Research Alliance) and the Austrian FHK to promote the voice of the UAS in Europe.