

European Commission must innovate to get value from 70 billion science funding program, researchers say

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The European Commission needs to make some key innovations in its science funding programme if Europe is to enjoy the full benefits of the €70 billion to be spent on science research as part of the Horizon 2020 programme kicking off in 2014, according to an academic paper published by SAGE in the *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy* today.

The Commission has already taken important steps to reduce administration costs and stimulate the participation of small business in research, but there are still significant gaps, say the authors of [Europe's](#) 'Horizon 2020' science funding programme: How is it shaping up? Dr Michael Galsworthy, UCL Department of Applied Research and Professor Martin McKee, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, argue that reforms are necessary in four key areas –reduction of red tape at the interface between academia and small business, better mapping and linking of the research funded, taking a bold lead in the open data drive, and ending inegalitarian salary policies that block Eastern European competitiveness.

Over the last 15 years, the EU has spent around €80 billion on [science research](#) via its three 'framework programmes', FP5, FP6 and FP7, and Horizon 2020 will nearly match that sum over the next six years. While past programmes were intended to ease the path of European researchers to funding and support, the bureaucracy involved was cumbersome and

hard to negotiate; the paper highlights the thousands of researchers who relocated to the US, in part to escape such constraints. The paper recommends reform in four key areas:

- **Red tape:** While the EC has taken welcome steps to reduce administration costs and other bureaucratic burdens, the paper calls on it to remove compulsory tendering, thus allowing research projects and small to medium enterprises (SMEs) to interact with each other dynamically and choose each other freely;
- **Funding:** The paper commends the Commission's increasing recognition of the benefit of mapping research and calls them to improve their central categorisation, informatics, and transparency so that the analysis and debate is open to all;
- **Informatics:** The paper calls for the EU to demand databases as a deliverable from data-collecting projects, then themselves check the data for re-usability by others and deposit the data in searchable archives. Currently, funders are increasingly encouraging scientists to make data-sharing plans, but a model of the funder themselves mandating, checking and archiving the core databases with unique citable reference codes would set a new gold standard;
- **Eastern European underinvestment:** the original 15 member states have received a staggering 34 times more health research funding under FP7 than the 12 newest member states (EU-12), representing dramatic underfunding of science in the EU-12, even allowing for GDP and population differences. The paper recommends paying researchers in new member states the same salary as in Western Europe, enabling Eastern Europe to use its competitive advantage of marginally lower living costs to retain and even attract top researchers;

Dr Galsworthy says: "After many years of often painful and bureaucratic development, the EU science model of international collaboration and researcher mobility is clearly starting to work. Science is now increasingly viewed as a cornerstone of Europe's future as an integral part of quality of life, sustainability and business innovation. In preparation for Horizon 2020, some solid steps have been made on levels of both practicality and vision, but a few key innovative changes at the central administration level would revolutionise the dynamism and productivity of European science."

More information: Europe's 'Horizon 2020' science funding programme: how is it shaping up? is published online in the Journal of Health Services Research & Policy jhsrp.rsmjournals.com/ .

More details on the Horizon 2020 programme can be found at ec.europa.eu/research/horizon2...m?pg=home&video=none

Provided by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

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