

British Academy response to the consultation on how to shape the role of Social Sciences and Humanities research in Horizon 2020, published by the Lithuanian Presidency of the European Union – June 2013

Introduction

- 1 The British Academy welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the role of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) in Horizon 2020 in preparation for the Lithuanian Presidency of the European Union.
- 2 The British Academy is a member of ALLEA, the All European Academies Alliance, which is the European federation of academies of sciences and humanities. This group has submitted a separate response to the consultation, which we endorse.
- 3 Our response focuses on three areas:
 - i. We make some general points about the importance of long-term, stable research funding.
 - ii. We highlight briefly the importance of SSH research in addressing challenges faced by societies globally.
 - iii. We touch on some of the ways in which SSH research connects to the various pillars in Horizon 2020.

Long-term, stable research funding is vital¹

- 4 A focus on excellence in a wide range of subjects and disciplines is central to the success of any research base. By maintaining broad research and innovation capabilities we ensure a supply of highly skilled people. This has significant benefits, including enhancing the ability to attract investment and, most important, to conduct successful research programmes addressing major problems. A UK example of the value of plurality both of research methods and of funding is the Global Food Security programme, which exploits synergies between the breadth of disciplines: it is supported by the Research Councils, the Department of Health, the Department for International Development and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Successful

¹ These points are made in more depth in *Fuelling Prosperity*, a joint statement by the four UK national academies, available at www.britac.ac.uk/news/news.cfm/newsid/911, and in a letter written by the four academies to Sir John O'Reilly FREng, Director General of Knowledge and Innovation and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, available at <http://www.britac.ac.uk/news/news.cfm/newsid/930>.

programmes addressing major challenges generally require such inter- and multi-disciplinary research efforts.

- 5 Responding to climate change is another example. We need the scientific evidence to understand what is happening, and what technologies might make a difference, but we also need to understand socio-economic aspects of the problem, including how people understand such a large and intellectually difficult set of issues, and how the activities of individuals and groups may need to adapt, and may be capable of adapting.
- 6 Investment in research must be stable, and planned over the long term. Turning the funding tap off and on disrupts discovery. Such unpredictability in research funding from whatever source hampers long-term approaches needed both to train skilled professionals and to tackle challenges such as finding sustainable sources of energy. It also makes it difficult to capitalise on past investments.
- 7 The best researchers will produce the best research and will drive the projects targeted at national priorities. In the social sciences and humanities, the funding of excellent individuals is of particular importance when so much of the research necessarily depends on individual excellence rather than on the work of large teams. These researchers need to be resourced properly if they are to reach their full potential, and there needs to be sufficient funding and support at key stages across research careers.

Importance of Social Sciences and Humanities research²

- 8 The challenges facing society today require expertise drawn from across the full range of the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. Two of these are noted above in paragraphs 5 and 6 (on global food security and climate change). Other challenges that require multidisciplinary research include ageing – which calls for researchers in a range of disciplines falling within the social sciences, natural and medical sciences³ – and responding to international emergencies and crises.
- 9 As an example of the latter, the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute at the University of Manchester bridges the Faculties of Humanities and Medicine in partnership with NGOs, and aims to help lead improvements in crisis-response on a global scale. It links the study of history and sociology with the medical interventions of bodies such as Médecins sans Frontières.⁴

- 10 Excellent SSH research is also critical in:

² These points are made in more detail in the British Academy statement, *Science, Research and Innovation Funding Priorities*, available at: www.britac.ac.uk/news/news.cfm/newsid/930. Note the context of the statement is the UK government's June 2013 spending review, so examples within are specific to the UK situation, but the general points apply to the EU research funding environment

³ A social sciences and humanities perspective on this issue is available in a British Academy Policy Centre report, *Demographic Futures*, published in June 2012 and available at www.britac.ac.uk/policy/Demographic-futures.cfm

⁴ See www.hcri.ac.uk/ for more information

- i. ensuring that policymakers develop effective public policy interventions – public money is wasted unless policy interventions are informed by the most robust evidence and insights;
- ii. documenting and analysing the context of international diplomacy and trade;
- iii. enabling countries to exploit technological and scientific breakthroughs;
- iv. advising the private and public sectors on innovative processes and approaches, aimed at heightening productivity;
- v. making key contributions to the standing of national universities, which are in their own right a major area within economies;
- vi. developing the content of undergraduate and postgraduate H&SS education, which in turn has wider benefits for the individual and for societies. A high quality SSH education will deliver both appropriately trained people to replenish the research base and highly skilled workforces capable of responding to the needs of twenty-first century societies.

11 As noted in a *Fuelling Prosperity*, a joint statement from the four UK national academies on research and innovation, research in behavioural economics and psychology is increasingly important in demonstrating how people can be prompted to respond differently depending on the choices they are offered.⁵

How SSH research connects to Horizon 2020

12 SSH research has a key contribution to make across Horizon 2020.⁶ To touch on a few examples:

- i. The European Union faces a number of significant health challenges. A critical component in understanding these can be found in analysing the social determinants of health adopted by the World Health Organisation's Member States in 2011. This focused on health governance and promoting participation in health policymaking and implementation. It looked at further reorienting the health sector towards reducing health inequalities, as well as strengthening European and global health governance and collaboration to monitor progress and increase accountability. These all require the skills, expertise and insights that SSH researchers can provide.
- ii. The EU faces significant bioeconomy challenges. One such area where SSH researchers can make a difference is in supporting the delivery of the EU's 2020 biodiversity strategy to help ensure that the world's natural capital is preserved and valued, and can sustainably support economic prosperity. Food security (as noted above), sustainable agriculture and forestry, and marine and inland water

⁵ *Fuelling Prosperity*, p10, drawing on research from the UK Cabinet Office about how to develop public policy using randomised research trials, available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62529/TLA-1906126.pdf www.britac.ac.uk/news/news.cfm/newsid/911

⁶ These points are elaborated in more detail in the response to this same consultation from ALLEA.

research, are all part of this endeavour, in all of these SSH has a significant role to play.

- iii. A deep understanding of Europe's cultural heritage and of its socio-economic and institutional structures is necessary for the identification of grounded and effective government policies. The lessons of the past, from which we determine the basis of sound decision making in the future, are most valuably elucidated and understood through our engagement with SSH research.

Conclusion

- 13 The significant challenges facing the EU can only be addressed by looking to solutions from across the entire spectrum of research – medicine, natural sciences, social sciences, humanities and arts. It is vital that the EU provides opportunities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research to address these challenges. And this research must be funded in a stable, long-term manner to provide researchers with the support to discover these solutions, identify how to apply them, and understand the implications for the many and diverse societies which constitute the EU.
- 14 The objective of embedding the social sciences and humanities within Horizon 2020 is an entirely new undertaking for DG Research & Innovation. In order to achieve this new objective, DG Research & Innovation will need to establish robust institutional structures. We thus echo recommendations made by ALLEA that a new strongly staffed and properly resourced directorate should be established within DG Research & Innovation. This will provide the essential institutional support and leadership to ensure that the social sciences and humanities are fully embedded in Horizon 2020. It will also mean that the critical perspectives offered by these disciplines can be brought to bear to understand the challenges facing Europe.

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