

Biochemical Society
Charles Darwin House
12 Roger Street
London
WC1N 2JU

24 May 2019

Dear Professor Sir Adrian Smith,

Re. Future frameworks for international collaboration on research and innovation: call for evidence.

I am writing on behalf of the Biochemical Society in response to your review into “Future frameworks for international collaboration on research and innovation” for the Department of Business Energy Innovation and Skills.

The Biochemical Society represents over 7,000 molecular bioscientists, and we welcome this timely review on this issue. As a Member Organisation of the Royal Society of Biology, we fully support their response which is being submitted to this review.

In addition, we are writing to highlight some supplementary examples which exemplify some advantages of participation in previous European funding programmes that our members feel are important to preserve in any future UK-framework. These include the un-quantifiable benefits afforded by pan-European funding schemes, including collaborative projects; ease of data sharing; access to resources; and the ability to attract the most talented researchers which are integral to the UK science-base. All of these issues are affected by the perception of the UK internationally, which we believe should remain open, welcoming and outward-looking. These points are all discussed in detail in the RSB’s response.

Projects under Horizon 2020 have facilitated collaborations which may otherwise not have been possible. For example, teams at UCL are working with a consortium of Portuguese universities on a project for translation in regenerative medicine. Besides the economic value of the grant into individual teams, this grant has enabled the organisation of scientific events, training and facilitated knowledge exchange between the Portuguese and UCL community. Furthermore, the grant has catalysed cross-faculty collaborations within UCL in what is an inter-disciplinary field, which would not have occurred without this international initiative.

European research grants have provided opportunities to students and post-doctoral fellows at the beginning of their careers. The ability to include several co-investigators across several teams and institutes has allowed the assembly of multidisciplinary teams to tackle ambitious interdisciplinary research possible for early career researchers. As many current UK Research Council Fellowships do not allow the inclusion of co-investigators, this can be difficult in current UK-funding structures. The recently established UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship has begun to address this problem, but any UK funding alternative to EU-frameworks should make sure to strongly promote and facilitate ambitious, collaborative research, including for early-career researchers.

Many of the concerns raised by our members relating to the future of international collaboration following the UK’s departure from the European Union are shared across the life (and physical) sciences. For further detail on the issues affecting the molecular bioscience community, please refer to the RSB’s full response to this review.

Yours faithfully,

Dr David Pye,

Honorary Policy Officer of the Biochemical Society