

European universities call for research funding boost

Institutions say Commission should divert structural funds into modernising academic systems

June 20, 2017



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More money for blue-skies research, a two-stage application procedure and wider use of structural investment funds in academia are some of the things that universities want from the European Commission's next funding programme.



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Leru said that the budget for the next programme should be increased to at least €120 billion (£105 billion), whereas the guild went a step further and asked for €130 billion. These figures are a marked increase over the current programme, known as Horizon 2020, which has a budget of about €80 billion for six years.

“Increased spending on research, innovation and education is essential if we are to strengthen Europe’s knowledge economy, enhance citizenship through rational discourse, and engage with the social, cultural and environmental concerns of citizens in innovative ways,” the guild said in its document, *Supporting Europe’s Societies: Research and Innovation for the Ninth Framework Programme* (http://www.the-guild.eu/Publications/guild-position-on-fp9_12-june-2017.pdf).

Within the multibillion-euro funding pot, both organisations said that the portion assigned to the European Research Council, which funds blue-skies research that does not have an immediate application, should be increased. The guild called this the “jewel in the crown of European research” and specified that its annual budget should be increased to €4 billion.

The organisations, which together represent 42 research-intensive universities across Europe, called for an increase in funding for the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions – a fellowship programme that promotes international collaborations for researchers at all levels of their career.

They were also united in calling for European structural funding to be used to fund research as part of the next framework programme. Structural funding is currently used by the commission to stimulate growth and development in poorer parts of Europe.

Leru said that a “fixed percentage” of structural funding should be “earmarked for synergies” with FP9. It argued that, in poorer regions, which also tend to perform less well in securing research funding, structural funding could be used to modernise academic systems.

The current programme is plagued with problems of oversubscription, with recent research finding that, because so few applicants received funding, the quality of European research is threatened (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/oversubscription-funding-threatens-quality-eu-research>) and billions of euros (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/billions-lost-in-bids-to-secure-european-union-research-funding>) are wasted.

The guild suggests that the amount of time that academics have to spend on bids could be reduced via the introduction of a two-stage application procedure, in which one-third of those who made it to the second round would secure funding.

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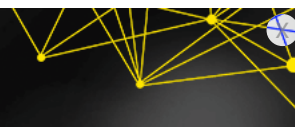
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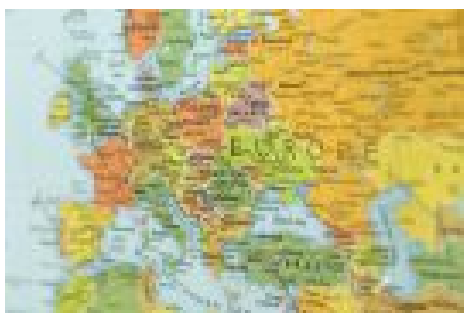
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