

## **Key Science Europe Messages on Widening Excellence and Closing the Knowledge Divide**

1. Strengthening of research capacity and reform of the research system is primarily a national-level responsibility. This is a long-term endeavour, and will reflect the diversity across different countries. However, actions and instruments at European level, in the form of funding, setting standards and spreading best practice, can significantly advance this process. Consequently it is essential in the design of European instruments that they strengthen national efforts rather than damage or detract from them, and that there is smart alignment of national and EU efforts. Best practices successfully introduced, such as the use of ‘seal of excellence’, should be extended throughout the Framework Programme.
2. An essential component in building a strong national research system is the ability to attract excellent research talent by offering competitive salaries in all European countries, in order to alleviate ‘brain drain’ from low-performing EU Member States. Administrative restrictions set by national or European funding bodies that prevent reaching this objective by limiting the freedom of research performing institutions to increase salaries to competitive levels are clearly harmful. It is timely to re-consider the rules for the eligibility of salaries funded through Horizon 2020 and implement new regulation that does not prevent more balanced remuneration levels for researchers within the EU.
3. Another essential component in attracting talent and improving research performance is the availability and use of state-of-the-art research infrastructures. There is a need to better exploit existing national infrastructures on a European level, including measures to improve access to and training in the operation of these facilities.
4. The full potential of Structural Funding to support research capacity building has still not been exploited. It is crucial for both national authorities and the European Commission to allow use of this funding for projects focused on excellent research. In case of national-level research initiatives it is essential to widen the scope of regional eligibility of European Structural and Investment Funds, since most national research infrastructures in low-performing countries are not located in convergence regions and the relocation of research infrastructure only increases transaction costs and reduces the efficiency of the action.
5. EU funding aimed at ‘widening participation’ should be maintained and strengthened. In addition to current schemes, the introduction should be encouraged of horizontal measures that aim to improve newcomers’ participation in research consortia and increase the active, meaningful participation of institutions in low-performing Member States in project consortia, especially in ‘Societal Challenges’ and ‘Industrial Leadership’ pillars that aim for direct European societal and economic impact. The role of such partners needs to be substantive rather than tokenistic, and must be in line with the core principle of excellence as the criterion

for inclusion. In addition, researchers and research performing institutions in low-performing countries should be encouraged and supported to apply for EU funding, and to take on a co-ordination role.

6. Access to, and active participation in, European and international research networks is important, and allows researchers to be identified as potential partners by peers in their communities. In particular, early-stage researchers and newcomers to European projects can benefit from joining cross-border networks. Entry barriers to networks are often lower than those related to participating in research consortia. Support to European initiatives and instruments that aim at structuring and maintaining networks of researchers across Europe, such as the COST Programme but also Joint Programming Initiatives and others, is therefore an important contribution to closing the knowledge divide.
7. A number of national funding initiatives exist that contribute to closing the knowledge divide by reversing brain-drain or by increasing collaboration between researchers from lower- and higher-performing countries. These include return grants programmes provided by a funder in a research-intensive country for researchers from low-performing countries to support the continuation of their research career in their country of origin, or granting practices that allow a national funder to finance a project partner from another country as part of the grant, through models such as 'Money follows Collaboration Line' (MfCL) or the 'Co-Investigator' scheme. In order to support existing measures of this kind and to encourage their use, the European Commission could consider extending the 'co-funding' model to these types of national funding scheme.
8. Open Science has the potential to transcend the localised nature of many aspects of research, such as funding conditions, working conditions, and others. Changes to the research system, for example Open Access to publications, new ways of sharing and managing research data, and new metrics for the assessment of research, increasingly help researchers to participate on a level and global research playing field. Policy support to such developments, as well European initiatives like the European Open Science Cloud, can contribute to the spread of excellence to all regions in Europe, and to closing the knowledge divide between regions by reducing the dependency of researchers on local conditions and infrastructure.

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