

## **UASNL reply to High Level Group Consultation on Horizon Europe and FP10: Fostering impact in the region**

Universities of Applied Sciences Netherlands – UASNL thanks the High-Level Group for the opportunity to provide input and add the perspective of applied research and regional impact to the consultation. UASNL represents 20 Dutch Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS). In UAS, knowledge valorization, applied scientific research, and educational activities are deeply interconnected within their regional ecosystems.

### **1. What major challenges (scientific, social, economic, technological) should still be attempted to be addressed in the second half of HE (2025-27) and further addressed by a future FP (FP10)?**

**Scientifically:** Climate change remains an urgent issue that demands immediate action. The scale-up and application of leading climate technologies, while ensuring the digital and green transition is inclusive, is a must for a vibrant and healthy society. Developments concerning security in Europe call for new guidelines for researchers regarding ethics and dual use.

**Socially:** There is a growing gap between citizens and science, and citizens and Brussels and democratic institutions. We need to bridge this gap by organizing research through structural collaboration with all stakeholders (public and private), leading to stronger connections and more meaningful societal impact.

**Economically:** Unequal distribution of welfare leads to polarisation in society. Industries and academia should be empowered to translate research into tangible societal benefits for all. FP10 presents an opportunity to boost European competitiveness and productivity and expand welfare through innovative regional ecosystems. SME's and their regional and social innovation strength should get special attention.

**Technologically:** New technologies like AI develop faster than society can keep up. The responsible and ethical developments of these technologies need to be ensured. This requires approaches that involve societal stakeholders and engage the entire innovation value chain. Evidence-informed policy making is key in this process.

### **2. Which are the major successes of the current HE and which are the major “roadblocks”/threats to success?**

**Successes:** The challenge- and mission driven research approach in HE fosters impact for society. Collaborative interdisciplinary research networks involving all players and levels in the innovation chain have proven successful instruments for advancing knowledge and innovation in Europe and Widening Countries.

#### **Roadblocks/Threats to success:**

1. Insufficient alignment with societal needs and suboptimal uptake by users slow down the innovation process.
2. An outmoded linear approach to valorization: first research, then valorization. Risking a mismatch between research output and the needs from industry and society.
3. Large consortia with a long duration in Pillar 2 raise the administrative cost of coordination while lengthening the research to impact cycle.
4. “Excellence” often receives a narrow interpretation, excluding practice-oriented skills and expertise.
5. Low success rates and recent steep inflation call for a higher budget to maintain the programmes’ intended impact.

### **3. Which sub-programmes of HE should be to be preserved and strengthened in a future FP and which should be altered? How far a future FP should keep/alter the current basic three-pillar architecture of HE?**

**Pillar 1, Alter:** Make Pillar 1 more inclusive: Talent programmes for individual researchers (ERC, MSCA) are now restricted to blue sky research approaches, with evaluation paradigms strongly focusing on track records in selected journals. By this, the programme excludes talented researchers in more applied and in industry contexts. Use COARA, one of the ERA priority actions, to set new standards in research evaluation. This would increase benefits for researchers and future employers beyond traditional academia. Regarding research infrastructures, we recommend more user-centered, place-based, and transdisciplinary research and innovation ecosystems.

**Pillar 2, Preserve:** Pillar 2 has proven a successful instrument to tackle transitions and urgent societal challenges. Partnerships are essential tools for strengthening collaborative research in Europe and should be continued in the current and future FP's.

**Pillar 2, Strengthen:** Challenge-driven research is required to achieve impact and speed up innovation along TRL levels. Participation of societal and industry actors should be strengthened. The partnership landscape should reflect sectoral differences but be unified, especially concerning financial rules.

**Pillar 3, Preserve:** The EIC has demonstrated its added value through its distinctive role in funding disruptive innovation. The EIT has initiated a robust drive toward knowledge valorization.

**Pillar 3, Strengthen:** Expand the EIC openness to collaborative innovation value chains, beyond individual business entities. The EIT would benefit from opening to actors across the innovation value chain and actors contributing to the necessary skills development, e.g. HEIs. Promote innovation competencies and an entrepreneurial mindset, to ensure the availability of talents in European regions.

#### **Alterations to Consider in Future Framework Programmes:**

**Use Widening** to safeguard the emergence of innovation valleys and leverage structural funds to build capacity.

**Complementary funding** from national investments should not be restricted to the framework programme.

Align **Missions** more with other instruments in the FP – especially the partnerships, policies and ecosystems at the global, EU, national, regional and local levels.

It is too early to roll out **lump sum** funding on a large scale. The lump sum approach shifts the administrative burden to the consortium level and seems to decrease risk-taking, leading to elimination of new or niche partners.

#### **4. What would be a catalyst to overcome the current roadblocks of HE and be implemented in a future FP? What should be the most important innovations to be considered in a future FP?**

Roadblocks 1–5, see above. Moving forward, FP10 should:

**1. Start from impact areas:** establish the pathways, policy and institutional environment for the application of research results. In this endeavor, Society Readiness Levels (SRLs), alongside Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs), play a crucial supportive role. Ensuring alignment between research programmes and other EU initiatives and transition policies is paramount for fostering sustainable and effective transformations. This can be addressed through an ecosystems approach and smart specialization strategies, which bring the demands of SMEs, civic and public organizations together, connecting required skills to research challenges.

**2. Foster** innovation approaches that co-create solutions together with stakeholders and end users in (non-linear) iterative cycles. Including stakeholders into the research process from the very beginning leads to impact driven research design that connect research outputs to the original problems and challenges: Valorization starts at day 1.

**3. Introduce** smaller and shorter collaborative projects in addition to larger projects; alternatively, when larger consortia are required, stimulate cascade funding. Streamline rules and administrative processes that enable smaller or less experienced parties to take part and allow for short research-to-impact cycles at project level.

**4. Rethink** the notion of "Excellence". Better mutual integration of fundamental and applied research needed. Improve the research evaluation process by using COARA.

**5. FP10 requires** an adequate budget. A 200 billion Euro budget for FP10 is the minimum to make sure researchers and innovators can work on long-term research roadmaps. The budget should be ringfenced, but dynamic enough for internal budget reallocation if needed.

**Final statement:** FP10 should focus on serving the European society, finding the right balance between blue sky research, applications and societal impact. We cannot leave the scale up and application fully to the private sector, centred on financial performance. HEIs should facilitate the innovation capacity of SMEs and industry in regional innovation ecosystems. Recognize the key role of talent and skills in securing uptake and impact. We need to foster talents that integrate different roles: researcher, innovator, change agent and professional.

#### **Supporting documents:**

UASNL: [Regional Innovative Ecosystems and the Role of University of Applied Sciences](#)

UAS4EUROPE: [A UASers guide to building innovation ecosystems](#)

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