Scientific Advisory Committee Deepens Discussions on Impact, Horizon 2020, and International Collaboration

On 5 and 6 April members of the Science Europe Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) met in Brussels. They discussed their current mandate given by the Governing Board on ‘the value and impact of science’ and ‘Horizon 2020’.

Narratives on Impact
The Chair, Professor Ola Erstad, reported back from the debate organised by Science Europe with representatives from the European Commission (EC) and the ‘High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU Research and Innovation Programmes’ on 24 March. Several key messages from the November 2016 SAC Symposium helped prepare this debate. Members of the SAC discussed the three themes of ‘unexpected impact’, ‘dynamic impact’, and ‘trust’ that resulted from the SAC Symposium. They agreed to collect additional case studies to better showcase the impact narrative. The SAC further developed another element of the narrative, on ‘education and training’. This reflection derives from the fact that education and training provided by researchers to students and early-career scientists, also contributes to society at large. Only few highly-trained students continue in research: the vast majority leave for positions in industry, administration, or to set up their own business.

An interesting case study on the ‘Balanced Value Impact Model’ (BVI Model) led by Professor Simon Tanner from the UK was presented. This model draws evidence from a wide range of sources and synthesises information from the whole impact assessment sector to demonstrate and ‘measure’ the benefits of digitisation and digital resources in general. More information on the model is available at http://bit.ly/2pc5IDi.

Horizon 2020
In relation to Horizon 2020 and Framework Programme 9 (FP9), the SAC discussed a wide range of topics: the architecture of FP9 and the balance between top-down and bottom-up; fundamental versus applied research; small- versus large-scale projects; the over-subscription and/or over-specification of calls; the possible inclusion of defence research into FP9; the disparities in terms of research and innovation performance between the different Member States; the challenges in fully embedding Social Sciences and Humanities into each of the general objectives of Horizon 2020; and the EC’s intention to fund projects based on output and how those ‘outputs’ should be defined.

International Collaboration
The topic of ‘international collaboration’ that was added to the SAC mandate on impact will be dealt with as a horizontal topic across the four key messages. To this end, Torsten Fischer from the German Research Foundation (DFG) was invited as an expert and representative from the SE High Level Policy Network on Cross-border Collaboration. He presented the different work strands of the network, which includes exploring multilateral collaboration between national funding agencies to fund pan-European science, co-programming of research at EU and national level, and the impact of international research collaboration. SAC members recognised the importance of the network and welcomed a more regular and structured approach to collaborating with it. As a next step, it was agreed to invite a SAC member to its next meeting.

2017 SAC Symposium
Finally, the SAC members decided on a November 2017 SAC Symposium topic with relevance for research for SE Members and the European Commission. They proposed the working title ‘Science Without Borders’, which covers a variety of relevant topics, such as ‘openness to the world/international collaboration; interdisciplinary and/or Open Science to overcome inequalities or borders between disciplines; moving between regions or sectors or in knowledge transfer; borders between science and society; the importance of borderless science in the world; and when borders may be actually useful (such as borders between fundamental and defence research).
Science Europe Provides Input to European Commission at Event on the Results of the Horizon 2020 Consultation

On 28 April, the European Commission’s (EC) Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD) and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) organised a joint event to present and discuss the results of the stakeholder consultation on the Horizon 2020 programme.

Science Europe was among a selected number of associations representing research organisations invited to provide testimony on the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme.

During the event, the EC presented the results of its public consultation. Of the 3500 contributions to the consultation, 9% were submitted by research organisations. One quarter of respondents did not participate in Horizon 2020 and mentioned low success rates as a key barrier. Indeed, 89% of respondents “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that an increased budget was needed for financing research and innovation at EU level. The detailed report of the results of the consultation was published on the same day.

Stephan Kuster, Acting Director of Science Europe, spoke in the first panel to underline some of the key points from Science Europe. “Science is an unsung success of the European project and we should promote it more actively,” he said.

For Science Europe, elements that have worked well so far include the European Research Council and its excellence-based funding for curiosity-driven research, for which the funding should be strengthened. The societal challenges approach is also welcome as it fosters collaborative research. Kuster also pointed out two key issues with Horizon 2020: the widening participation gap and oversubscription, which is actually more an issue of underfinancing. While emphasising that rationalisation of the funding landscape does not mean harmonisation, he advised the EC to be cautious with the development of output-based funding. He added that the societal relevance of research is already huge, and this should be better communicated to citizens. He recommended to be uncompromising on quality as the best guarantee for impact. In conclusion, Horizon 2020 must keep its character as a research funding programme, with a strong budget for bottom-up, collaborative, and curiosity-driven programmes.

The EESC also presented its main recommendations – many of which are in line with Science Europe’s Position Statement ‘The Framework Programme that Europe Needs’.

This event was another opportunity to express the collective views of Science Europe members on the current EU Framework Programme and on how its successor should be structured.

For more information:
- Programme and streaming of the event: http://bit.ly/2oXBCTv
- Photographs from the event: http://bit.ly/2pbYiPM

Registrations Open for the Conference ‘Research & Innovation – Shaping our Future’ on 3 July 2017

On 3 July 2017, Carlos Moedas, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, will host the stakeholder conference ‘Research & Innovation – shaping our future.’

The event will bring policymakers from EU institutions together with nearly 700 stakeholders and interested actors to discuss the role of research and innovation for Europe’s future. Pascal Lamy will also present his vision and the report of the High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU Research and Innovation Programmes.

Speakers will include Nobel Prize winners, captains of industry, researchers, politicians, and innovators who will discuss how research and innovation could transform our economy and improve our society. For more information and to register go to http://bit.ly/2pFQXcU.
Three New Science Europe Working Groups Ready to Kick Off

The mandates of all Science Europe Working Groups (WGs) expired on 23 March 2017, the date of the last Governing Board (GB) meeting. At that meeting the GB decided to launch the first three of the new generation of WGs immediately in order to address urgent issues and fulfil Science Europe’s 2017 work plan.

The three topics on which Science Europe will launch new WGs immediately are: ‘Open Access to Research Publications’, ‘Research Data’, and ‘Horizon 2020 and the next Framework Programme (FP9)’. These WGs will run for two years, with an interim report due after the first 12 months. In addition, the High Level Policy Network on Cross-border Collaboration continues to operate as a Member Organisation driven platform.

Activities on other priority topics will continue to be pursued by the SE Office with involvement of experts from different Member Organisations. New task groups or Working Groups will be proposed when needed.

Discussing Community-driven Research Data Management at the RDA Conference in Barcelona

The Science Europe Working Group (WG) on Research Data organised a session at the 9th Plenary Session of the Research Data Alliance (RDA) in Barcelona on 5 April.

The session ‘Community-driven Research Data Management: Towards Domain Protocols for Research Data Management’ presented the WG’s approach and its resulting framework to conference participants. The WG compared its approach to others from different communities and institutions, to identify common points, differences, and gaps, and to identify potential partners for the implementation of a commonly used framework for research data management protocols (RDMPs).

While working on a modular framework for disciplinary RDMPs that is intended to offer a pragmatic solution to ensure proper implementation of Data Management Plans (DMPs), the WG compared its approach to others from different communities and institutions, to identify common points, differences, and gaps, and to identify potential partners for the implementation of a commonly used framework for RDMPs. The WG also submitted its proposal to various scientific communities for proof of concept. The session at the RDA conference was structured to present and confirm the initial findings of this approach.

After the presentation of the framework and the WG’s approach by WG Chair Peter Doorn and his colleague Patrick Aerts, representatives from the European Commission, Jean-Claude Burgelman, and the European Research Council, Martin Stokhof, gave their institutions’ views on Open Data and data management. The presentations were followed by a panel discussion on the applicability of protocols for DMPs. The panel members Franco Niccolucci (ARIADNE and PARTHENOS), Susanna Sansone (ELIXIR/BioSharing), Ron Dekker (CESSDA), Dieter van Uytvanck (CLARIN), and Ari Asmi (ENVRIPlus) all represented scientific communities that had been contacted by the WG beforehand for feedback and proof of concept.

The session’s audience included representatives of the scientific communities, policy makers, and DMP specialists who are familiar with the development and/or use of RDMPs. The session was very well attended and participants showed a lot of interest in the topic while engaging in lively discussions with the speakers.

The WG will compile all comments received during the session and finish the report during the coming weeks. More information on the RDA session can be found at http://bit.ly/2nwlCnq

Panellists discussing DMPs during the Science Europe session at the RDA conference in Barcelona
Revision of the Multi-annual Financial Framework

On 5 April, the European Parliament (EP) adopted the consensus reached on 7 March by the Council of the EU on the revision of the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF), which sets the budget of the EU for a seven-year period. The Council had several months of discussion on the compromise text, further to the proposal from the European Commission (EC) tabled in September 2016.

In its proposal the EC wanted to reallocate €6.33 billion; this has been reduced to €6 billion. This €6 billion mainly comes from unallocated resources, and is allocated to two priorities: for migration-related measures inside the EU and tackling the root causes of migration externally, and for jobs and growth.

Horizon 2020 will receive a top-up of €200 million, instead of the initial €400 million top-up earmarked in the EC proposal. The money will be spread as follows:

- €50 million for the European Research Council (of which €16.7 million was already included in the 2017 budget);
- €55 million for the ‘Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation’ part of Horizon 2020 (of which €16.7 million was already included in the 2017 budget);
- €50 million for the European Innovation Council (budget line ‘Innovation in SMEs’); and
- €45 million for High-Performance Computers, under the ‘Leadership in Enabling and Industrial Technologies’ part of Horizon 2020 (of which €16.7 million was already included in the 2017 budget).

In its Position Statement ‘The Framework Programme that Europe Needs,’ Science Europe called to reverse the €2.2 billion budget cut to Horizon 2020 which had been reallocated to the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) in 2016. This is in line with the EP resolution of July 2016 to fully compensate the €2.2 billion cuts. Science Europe also considers that the additional €400 million for Horizon 2020, announced by the EC in the context of its proposal for the MFF revision, is a welcome step but is disappointed to see this reduced by half.

The preparation of the next MFF, post-2020, will start at the end of 2017. For the EC’s Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, the ambition is to lift the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation up from a marginal place in the EU budget to the level of the agricultural and cohesion policies. Science Europe will continue to advocate for research as a key budget priority.

More information:
Research Involving Animals: European Commission Conference on the Consultation

Last summer, the European Commission (EC) conducted a survey among a selected group of stakeholders, including Science Europe, on Directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes.

This consultation aimed to gather the views of researchers, research organisations, Member State authorities, animal rights groups, and representatives of the pharmaceutical industry. As a follow-up to this consultation, the participating stakeholders were invited to a meeting on 31 March 2017 to be informed of the EC’s findings. The EC will use the findings during the ongoing review of the Directive.

Article 58 of the Directive requires the EC to review it by 10 November 2017. In this review, the EC has to take into account the development of alternative methods that do not entail the use of animals. It will also have to propose amendments if considered appropriate.

Survey respondents indicated that even though the Directive is seen as an appropriate regulatory framework, the review comes too early to derive definitive conclusions. The impact of the Directive so far depends heavily on the existence of prior national legislation and the progress of implementation in the different Member States. This was also reflected in the Science Europe response to the consultation, which was a compilation of its Member Organisations’ views.

As a result of the consultation the EC sees a need for common standards for project authorisation and for researcher training. It also found that there is no pan-European severity classification on what is considered acceptable or cruel in animal testing. The fact that Member States are not required to disclose the number of animals used in research in their territory makes it difficult to get solid data on the success of the Directive.

In the coming months, the EC will finalise its analysis and conclusions. It will issue a Review Report by 10 November 2017. Science Europe will continue to monitor this process, inform its Member Organisations, and react to any Commission initiatives when needed.


Informal Deal Between the Council and European Parliament on PRIMA

On 11 April, the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU reached an agreement with the European Parliament regarding the participation of the EU in the new public–public Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA), under Article 185 TFEU.

PRIMA focuses on two key socio-economic issues that are important for the region: food systems and water resources. It aims to develop innovative solutions for sustainable water provision and management, and food production in the Mediterranean region. As such, it will pool the know-how and financial resources of the EU and participating states.

Currently nine member states are participating (Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, and Portugal) along with six non-EU countries (Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia).

The EU’s participation will include a contribution of €220 million from Horizon 2020. The EU contribution will be provided from the budget for ‘Societal Challenge 2’ on food security, sustainable agriculture, and water research, and ‘Societal Challenge 5’ on climate action and resource efficiency. The EU budget contribution will be implemented over the seven annual work plans of the initiative (2018–2024).

For more information:
More European Research News

Validation and Regulatory Acceptance of Alternative Methods to Animal Testing
Science Europe was invited to take part in a workshop on validation and regulatory acceptance of alternative methods to animal testing on 23 and 24 March in Berlin. The event was jointly organised by the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) and the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM).

The aim of the workshop was to identify strategies to facilitate more effective validation and regulatory acceptance of new alternative approaches for the replacement of animal testing with an emphasis on testing strategies. Participants representing regulatory authorities, test methods developers, and research organisations discussed drivers for and barriers to the implementation of alternative methods. Dedicated discussions went into topics such as improving the quality of alternative animal-free methods, accelerating the validation processes and facilitating regulatory acceptance of alternative animal-free methods.

The workshop organisers, as a first step, aim to compile a set of recommendations from the discussions. It was also agreed that more workshops will be needed in the future to follow-up on discussions among stakeholders as well as on those at national and European level.

European Commission Appoints Advisory Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies
On 30 March, the European Commission (EC) re-launched the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies (EGE). The group, selected from over 200 candidates who responded to a public call, brings together 15 leading experts from around the world from the fields of natural and social sciences and humanities, philosophy, ethics, and law.

Since 1991, EGE has provided the EC with high-quality and independent advice on all policy areas where ethical, societal, and fundamental rights issues intersect with the development of science and new technologies. Previous Opinion Papers and Statements (2010–2016) of the group include and address: Ethics of New Health Technologies and Citizen Participation; Ethics of Security and Surveillance Technologies; An ethical framework for assessing research, production and use of energy; Ethics of information and communication technologies; Gene Editing; Research Integrity; and Clinical Trials.

The group will hold its first meeting on 24 and 25 April 2017, when it will meet Carlos Moedas, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, and reflect on the most relevant topics for its upcoming work.

For more information, see http://bit.ly/2p8uIOV

European Commission Survey on the Rewards and Skills for Scientists in an Open Science Environment
The European Commission (EC) has launched a survey to gather information on what education and skills are deemed necessary to practice Open Science, and how to reward researchers doing so. The survey targets three different stakeholder groups: researchers, research performing organisations, and research funding organisations. The results will feed into the EC’s discussions on Open Science.

The background to this survey is the assumption that the practice of Open Science represents a new approach to the scientific process that is based on more co-operative work. This will would open new ways of knowledge distribution for researchers who will use new digital technologies and tools. Science Europe will also delve into discussions on this subject at its next High-level Workshop to be hosted by DFG in Berlin on 13 and 14 September 2017.

The survey is open until 15 May 2017 and can be found at http://bit.ly/2pp1PZL

Calendar of Science Europe Meetings

General Assembly
18/05/17 General Assembly, in Brussels
30/11/17 General Assembly, in Brussels

Governing Board
22/06/17 Governing Board, in Brussels
12/10/17 Governing Board, in Brussels
28/11/17 SAC Meeting, in Brussels

Scientific Advisory Committee Meetings
12–13/09/17 SAC Meeting, in Brussels

Other Meetings and Events
13–14/09/17 ERA High-level Workshop 2017, in Berlin hosted by DFG

If you are from a Science Europe Member Organisation and you wish to subscribe or unsubscribe to this newsletter, please send an email to: communications@scienceeurope.org