

ELO-catchup: 3rd March 2021 Summary of Breakout Room Discussions

1. Horizon Europe communication strategies and UK-EU engagement planning:

Does your (pre-award/EU/International) Team have a strategy on Horizon Europe (HEU)?

- 1.1** There is a mixed picture, some have strategies in place others are developing these. They are prioritising getting the message out on UK status and eligibility in calls. Some are embedded as part of organisational international strategies.
- 1.2** At present HEU strategies tend to be informal and not top-down other than supporting overarching research strategies. Some strategies are focused on rebuilding areas hardest hit by Brexit, and others are building on H2020 strengths.
- 1.3** Generally informal comms strategies (ramped up from January) have received some direct VP/PVCI level support.
- 1.4** Top-down (institutional level) and bottom-up (academic links) approach being encouraged.
- 1.5** Focus now on those with existing/potential networks, grantees, and experienced academics plus ERC applicants - given first calls announced.
- 1.6** Several HEIs reported a need to catch up still due to workloads (e.g. REF) constrained by role that may not just be EU.

Have you started communication activities and reaching out to your researchers - have you already run/planned any HEU events/information activities?

- 1.7** Agreement that all HEIs had utilised at least one of the following: UKRO visits, internally teams/zoom updates, emails, blogs, newsletters, twitter, social media, joint workshops.
- 1.8** Some HEIs cited SharePoint as a means of sharing new updates as well as UKRO guidance and fact sheets which were deemed very helpful.
- 1.9** Some ELOs considering bringing in former grant holders and considering some specific theme events e.g. on SSH.
- 1.10** Considerations around ERC strategy – which call to apply for where researchers might not be ready for this call is it better to wait.
- 1.11** Some still receiving queries about UK participation – work remains to be done in this area.
- 1.12** The recently published European Commission Q&A document on UK participation was well received.
- 1.13** Danger of information overload (webinars, news items, social media) – it is hard for researchers to keep up – ELO role to target to ensure academics get what they need at right time.

1.14 Individual UK queries querying UK participation – work remains to be done – EU ‘protagonists’ are ok but how to communicate to newbies/early career researchers for whom EU funding is an opportunity, but they are inexperienced.

1.15 Need to demystify Pillar 2 as calls are more open – harder to communicate in targeted way (cluster 1&2 are clearer but other clusters have cross over).

What are you doing to keep in touch with your counterparts across the EU in other institutions or stakeholder organisations? What are the main concerns?

1.16 Many institutions are working between researchers or as part of other consortia such as LERU or AURORA, however there is a general feeling that more should be done.

1.17 ELOs have been encouraging academics to maintain networks and positions in potential consortia.

1.18 Practically, some are issuing letters from President/VC to collaborators to encourage future collaborations.

Is there much interest from your researchers in HEU?

1.19 Interest is building but levels have suffered because of the uncertainties.

1.20 Interest strong in ERC calls (from individual academics to senior level) it is trickier to gauge how HEIs will engage with consortia under Pillar II & III given draft WPs, calls not out yet thus no submissions yet. Scope of call topics (as opposed to national opportunities) is an attractor.

1.21 There is a concern, whether the message to EU partners is really getting across. Competition levels for R&I calls - will interest convert to bids.

1.22 HEIs under pressure re financial viability – comms challenge for MSCA DNs and tuition fees that cannot be funded from grant - some HEIs have no fee waivers as policy.

1.23 Academics are keeping in touch with EU counterparts in EU. ELO using comms messaging to encourage academics to rebuild proactively their networks etc. Anecdotal reports of individuals being invited back into consortia rather than having to initiate and lead.

1.24 Some HEIs are/considering use of paying into subscriber networks (e.g. Crowd Helix) to enhance engagement.

1.25 Concern: how EU partners perceive UK participation (given changes to regulation, immigration, data management differences etc as a Third Country).

Do you have any recommendations on UK communication approach – what could/should be done at a higher/governmental level (UKRI/BEIS/UKRO) regarding communication to support UK engagement in HEU?

1.26 Showcasing good examples and championing UK success – is this something UK Gov, or UKRI would be able to help with?

- 1.27** More on the policy related to Horizon Europe – data adequacy, immigrations (more similar to the presentation today to a wider audience), gender equality, diversity, partnerships.
- 1.28** Some raise concern that there is a lack of clear HMG messaging on HEU. Q&As from the EC on UK participation is very helpful can BEIS provide something similar?
- 1.29**
- Recommendations:**
- 1.30** **BEIS comms targeted at different levels:** for senior management, heads and individual academics and EU audiences.
- 1.31** **PR & Media campaign:** is it possible for Minister for R&I, Anne Solloway to be more visible in the media? Get Horizon Europe and UK participation news out in media with positive UK H2020 case studies?
- 1.32** **Is there scope for BEIS and UKRI to publish** H2020 UK case studies to motivate researchers to take part?
- 1.33** Could Government **invest in a pot of seed funding** for researchers i.e. access funds to support EU engagement and support newcomers to the programme..
- 1.34** Webinars targeting early career researchers.
- 1.35** UKRO webinars (and others) praised but duplication of content should be avoided.
- 1.36** More networking/brokerage activities (perhaps facilitated by NCPs) to allow researchers to pitch ideas to potential collaborators.
- 1.37** The presentation on immigration rules (from this event) was widely praised and it was noted that the information needs disseminating widely. The fact that it was specifically in relation to HEU was welcome.

2 New UK immigration and mobility rules and the impacts on EU-funded research projects

What issues/additional hurdles do you foresee as a result of the changes in immigration rules? E.g. implications for HR processes, additional costs?

- 2.1** On **staff capacities**, at present there's 'a calm before the storm' due to immigration at a halt due to COVID-19. In many institutions there is only one staff in HR that deals with EU funding and mobility issues, so capacity is limited.
- 2.2** There is therefore pressure on institutional staff to build expertise on the new immigration system in this first year (during this quiet period) so that staff are prepared to field immigration and visa queries as best as possible.

Are there many questions from your researchers involved in EU projects about visas? What are their main concerns?

- 2.3 ITNs and Doctoral Networks:** There was real concern on how to deal with the costs around visas and immigration, particularly if the ESR has a family. These costs in most instances will not be covered by the full grant and therefore poses a notable barrier to participation in MSCA DNs.
- 2.4** There was a discussion on how to most **adequately support an ESR** and make them aware of these at the application stage, when you don't necessarily know much about the personal situation of the ESR or how much they foresee the overall costs may be.
- 2.5** On **Endorsement Letters**, it was noted by the group that there is not much flexibility around this at present. A letter of endorsement lasts for three months, and the Home Office could not guarantee that researchers can use an expired letter in the event a start date needs to be changed because a delay in the grant agreement process, project start date or COVID-19, to give some examples.
- 2.6** There are uncertainties around **the costs of visas and NHS surcharge** and how/if these can be charged to Horizon Europe grants across ERC, MSCA and collaborative projects. (UKRO have provided clarification articles on this previously).
- 2.7** It was noted that current information on new immigration and implications for research are scattered and unclear, is there a way to bring this together?.
- 2.8** Recruited **Non-EU citizens** who then go on secondments to other European countries will also have their own outward immigration rules to adhere to.

3 Horizon Europe Implementation Strategy and ELO's views on novelties.

What issues/opportunities do you foresee as a result of the novelties in the HEU? E.g. the personnel costs daily rate; internal invoicing; Gender Equality Plans.

- 3.1 For implementation novelties** further details are required for practical rules related to daily rates, internal invoicing, third parties and challenges will remain related to novel approaches in HEU, for example, portfolio-based calls, destinations and how to address novelties in applications.
- 3.2** Many EU teams are operating with reduced staff, so adopting a new system will be tough.
- 3.3** There were concerns over how to organise timesheets, overall process, having H2020 and HE projects run in parallel, particularly with the ERC calls 'bunched together'. There are questions on how it can work for those currently using Standard Productive Hours option 3.
- 3.4** Others were fine with the change and agreed it would just be a simple calculation at the end of the reporting period, and no change was needed to timesheets.
- 3.5 For Gender Equality Plans (GEPs)**, general feedback was that all HEIs feel setup for this but there is a hope it does not become a tick box exercise. One participant said he will use experience with GCRF and Newton. Several said they had Athena SWAN in place which will help.
- 3.6** A lot of information related to GEPs already available on university websites so there was a discussion on whether HEIs need to re-brand it all as GEP. Another question remained to what would happen in the instance they cannot publish these on their institutional websites.
- 3.7** Others enquired to what concrete next steps should be taken and whether integrated or requirements met by existing activities were sufficient.
- 3.8 New CFS thresholds and SPA** audits procedures were seen as good opportunities.
- 3.9 Exploitation of results:** Concerns on how realistic it is that projects can organise reporting beyond project end (project managers leave, hard enough for a coordinator to obtain everything from partners even while a project is still running). One participant said their university involves the tech transfer office closely who advises PIs, and they were also offered training on tech transfer as research managers which she thought would help going forward.

Do you see any additional hurdles for budgeting (e.g. What is your approach to claiming/waiving PhD fees in MSCA Doctoral Networks (former ITN)?)

- 3.10 On PhD fees**, several commented that they see a move to including Post Docs rather than PhDs in projects, given the increase in cost and potential hassle with visas for students. Many said they let departments decide how they manage fees/waivers, but one said they are now looking to have a common approach.
- 3.11** Others commented that further information on **charging PhD students to grants** was needed.

4. Actions for UKRO/BEIS/UKRI

- 4.1** UKRO articles and webinars dedicated to the implementation strategy are useful but could also be useful for practical examples of how the daily rate, more on personnel costs and also advice on proposal-writing.
- 4.2** Researchers in other countries need to be completely aware and assured of UK eligibility
- 4.3** Articles, factsheets and seminars have been helpful when navigating the complexities of EU funding. A FAQs section may be a useful addition. This will need updating as the AGA will evolve.
- 4.4** UKRO should continue programme of activities!
- 4.5** Potentially more focus groups to exchange more throughout the year.
- 4.6** Frequent ELO catch ups if possible. If possible, hold practical 'demo sessions' for applicants or a session with input and feedback from panel reviewers.
- 4.7** Think about two levels of detail for two separate audiences: Academic and Research Manager. Try to provide early sight of all EC templates where possible and facilitate different routes of partnering with colleagues.
- 4.8** The issue of PhD fees that PhD fees would be a good one for an UKRO Focus Group meeting later this year.
- 4.9** More transparency of the visa costs particularly around which budget this comes from in each area of HEU. In addition, research managers would like further advice on the length of the visas for the different programmes, particularly with regards to COVID-19. This could take the form of a simple guide, flow chart or video tutorial.