

Danish non-paper on a mission-oriented approach in the next framework programme

The EU's future position as a global research and innovation power house is fully dependent on a strong Framework Programme based on excellence that generates maximum impact by setting a strategic agenda for European research and innovation investments.

The three-pillar structure of the Framework Programme has proven successful, and should be maintained.

Particular emphasis should be put on a strengthened "excellence pillar", as the European Research Council and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions provide the basis for new and unforeseen discoveries.

The "excellence pillar" as well as the "innovation pillar" should be "bottom-up", giving researchers and innovators full freedom to find new opportunities and pathways.

Tackling societal challenges through strategic research should continue to be the third cornerstone of the Framework Programme. The introduction of a limited number of research and innovation missions could contribute to strengthening the strategic character of this pillar, and effectively underpin the EU's overall political objectives.

1. A vehicle for stronger impact – not merely a means of communication

It is pivotal that missions take their starting point in strategic objectives of the EU and be selected on the basis of EU's research and innovation excellence where the impact of a joint research effort is expected to be greatest. For each mission, a realistic time frame of e.g. 10-15 years should be set and a clear portfolio management approach ensured. The mission-oriented approach could contribute to creating a strong narrative for research and innovation cooperation, could include the various research and innovation projects and partners and end-users should be involved in the formulation and design of missions. However, the purpose of research missions should first and foremost be to strengthen impact based on political priorities. Only a minor part of the budget for the challenges pillar should be tied to concrete missions so that there is room for challenge-driven research outside the umbrella of missions.

2. Mission accomplished because of research

The interlinkage between the EU's political priorities and mission topics should be discussed and refined. Missions should contribute to meeting political goals and form part of a complex set of solutions to complex challenges. However, when formulating missions, priority should be given to topics where research in its own right can bring forward solutions to challenges via an interdisciplinary approach. Mission topics must be chosen based on what research can achieve through a targeted effort – as an independent, yet complementary, contribution to regulatory activities or the attitude or behaviour of societal actors in order to deliver tangible results. In other words: It should be easy to evaluate whether a specific mission has been accomplished, because the accomplishment can be attributed to the research and innovation efforts made.

3. Coherence between higher education, research and innovation

Educating the next generation of researchers and innovators in tackling societal challenges – and disseminating research results through education – are key in order to maximise impact. Therefore, education and training activities should be integrated in relevant projects under each mission. As regards the successor of the Erasmus+, it should be explored whether mobility and other education activities could be linked to concrete missions.

4. Excellent research covering the whole knowledge chain

Scientific excellence and expected economic or societal impact should be key criteria for the evaluation of projects contributing to the realisation of a mission. A “semi bottom-up” approach with non-prescriptive calls should give researchers a high degree of freedom. Fundamental research plays a key role and, and projects along the whole knowledge chain (all TRL) should be included. Inter-disciplinarity must be an integral part of project designs. Real involvement of end-users in project designs must be included.

5. A streamlined and simple Framework Programme

The next FP should be lean and simple, and the inclusion of missions should not complicate the landscape of programmes and instruments even further. New missions and existing “mission-like” initiatives should be merged, including FET flagships and JPis. In particular, there is a need for redefining the size, organisation and role of the EIT. The EIT should be integrated under the umbrella of the FP, and be institutionally linked to the EU’s research cooperation. With the introduction of missions, it should be given serious thought whether KICs continue to be the relevant frame for large-scale, thematic, cross-sectoral cooperation.

6. Political ownership with Member States

In order for research missions to be a success and contribute to realising political objectives, political ownership with Member States is key. Public consultations can play a role in promoting missions, but missions should be selected in the work programmes. Therefore, a strategic programming process should be established with the full involvement of Member States. Flexibility is important, and progress should be evaluated regularly with a view to discontinuing or adjusting missions in light of new strategic priorities or unforeseen developments.

In light of the above, the Danish government looks forward to working with Member States and the Commission on integrating a mission-oriented approach into the next Framework Programme to maximise its economic and societal impact.