

Enterprise and Business Committee, October 2015

Written evidence from Swansea University

Horizon 2020

1. An update on Swansea University's participation in the first calls under the Horizon 2020 calls.

The Horizon 2020 (H2020) programme is of strategic importance to Swansea University in continuing to grow its research capacity. To this end the Department of Research, Engagement and Innovation Services (REIS) at the University is supporting the Pro Vice-Chancellors in coordinating engagement on H2020 with Research Directors and academics to raise awareness of the new funding schemes and support researchers in making research applications, including:-

- High level scoping meetings and briefings – started Autumn 2013
- Research Director Meetings – Spring 2014
- College Research Committee briefings and programme updates – throughout 2014
- Researcher awareness raising via project team and one to one meetings - throughout 2014
- A range of expert workshops:-
 - January 2014 - Hyperion Ltd. - EU bid development consultants, workshop on How to Write a Competitive H2020 Application. Attended by academics and research administrators from all Colleges; researchers from across Wales; and representatives from industry, WHEB and the Welsh Government.
 - December 2014 – Prof Mike Blakemore University of Durham, Marie Sklodowska Curie (MSCA) expert evaluator, - training and bid evaluation workshops on MSCA & Erasmus+ funding schemes
 - March 2015 – UK Research Office (National Contact Point (NCP) for the European Research Council (ERC) and MSCA), training workshops on ERC & Marie Sklodowska Curie Actions
 - October 2015 - further Hyperion training and a bid evaluation workshop is scheduled via the Engineering NRN;
 - November 2015 – NCP led information day for Societal Challenge 6 (Economic and Social Sciences Research Council) to promote the 2016/17 work programmes for social sciences and humanities researchers.
- Grenoble Strategic Partnership - Collaborative links between Swansea and Grenoble academics are continuing to strengthen, with a number of Swansea academics using Score Cymru and an internal 'strategic partnership travel fund' to visit Grenoble to identify common links and shared research interests; make new connections; and enhance their research networks, with the aim of more collaborative research proposals under H2020.
- Emerging Strategic Partnerships – a number are under development and already include collaboration on H2020 proposals
- The University has a combination of dedicated expert staff complemented by external consultants and consideration is being given to enhance EU research development support.

SU H2020 Successes

To date Swansea has achieved 6 grant successes in the first round of H2020 funding, totalling **€2.14m**, - 3 grants as Coordinator and 3 as Beneficiary. This includes a prestigious MSCA Innovative Training Network, the first time Swansea has led an Innovative Training Networks project.

SU H2020 Success by College:-

College of Arts & Humanities	1 - coordinator
College of Engineering	3 - Beneficiary
College of Science	2 - coordinator

The total number of proposals submitted which included participation of Swansea University is 95 to date (H2020 Participant Portal data) and a large number of applications are still undergoing evaluation.

Practical feedback on the application process:

- Upgrades to the H2020 Participant Portal have made it easier to use and find background information.
- Having a centralised resource repository for each call has made applying more straightforward.
- The introduction of two year work programmes have been positively received, providing academics with a longer bid lead time, ability to tactically establish their collaborations/and networks and focus on developing the scientific case.
- Other useful features of the Participant Portal have also been welcomed including the ability to download Evaluation Summary Reports (ESR), however the wiping of unsuccessful proposals without a prior notification has received negative comments.
- Researcher comments suggest evaluation reports continue to be of variable quality. Some offer helpful and focused feedback which enable researchers to address areas of project weakness, whereas others are vague – too generalised and lacking the detail for researchers to identify the areas of concern to the evaluator.
- ESR reports receive the greatest criticism where the feedback suggest only limited understanding of the project area (leading to questions about the fit between the evaluators and the panel area); where key sections of the application appear to have been overlooked; or where the comments appear to be inconsistent,
- Interestingly many researchers report they score well on Excellence, which researchers commonly regard as the primary focus of the action. However achieving the required standard and appropriate activities in Impact is proving particularly challenging to address. Further feedback from the commission/ NCPs in this area would be appreciated.
- Many researchers have embraced the new multidisciplinary approach and are tactically and proactively using the Score Cymru travel fund to enhance their networks.

- In addition network opportunities created via the WHEB Grand Challenge groups is also enabling researchers to meet prospective new collaborators.

2. Views on the role of WEFO Horizon 2020 unit in supporting Welsh engagement in the new programme, and views on the other support mechanisms available in Wales including Score Cymru

The WEFO H2020 unit provides helpful policy and briefing information via email and circulars. Some of the communications duplicate correspondence from other areas of the EC, or have been received post deadlines/ events which have caused frustration amongst some academics.

At its inception the WEFO H2020 Unit suggested it would like to host training events to support sector upskilling, and encourage increased participation in H2020 – this remain outstanding.

Going forward a more targeted use of resources could be achieved if the remit of the WEFO H2020 Unit within the Welsh research sector could be clarified, to avoid duplication etc. WEFO H2020 Unit could undertake to:-

- Provide H2020 training opportunities
- Establish database:-
 - Welsh H2020 project successes – to share best practice
 - Welsh H2020 evaluators
- The Score Cymru initiative has provided useful funding to facilitate researcher and industrial partner travel to enhance networking, and establish future project collaborations. Swansea has received more than 15 travel awards, with at least 2 of these resulting in successful H2020 grant awards.
- Score Cymru’s bid development support has enabled to date 5 Swansea research teams to engage with EU experts, to develop and polish H2020 bids, which could be enhanced.
- Significant interest in both schemes has been expressed by Swansea researchers however the requirement for a 50% match funding contribution has limited engagement, as not all research teams have been able to identify a suitable match source.
- Going forward it would be helpful if WEFO could consider contributing a higher grant % for key H2020 calls/ project areas which are of strategic importance to the Welsh region.
- We value interaction with the National Contact Points, and welcome the H2020 Unit’s work in this area. To avoid duplication, examples are given below of interaction with the NCPs:

Overview of interaction with the National Contact Points:

- REIS is actively engaging with NCPs including UKRO, ESRC, MRC etc. through Commission hosted meetings, training workshops and one to one briefings and queries. This support is highly beneficial in providing call specific guidance and responses to researcher queries.
- UKRO continues to provide professional and proactive support and guidance for the ERC and MSCA actions. In 2014 & 15 they have led tailored training and advice workshops for Swansea researchers, as well hosting national training seminars. Researchers and research managers are able to directly contact UKRO staff with call specific queries and receive efficient, timely responses. Due to resource limitations however UKRO is unable to offer draft bid evaluation or scientific feedback support. Support of this kind for the ERC and MSCA actions would be highly effective and resource efficient in such a competitive area of the H2020 programme. Swansea would welcome EC consideration of extending the role of the ERC & MSCA NCPs in this area.
- Very useful scientific and policy feedback has been received from the Health and Energy and Food Security NCPs, who have been particularly helpful in offering initial evaluation feedback on application drafts, to confirm an appropriate fit between a project and a specific call and for EU general policy feedback.
- On 16th November Swansea will be hosting an NCP led (ESRC) information day – for Societal Challenge 6 , targeted to promote the new 2016/17 Work Programmes to the social science and humanities research community, on Europe in a Changing World.

3. Views on the impact that the Science for Wales Strategy has had on Welsh participation in Horizon 2020

The Science for Wales Strategy has provided a clear indication of priority research sectors for Wales, enabling Swansea researchers to target these key areas and channel resources effectively. In addition the Sêr Cymru chair and NRN initiatives alongside the WHEB groups have enabled Swansea to develop critical mass in Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing, and focus on building capacity in Health and Low Carbon.

These initiatives complement Swansea's Research and Innovation Strategy and the opening of the Bay Campus. This investment, supported by the European Investment Bank, EC, Regional and national government and industry, will be the spring board to both facilitate Swansea's increased participation in H2020 – particularly in Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing and aspirations to capitalise on H2020 grant capture.

Swansea is very keen to engage with the COFUND initiative, with our research managers having been actively involved in the bid development. A database of Swansea experts

has been developed. Information on the scheme has been circulated to research Directors and leading academics, and sources of institutional match funding identified.

Swansea will apply for a number of fellowships. A database of Swansea experts has been forwarded to the CSAW as potential fellowship supervisors, and Colleges and leading researchers have been encouraged to contact their international networks to identify prospective fellows with the potential to be future leading researchers, to initiate an application.

Internal training events to clarify the COFUND scheme and application process are planned once call guidance documentation is released from CSAW.

Sêr Cymru Chairs and National Research Networks: The Sêr Cymru chairs and the NRN initiatives have enabled universities to develop critical mass in the three focus areas.

The Engineering NRN is organising a Hyperion Bid Consultancy session for researchers from across Wales at the Bay Campus in October.

4. Views on the impact of the Welsh HE Brussels Office support to the participation of the sector in the programme, including the four thematic co-ordination groups it established in 2012

Support from WHEB continues to be invaluable, through their policy guidance and in the establishment of 4 Pan Wales H2020 Expert Groups, focusing on the Grand Challenge areas.

- Health
- Low Carbon & BioSciences
- Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing
- Digital Economy

The Expert groups in the first three areas have met regularly throughout 2014/15 to identify and target potential call opportunities. In addition, WHEB hosted visits to Brussels have enabled Swansea researchers to meet with MEPs, Commission representatives and Brussels Directorate General on their research area. Positive feedback from this activity can be seen in the incorporation of Swansea topic suggestions into the 2016/17 work programmes for low carbon energy and advanced manufacturing.

Swansea University is in the process of developing institutional strategic H2020 targets on which to focus efforts, coupled with support to staff who are at advanced stage of the process in order to e.g. prepare for an ERC interview.

WHEB is also engaging in researcher awareness raising, through hosting a H2020 introductory briefing in Brussels for Welsh Crucible researchers, attended by 2 researchers from Swansea.

5. Views on how Swansea University and Welsh HE more generally is working with Welsh businesses (and other businesses) to engage them in collaborative projects under Horizon 2020. The EU Funding Ambassadors in their session with the Committee on 23 September underlined the importance of specialist one-to-one support to businesses on engagement with Horizon 2020, arguing that this is currently not available in Wales. Do you agree with this view?

Generally Welsh Universities including Swansea employ dedicated business engagement staff both centrally and at college or project/research centre level who are identifying additional appropriate companies for collaborative research and engagement activities including where appropriate initial or longer term H2020 activities. These companies will be helped to understand and develop their role and experience in an H2020 project through being a partner, rather than initially leading a H2020 bid. The universities internal support network for H2020 would then, through the academic in the project, help to develop the company's H2020 bid and project experience. We do not provide direct support to companies for H2020 bids unless they are involved in the bid as above.

Via Swansea University, we do provide through the Enterprise Europe Network project, direct support to companies to understand and access H2020 funding and to find international research partners.

There is a need for clear and accessible one to one support for businesses developing H2020 bids in Wales at the early stages after awareness raising and initial guidance.

EEN do promote H2020 opportunities but we only have one H2020 specialist spread across the whole of Wales, so the reach and depth of the support we can offer is limited. EEN has a specific role to help companies to access EU funding and finance and our partnering is designed to specifically help find international partners on defined projects.

The focus of any additional support should not be on general awareness raising, but on in-depth support.

There are other support networks and organisations which are springing up in Wales e.g. Vision 2020.

Wales does not make enough use out of sharing the experiences of its evaluators, and we note that other countries engage more effectively with their evaluators.

6. Views on whether Wales – the Welsh Government and the Welsh HE sector including Swansea – is sufficiently ambitious with regard to how it is approaching Horizon 2020, particularly given Ireland has set a target of drawing down €1.25bn

from Horizon 2020 and has secured around €127m from the first calls under the new programme.

The H2020 programme is of strategic importance to Swansea University and a series of awareness raising events took place in 2014 to promote the programme. The department of Research, Engagement, and Innovation Services has engaged extensively with academics and research directors via group and one to one meetings, to encourage research collaborations; and to identify and target key H2020 funding opportunities. REIS has coordinated a number of H2020 workshops led by EU experts including Hyperion Bid Consultancy, on competitive bid writing, with further training and bid evaluation sessions planned for October 2015; Professor Mike Blakemore a MSCA expert evaluator and UKRO .

EC and NCP feedback confirm the value of Registering as an Expert Evaluator for H2020. Evaluators gain useful insight into the workings of funding schemes; enabling them to understand success criteria; have excellent opportunity to make useful network contact at Brussels hosted evaluation meetings; and receive financial reimbursement.

We have a Research and Innovation Strategy. Linked to this, there are particular activities linked to H2020 e.g. an H2020 Evaluators Strategy, together with focused College support to encourage researchers to register as EU Evaluators, which could significantly influence the University's H2020 success rates.

7. Synergies between EU Structural Funds and Horizon 2020: views on the measures being taken under the Structural Funds in Wales 2014-2020 to support research and innovation and impact of this on Welsh competitiveness in Horizon 2020

In the 2014-2020 EU Funding programmes, there will be much closer synergy between H2020 and the European Structural and Investment Funds. As the ESIF Research and Innovation projects now clearly aim to increase research income for Wales, there is a direct link between the programmes. It is our intention that any projects in receipt of ERDF support from WEFO will also be applying to Horizon 2020 in order to leverage the maximum benefits from both programmes.

Investments made via ERDF and the NRNs will be a springboard to facilitate Swansea's increased participation in H2020 and aspiration to enhance H2020 grant capture.

Erasmus+

- 1. How they are responding to the UK Outward Mobility Strategy for Students, and whether they have or plan to follow Swansea University's lead and introduce a specific target for outward mobility of their students (Cardiff target is 17% of all graduating students in 2017 to have undertaken outward mobility action)**

(The initial reference above to Swansea presumably should be Cardiff.)

Swansea University has a comprehensive strategy for outward student mobility which is fully aligned with the UK Outward Mobility Strategy, indeed Swansea University staff were involved with the development of the UK strategy. Swansea University does have targets for outward student mobility, however these are currently expressed in actual student numbers as opposed to a percentage of the student population (see HEFCW Fee Plan). The University has met and exceeded its targets every year for the last 3 years and is on track to do so again in 2015/16. Although the targets are currently set as actual student numbers, the University also measures the total number of mobilities undertaken by a particular year of entry cohort over the course of their whole degree. This can only be done retrospectively as different students will undertake mobility at different points in their programme. Using this method, it has been possible to see that of the 2008 entry cohort, 6.5% undertook a mobility experience during their degree, however by the time the 2011 entry cohort (i.e. those graduating in 2014 or 2015) had graduated, this had increased 13%. This figure will grow considerably over the next few years. We aim to provide all students with the opportunity to follow part of their course overseas.

Apart from the student mobility application, a number of Erasmus + applications have been submitted to the 2014/15 calls including

- Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree – College of Engineering, Sports Science
 - Strategic Partnerships x 4
 - Knowledge Alliances x 2
 - Sports Action, in conjunction with the Ospreys.
- 2. Whether they have seen any follow up to the following recommendations that the Committee made to the Welsh Government in the report from its EU Funding Opportunities inquiry, published in July 2014.**

No information currently available.

- 3. What contact Swansea University has had with the new EU Funding Ambassadors and the view of the University on the value this initiative provides to Welsh engagement with centrally-managed EU programme such as Erasmus+**

We have engaged with the EU Funding Ambassadors. Dr Hywel Ceri Jones visited Swansea University on Europe Day in 2015 to discuss collaborative opportunities, including those with Ireland. Our main contacts have been with Professor Graham Guilford (Research and Innovation) and Gaynor Griffiths (Poverty and Social care).