

Inquiry into Horizon 2020

Evidence from GeoLang Ltd

Dear Committee Members

In response to the call from the National Assembly for Wales to comment on the proposals for Horizon 2020 and the Science Strategy for Wales please find attached a document submitted to the WG's department for BETS in January of this year in relation to attracting research funds into Wales. Unfortunately, on this occasion we were not invited for further discussion of the proposals contained therein but the document may serve to elicit further discussion from your committee. The proposal was outlined to the EU Commission (DG Enterprise and Industry) and advisor's within UK's TSB with both fully supporting this self-sustainable concept.

General Response

It is my opinion that the proposals for Horizon 2020 are very much moving in the right direction for simplifying the process for access to research and innovation funding and the support of high quality research in Europe as a whole. In addition, the proposal to cut the lead time from application to project start from the current 350-500 days to 250 days is to be applauded. It remains to be seen as to whether this can be delivered.

Wales Specific Response

It is my belief that Wales can and should in the future do very much more to close the gap between the levels of funding seen in Scotland and those attracted to Wales during the previous FP7 programme. It is well known within EU and UK, as well as in Wales itself, that Wales is failing badly in this regard.

In order to attract the levels of funding required, I believe we must better facilitate HE and SMEs during the bid writing process. This requires proactive and dedicated teams of bid writers working at both grassroots and international levels. The document attached outlines a sustainable model that would proactively support HE and SME inclusion in Horizon 2020; although it must be said that my thoughts have moved on somewhat since writing this document.

It is with some regret that I find on this occasion that I do not have the time to write a full response to the call for comments. I would, however, make the following additional points:

1. The Minister for Education and Skills is right in his view that Wales needs to be conducting research of International import. However, Wales needs seed funding to support HE and SMEs in attracting research funds. We also do not need to create "super Universities" to do this. Sometimes small and agile is better than large and ungainly. As an example, the California Institute of Technology has just over two thousand students and yet has been ranked first in the 2011-2012 Times Higher Education worldwide rankings of universities as well as ranking first in physical science and engineering. What Welsh HE really need to do is to identify the scientific discipline(s) they are strongest in (or aim to be) that have the potential for international recognition within the scientific community. This will lead to the "Cambridge effect" in those regions by attracting industry to work with the Universities. Before Wales can do this we need to support bid writing in HEs and SMEs.

2. If we look at the HE establishments that are most successful in attracting research funds (Cardiff and Swansea) that support internationally renowned research there are a number of factors that need to be taken into consideration and these include:

- a. Favourable student/staff ratio
- b. Level of funding per student is much higher than average
- c. Internal bid writing teams are in place

3. Those HE establishments that are not as successful in attracting research funding have student/staff ratios of around 22 to 1 whereas those who are successful have student/staff ratios of around 15/1.

4. The level of investment in terms of time to create a bid and find the right partners is beyond a lot of HE establishments and certainly beyond the capacity of most SMEs. For Wales to be successful in attracting international research funds we need to change this.

5. The WG will argue that there are already funds in place for bid writing and the crucial partner overseas visits. These programmes remain unchanged and are frankly pretty inaccessible without an inordinate amount of work which rather defeats the object. It is these programmes along with the current EEN Wales structure that have failed Wales during the past 7 years. It is very much time for change. The current programmes have staff with a high level of knowledge and expertise and this should be retained and enhanced. Now is not the time to cut funding to EEN Wales type initiatives but rather to build better and more agile support services.

6. Given that only one in seven FP7 bids is actually good enough to be considered this further supports the establishment of dedicated bid writing teams. Evidence of these statistics has been provided in subsequent attachments.

7. Within the majority of universities in Wales there is no “driver” taking ownership of their bid writing processes and this contributes to Wales’ failing in this regard.

I believe Wales already has “Stars” in situ we just need to facilitate them with specific teams. The £100 million would be better spent bringing entrepreneurs into Universities and requiring each department within HE to identify at least one project per annum for spin-out and commercialisation and to develop at least one research and development funding application – these targets go hand in hand as the one facilitates the other. We need to set targets for our Universities and facilitate them in attaining these targets.

Infrastructure

In terms of rail electrification between Swansea and Cardiff, we should be looking rather at rail electrification between Cardiff and Pembroke Dock/Fishguard as a high speed link to Ireland, Cardiff and London to support the planned Haven Enterprise Zone and Wales’ most important port – Milford Haven. It currently takes 3 hours and 13 minutes to get to Cardiff from Pembroke Dock and it is not feasible to travel from Pembroke Dock to London returning on the same day as the 12 hour

journey, 6 hours of it on a very, noisy, uncomfortable slow coach with no electrical points or refreshments at a cost of sometimes £100 return is not very attractive. Also, it is not possible to purchase tickets online for collection at the station prior to travel as there is not a single station in Pembrokeshire that has a self-service ticket machine! Quite outrageous really! I cannot see the Haven Enterprise Zone being successful without some sort of faster train service to and from the County. This perhaps also explains partially why the Technium in Pembrokeshire failed. Wales could perhaps look to Sweden for examples of rail infrastructures in rural communities. Wales needs to remember that it is a whole country and not just a Cardiff based country.

There is also a need for better rail links between West Wales – Pembrokeshire/Ceredigion/Carmarthenshire, and North Wales. Currently all rail links from West Wales to North Wales go via England! Again it is almost impossible to go to North Wales from West Wales returning on the same day. Yet you can easily get from Bangor to London returning the same day. How Bangor University and Aberystwyth will work together is beyond me as travel is so difficult.

I hope you find my comments useful and I apologise for the rather hasty response. I hope in the future I may participate more fully and with a more deliberated response. Finally, it would perhaps foster more participation if the web site announcing the call had actual links to the documents in question – although I personally was furnished with links via an officer of the Assembly.

Yours sincerely

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