



Research Paper 52/10

March 2010

EUROPEAN UNION FRAMEWORK PROGRAMMES FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

This paper was commissioned by the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment to identify means of getting the most for Northern Ireland from the Framework Programme 7 and influencing and planning for the introduction of the next Framework Programme beginning in 2014.

Library Research Papers are compiled for the benefit of Members of The Assembly and their personal staff. Authors are available to discuss the contents of these papers with Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

The Framework Programme (FP) is the EU's main instrument for funding research and development. It will support five main activities: co-operation between industry and universities etc; frontier research; the number and calibre of researchers; research and innovation capacity in Member States; and Euratom. FP7 has been given a budget of 54 billion euro, around 7.7 billion euro per year. This reflects a 60% increase on FP6.

FP7 seeks to further galvanise efforts to reinforce the European research base so to strengthen the competitive position of the European Union in an ever more competitive global economy. The EU set a target in the Lisbon strategy for 2000-2010 of attaining research spending within the EU of 3% of GDP by 2010, which it has subsequently missed, but is likely to recommit itself to the EU2020 strategy for the next decade.

Statistics examining R&D expenditure as a percentage of regional GDP identified in the NI Taskforce Report from the EU Commission, shows that Northern Ireland's 0.56% was the third lowest of twelve UK regions. NI businesses would have needed to invest some £164 million more in R&D in 2005 to reach the UK average rate. NI also has considerably lower levels of spending on R&D as a percentage of GDP compared with the rest of the EU.

FP7 is already in its implementation stage and has issued several calls over its first 2 years. Since February, the Commission has been obtaining advice for further improving and adapting FP7 from an external and independent expert group, which will undertake an Interim Evaluation of FP7. The final report is expected in October 2010.

Although the first official documentation on FP8 is not expected until 2011, discussions and informal consultations at multiple levels have already begun. Thus, waiting until 2011 to engage may be too late to influence the direction of the agenda. FP8 will inevitably react to the perceived weaknesses uncovered in the FP7 interim report and also will seek to facilitate the realisation of the goals within the EU2020 strategy which is also being worked on currently by the Commission. Input into these processes, and discussions with those involved at various levels within the FP, could be a useful way of both potentially influencing EU policy, and getting a head start on FP8's direction for NI business interests.

On a practical level, work can be done to establish the key decision makers amongst Commission officials, including the evaluation teams, design and development, and project management. Exploratory meetings can be held with these individuals to develop procedural understanding of how the FP evaluations of proposals are made and to gain an appreciation for how best to work the mechanisms behind the new FP at an early stage.

CONTENTS

1	Background to Framework Programme 7	1
1.1	What is Framework Programme 7 (FP7)?	1
1.2	How does FP6 differ from FP7?	3
1.3	Funding within FP7	3
2	How FP7 is being Implemented So Far?	4
2.1	Implementation in Northern Ireland	4
2.2	Implementation Internationally	6
2.3	FP7 Interim Review	9
3.	Framework Programme 8	9
3.1	UK evidence gathering timetable	10
3.2	European Timetable (estimated)	11
4	Key Figures to Establish Contact With.	12
4.1	Framework Programme 7	12
4.2	Framework Programme 8	13

1 Background to Framework Programme 7

1.1 What is Framework Programme 7 (FP7)?

Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development (FP) are the EU's main source of support and funding for research. The current Programme will run from 2007 to 2013 with a total budget of just over €54 billion, including research on nuclear energy under Euratom.¹ The legislative basis for FP7² states:

"The overriding aim of the Seventh Framework Programme is to contribute to the Union becoming the world's leading research area. This requires the Framework Programme to be strongly focused on promoting and investing in world-class state-of-the-art research, based primarily upon the principle of excellence in research...The objectives...should be chosen with a view to building upon the achievements of the Sixth Framework Programme towards the creation of the European Research Area and carrying them further towards the development of a knowledge-based economy and society in Europe which will meet the goals of the Lisbon strategy in Community policies."

FP7 is open to a broad range of organisations (public and private) and individuals including university research groups, companies intending to innovate, small and medium-sized enterprises and researchers. Generally, FP7 is open to participants from any country, although the EU Member States have access to the broadest rights and funding, and participation procedures might vary for non-EU countries.

How Does FP7 Work?

FP7 is divided into the following key areas:

Co-operation

As the largest element of FP7 it represents two thirds of the overall budget. Funding under this section is for research activities involving collaboration between partners from different countries under ten themes:

- Health
- Food, agriculture and fisheries, biotechnology
- Information and communication technologies
- Nanosciences, nanotechnologies, materials and new production technologies
- Energy
- Environment
- Transport
- Socio-economic sciences and the humanities
- Space
- Security

This programme is viewed as 'crucial in distributing more widely the significant effects on restructuring research in the EU, and on pooling and leveraging resources, and will move Europe closer to a real "single market" for research.'³

¹ Council of the European Union, Press Release. 'Council approves EU research programmes for 2007-2013' http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/misc/92236.pdf

² Decision No 1982/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 concerning the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Community (2007-2013).

³ EU Commission Impact Assessment form on FP7 Main Report – p.9 http://ec.europa.eu/research/future/pdf/comm_sec_2005_0430_1_en.pdf

Ideas

The Ideas Programme supports 'frontier research' solely on the basis of scientific excellence. Projects are 'investigator driven' and implemented by individual teams. The Programme is aimed at reinforcing excellence, dynamism and creativity in European research and should allow researchers to identify new opportunities for research, rather than being led by politicians. Unlike the Co-operation Programme, there is no obligation for cross-border partnerships. The Ideas Programme is managed by the new European Research Council.

People

The People Programme provides support for researcher mobility and career development, both for researchers inside the European Union and internationally. The European Commission hopes to improve the career prospects of researchers in Europe, attract more high-quality researchers and give them incentives to build their careers in Europe. Key areas of the People Programme include:

- Initial training of researchers – Marie Curie Networks
- Industry-academia partnerships
- Co-funding of regional, national and international mobility programmes
- Intra-European fellowships
- International – outgoing and incoming fellowships, international co-operation schemes and reintegration grants
- Marie Curie Awards

Capacities

The Capacities Programme is intended to implement new research and innovation infrastructures to give researchers the tools to enable them to enhance the quality and competitiveness of European research. For example, it aims to:

- Optimise use and development of research infrastructures
- Reinforce the innovation capacities of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and their ability to benefit from research
- Promote and sustain development of regional groupings which depend on research
- Unlock research potential in the EU's outermost regions
- Bring science and society closer together
- Stimulate international co-operation

The Joint Research Centres (JRC)

Although the JRC receives support from the European Commission, the JRC is considered a separate legal entity which means that their offices are eligible to participate in FP7 on the same basis as other legal entities in European Member States. There are several JRC offices spread over Europe, each focusing on providing scientific and technical support for the development, implementation and monitoring of EU policies.⁴

Implementation of Funding Schemes

The research programmes are implemented through 'direct' or 'indirect' actions. The direct actions are research and development activities carried out by the European Commission in the institutes of the JRC. They are fully financed by the EU budget. Indirect actions are research projects carried out by research centres, universities or enterprises, including SMEs, with financial assistance (a grant) from the EU.

⁴ UK Research Office, Brussels 'Introduction to Framework Programme 7'
http://www.ukro.ac.uk/subscriber_services/fp7/index.htm

1.2 How does FP6 differ from FP7?

There are several areas in which FP7 has been adapted to reflect the experiences of FP6. FP7 lasts longer than FP6; increased from four to seven years. The overall budget has increased significantly (FP7: €50.5 billion / FP6: €17.5 billion). This represents an increase of 63% at current prices.⁵

FP7 has also seen the creation of new bodies such as the European Research Council; a funding body set up to support investigator-driven frontier research. Its main aim is to stimulate scientific excellence among researchers who are working or moving to work in Europe. This is viewed in Europe to have been an overwhelming success so far.

Joint Technology Initiatives (JTIs) are a further new innovation within FP7 whereby public-private partnerships can be set up at the European level in areas where industry-driven research and development can help boost competitiveness. They allow common research objectives to be pursued in a more efficient manner, utilising resources and researchers from across the EU.

Two financing instruments have also been established within this new programme. The first, the Guarantee Fund, is a mutual benefit instrument that replaces the concept of 'financial collective responsibility between participants' from FP6. It can be viewed as a kind of insurance contract by the participants in the research project to protect against financial losses that might be incurred. The introduction of the fund also allows the abolition of ex ante financial viability checks for the majority of participants, thereby helping to reduce the overall administrative burden on the research community.

The second instrument is the Risk Sharing Finance Facility (RSFF). This is a scheme to improve access to debt financing for private companies or public institutions promoting activities in the field of R&D, with additional funding capacity of up to 10 billion euro. RSFF is built on the principle of credit risk sharing between the EC and the European Investment Bank and extends the ability of the Bank to provide loans or guarantees with a low and sub-investment grade risk profile to companies who might not otherwise access credit.

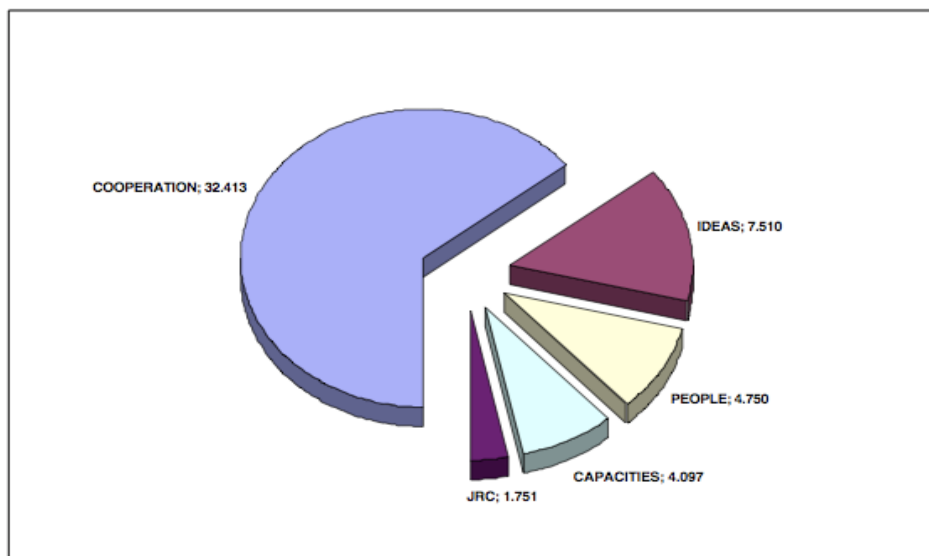
1.3 Funding within FP7

The basic principle of funding in FP7 is co-financing. In other words, the Commission does not buy research services but contributes a percentage of the overall costs by giving grants to projects. This can be up to 50% for RTD (Research and Technological Development) and Demonstration (although some organisations such as SMEs can get up to 75% of RTD costs) and a contribution towards overheads. The maximum reimbursement rates for a project depend on the funding scheme used, the legal status of the participants and the type of activity. There is a general rule however that a proposal should include at least three legal entities from three separate Member States.

- Cooperation – Collaborative Research in 10 priority areas: €32,413 million
- Ideas – European Research Council: €7,510 million
- People – Human Potential, Marie Curie Actions: €4,750 million
- Capacities: €4,097 million
- Joint Research Centre €1,751 million⁶

⁵ European Commission, FP7 in Brief: How to Get Involved in the EU 7th Framework Programme for Research. 2007. p.6

Figure 1: How the budget of FP7 split between programmes



Source: European Commission, Second FP7 Monitoring Report, 1 October 2009⁷

Applying for Funding

The European Commission publishes annual 'Work Programmes' which include the schedule of 'Calls for Proposal' to be published during the year. Each Call usually covers specific research areas. All Calls are announced in the EU's Official Journal and are published on the FP7 section of CORDIS, the website dedicated to EU supported research.

2 How FP7 is being Implemented So Far?

2.1 Implementation in Northern Ireland

Priorities for European Engagement

*The Priorities for European Engagement*⁸ was set by OFMdfM in response to the Barroso Task Force's Report which appraised NI's approaches to accessing European markets and funding. The task force identified key EU policy initiatives and programmes which could be mobilised in support of the region's economy and the Executive's response includes three actions related to FP7. DETI is the lead department in two of these.

The first action is to 'enhance the support for development of high quality proposals for NI projects to be funded under FP7'. To achieve this, Invest NI has appointed a Representative in Brussels to be based in the Office of the NI Executive who will liaise with the Commission. 'Moreover the Director-General in the Research Directorate-General has offered to accommodate that secondee in the initial stages, in order to help us best compete for available funding.'⁹ Invest NI has also developed a strategic roadmap of where N.I. is able to take a leadership position in its interface with FP7 based upon the findings of MATRIX, whilst also working with Enterprise Ireland to jointly promote uptake and increase the number of North-South collaborative projects.

⁷ Note: Euratom FP: €2.7 billion over 5 years not included in Figure 1 above.

⁸ Northern Ireland Executive (2008) Priorities for European Engagement: Action Plan 2008/09 http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/priorities_for_european_engagement- action_plan_2008-2009_3mb_-2.pdf

⁹ Evelyn Cummins, briefing to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding the Executive's response to the Barosso Report. 11/02/2009. http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/centre/2007mandate/moe/090211_barroso.htm

The second action being led by the Department is the promotion of regional research driven clusters. This is being implemented through the identification of existing clusters, their level of participation, their thematic focus and other potential networks of clusters in the same theme. This is developing in relation to the Department's strategic roadmap and the most recent calls for action from the Commission. This process is largely reactive in nature at the moment, whereby the Commission issues a call for action and DETI and Invest NI must work together to inform potential participants in that area, facilitate the application process where possible and aid the participants in identifying potential collaborative partners in other Member States. This poses a significant logistical challenge for SMEs in particular. Therefore the more networks and linkages which can be established in advance and developed, and the greater horizon scanning of Commission calls for action to give more time for NI participants to develop proposals, the better.

The third action within the Executive priorities relates to the development of high quality proposals for Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute projects to be funded under FP7. The lead department for this action is the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Figure 2: Funding received by NI participants through FP7 as of 1 November 2009:¹⁰

Organisation	FP7 Funding Secured	No. of Participants
Companies	€2,346,386	11
Universities	€13,002,483	42
Other* organisations*	€1,152,458	8
Total	€16,501,327	51

* For example; Government Departments and Agencies and Health and Social Care Trusts

Case Study 1: FACET

The four-year collaborative research project FACET, supported under the FP7 'Cooperation' programme involves the Northern Ireland Centre for Food and Health (NICHE) at the University of Ulster. The project is coordinated by University College Dublin and involves 17 other partners from 13 different countries spanning all 4 corners of the EU.

Project outline

The concept behind the FACET project is the creation of a food chemical exposure surveillance system, which covers representative regions of the EU. Current efforts to monitor exposure to food chemical intake tend to be orientated towards specific groups or chemicals. To date, there is no project which combines exposure estimates for several chemicals into one project across the EU. The general objectives of the project are:

The value for the University of taking part in this project is explained by the University of Ulster contact for the project, Dr Maeve Kerr as:

“Our participation in the FACET project will develop and deepen established links between NICHE and the various EU member states and organisations involved in the project, and will extend the University of Ulster's involvement in food chemical exposure assessment, which is a central tenet of the EU risk-based approach to food safety and consumer health and protection.”

¹⁰ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Request From Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Library Services on Funding Received From The Framework Programme 7. Received March 2010

Case Study 2:

Cherry Pipes Ltd. was the coordinator of the “Ultravisc” project, which has been funded via the FP7. The Ultravisc system will allow recycled polymers to be processed with a higher level of product quality and with greater efficiency than previously possible. The project involves 3 research providers: U.K materials research and technology institute, SIRRIS ASBL, Belgium and Queen’s University Belfast. The project also involves other SMEs across Europe including DKI Plast A.S, Plastitehase A.S, Polinter S.A and Total Sigma Measurements Ltd.

2.2 Implementation Internationally

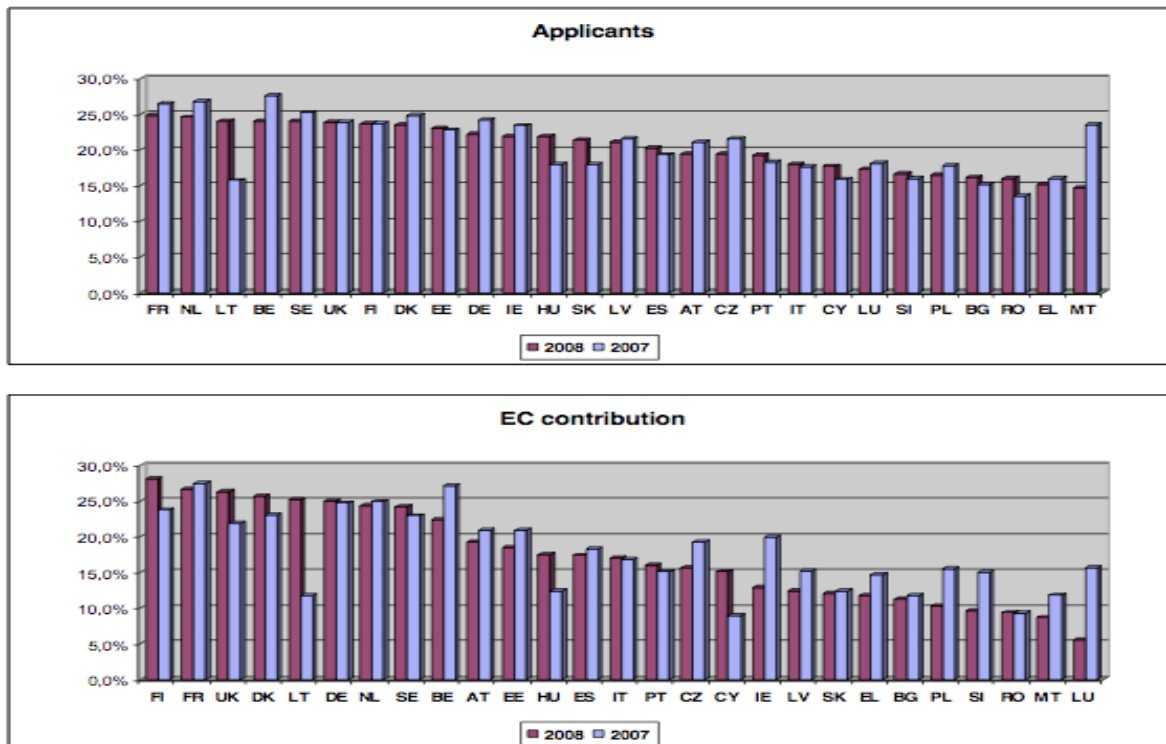
The Framework Programme by conception is a collaborative programme with global outreach open to all researchers and research organisations irrespective of their country of origin. During its first two years of implementation FP7 has attained unprecedented levels of international participation with proposals retained from as many as 136 countries from all continents.

Figure 3: The UK’s record in FP7 2007 & 2008

Year	Applicants Eligible Proposals	financial contribution to eligible proposals (euro)	Applicants Retained proposals	financial contribution Retained proposals (euro)	Applicants from country	financial contribution Applicants
2007	1,175	21,544,289	28	12,682,361	8%	2%

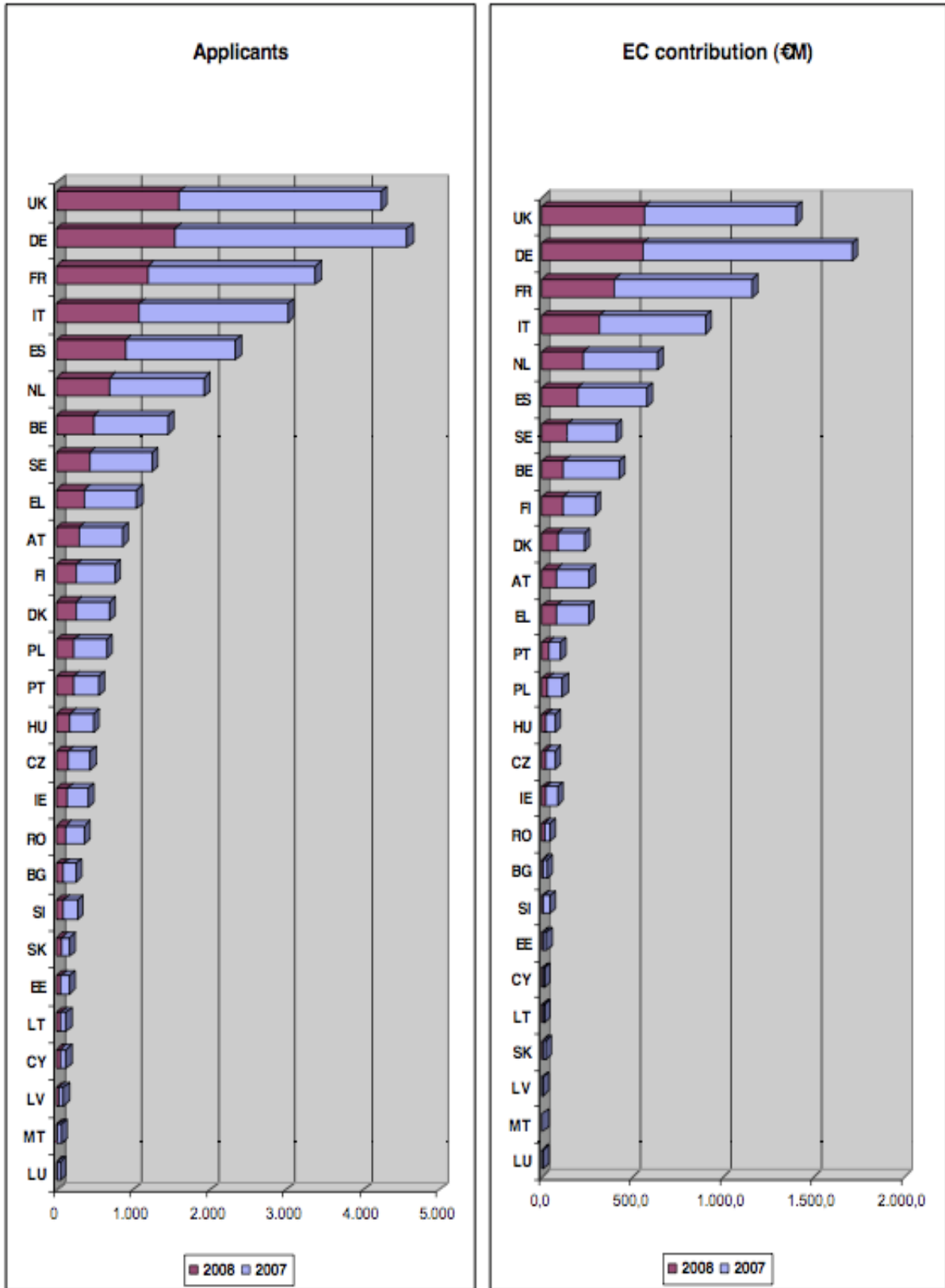
Source: European Commission, Second Monitoring Report 2008, released 1 October 2009

Figure 4: Success rates (%) of EU27 applicants and requested Community financial contribution for FP7 calls concluded in 2007 and 2008 by EU Members



Source: European Commission, Second FP7 Monitoring Report, 1 October 2009

Figure 5: Numbers of EU27 applicants and requested Community financial contribution (in million €) in retained proposals for FP7 calls concluded in 2007 and 2008 by EU member states



Source: European Commission, Second FP7 Monitoring Report, 1 October 2009

The overall funding streams which are allocated to UK legal entities from successful applications to Commission Calls can be dissected to analyse the sectors which are most successful within the UK and then placed in comparison with other large Member States from the EU15 group.

Figure 6: Sectoral Comparison of successful funding applications

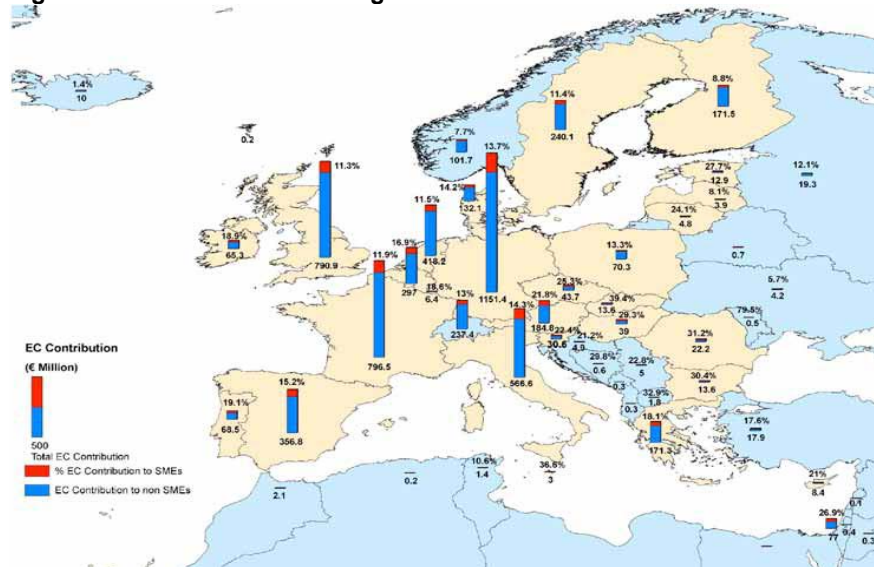
Participation Type	Secondary & Higher Education (%)	Private & Commercial (%)	Research Organisations (%)	Public Bodies (%)	Other (%)
UK	18.8	10.5	10.3	1.5	1.9
Germany	10.0	10.7	10.9	1.5	1.5
France	10.1	10.6	10.1	1.5	1.5
Average	10.5	10.5	10.8	1.5	1.5

Source: European Commission, FP7 grant agreements and participants database, released 1 November 2009

While UK Universities' participation is second to none, in a pattern similar to that of NI's, the percentage of funding being claimed by the private sector is lower than that in other large Member States. Encouraging company participation, particularly that of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), within the FP is a priority for the Commission which is required to pay special attention to the funding for SMEs under the Cooperation Programme. This follows the establishment of a target in the enabling decision requiring that 'at least 15% of the funding available under the 'Cooperation' part of the programme to go to SMEs.'¹¹

So far however, it is running at an under spend with 13.4% of the budget going to SMEs as of September 30th 2009. Therefore, in order to achieve 15% of the budget being allocated to SMEs at the end of the Cooperation programme, €3,990 million of the remaining budget (15.4%) would need to be allocated over the remaining period.

Figure 7: EC Contributions in signed Contributions across the EU



Source: European Commission, SME Participation in FP7 Report, Autumn 2009

Contributions should be considered in light of the stated intention that more money comes on line in later years of FP7¹², hence the first calls have been comparatively smaller in scale and

¹¹ European Commission, SME Participation in FP7 Report, Autumn 2009 http://ec.europa.eu/research/sme-techweb/pdf/fp7_report_autumn_2009.pdf

¹² Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council Report on Framework Programme 7 (December 2006) – Corporate Science Group http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Meetings/0612_eu_framework.pdf

scope. Thus encouraging SME participation now can reap significant dividends in the medium term as the budget available for this sector increases exponentially.

The Committee may wish to find out more information on linked programmes such as the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) which is a programme with a budget of €3.621 billion, from 2007-2013. One of the CIP objectives is to help SMEs access the FP7 through the leveraging of venture capital for innovative enterprises, thereby helping them bring their research results to the market.

2.3 FP7 Interim Review

FP7 is adapting to help the EU meet its goals of creating a low carbon, knowledge-based society and the current adverse economic context underlines its importance.

In order to obtain advice for further improving and the potential adaptation of FP7, the Commission will be seeking advice from an independent expert group, which will undertake an Interim Evaluation. The legal basis for FP7 stipulates that the evaluation should be completed by 2010 at the latest¹³.

This process may potentially address questions such as:

- How can the impact of FP7 and future FPs on shaping the European Research Area be improved?
- Are the novel measures (ERC, JTIs, Article 169, RSFF) effective in reaching their intended objectives?
- How can the impact and added value of collaborative research that cuts across scientific disciplines, industrial sectors and policy fields be further enhanced with a view to better addressing large societal challenges?
- Does FP7 play an adequate role in positioning Europe on the global map of science and technology?
- To what extent have simplification measures been effective? Will further steps create the desired results or do we need to consider radically new approaches?
- Can FP7 be adjusted to take into account FP6 Ex-Post Evaluation and Progress Report

This evaluation should highlight areas for potential changes of direction within FP7 and also inform the ongoing consultations which are taking place for FP8, by identifying areas which continue to stymie the effective realisation of the programmes' goals.

3. Framework Programme 8

Although the first official documentation on Framework Programme 8 is not expected until 2011, discussions and informal consultations at multiple levels have already begun. Thus, waiting until 2011 to engage may be too late to influence the direction of the agenda. FP8 will inevitably react to the perceived weaknesses uncovered in the FP7 interim report and also will

¹³ Seventh framework programme of the European Community for research and technological development including demonstration activities(FP7) -

http://cordis.europa.eu/search/index.cfm?fuseaction=prog.document&PG_RCN=7150618

seek to enable the EU2020 strategy. Thus input into these processes and discussions with those involved at various levels within the Framework programme; whether that be with political decision makers; directorate officials; funding committees; or regional research offices; they could be very valuable.

A new European Commission was confirmed by the European Parliament for the period of 10th February 2010 to 31st October 2014. Ms Maire Geoghegan-Quinn of Ireland, was appointed the Commissioner for Research and Innovation, informing the Parliament at her hearing that she was a "politician who is in charge of doing things, who wants results and who wants delivery... I won't be a mouse, I won't be quiet." The Commissioner is charged with improving 'coordination between EU and national/regional activities so that we can exploit the advantages of scale offered by the EU.'¹⁴

Recent European Commission documents, including the consultation document on the EU strategy for growth and jobs in the horizon of 2020, seem to be proposing a less territorial and a more sectoral approach to funding, with great emphasis on excellence in research and innovation; 'Knowledge is the engine for sustainable growth. In a fast changing world, what makes the difference is education, research, innovation and creativity.'¹⁵

Current discussions on the future FP suggest that it could go in various directions. First, it could focus purely on global challenges such as climate change, energy shortage, pandemics, ageing societies and security. This would lead to an increased importance of world-class universities networking in order to enhance the competitiveness of EU research, but may leave out less competitive universities. Second, some argue that the future FP should focus more on engagement of SMEs in the research agenda, given that they are key players in terms of growth and jobs in Europe, as well as promoting their role in the commercialisation of research.

3.1 UK evidence gathering timetable

June-August 2009	Review existing evidence (evaluation reports etc)
September 2009-January 2010	Informal consultations with stakeholders
March 2010	Delivery of Technopolis report on FP impacts in the UK
March 2010	Commission Communication on Simplification of the FP. This will report after an online consultation with Stakeholders which began in December 2009.
June 2010	Delivery of study report on impact indicators for FP8
Q3 2010	Public consultation on UK negotiating position

¹⁴ José Manuel Barroso's mission letters to Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, Commissioner Designate. November 2009 http://ec.europa.eu/commission_designate_2009-2014/mission_letters/index_en.htm

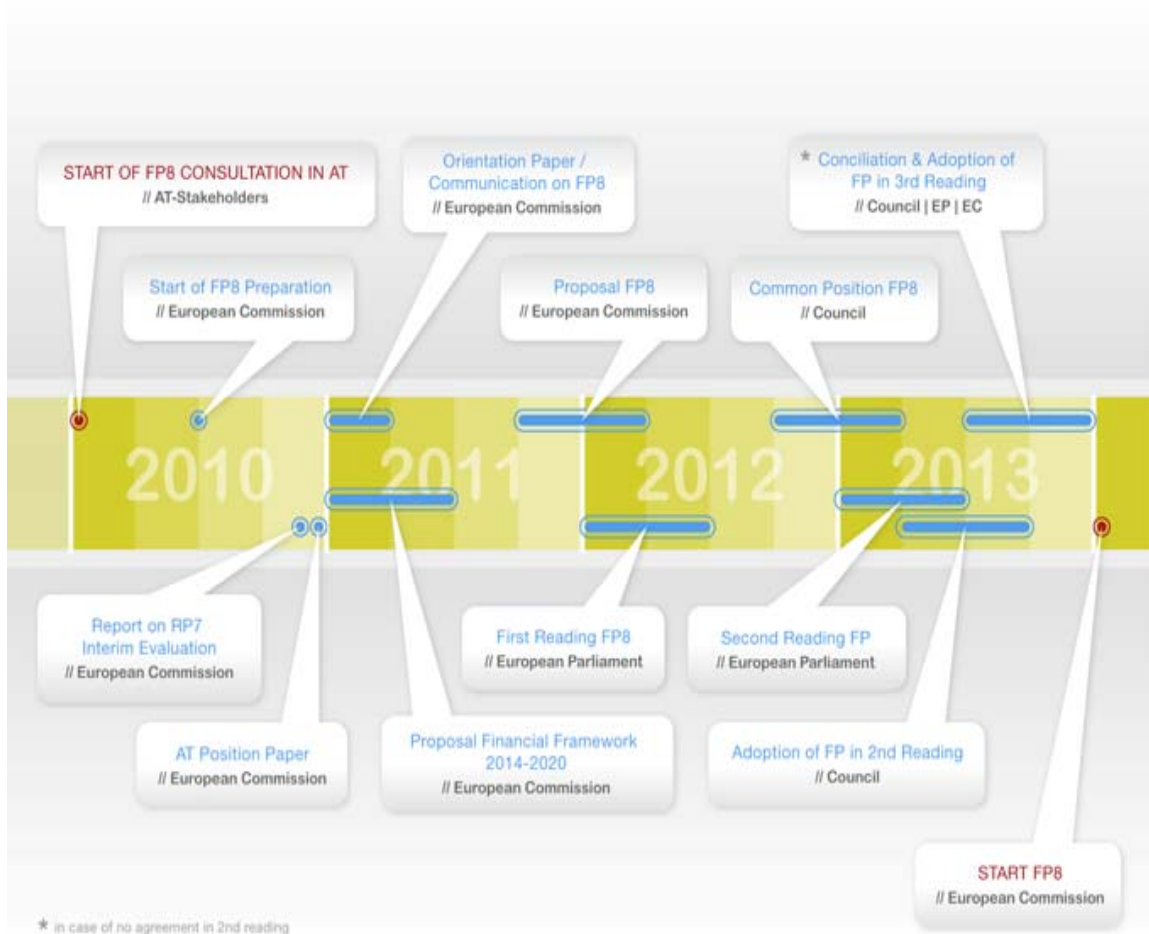
¹⁵ Council of EU Guidance on Future priorities for European Research, Dec 2009

December 2010	Submission of formal UK position to the Commission
----------------------	--

3.2 European Timetable (estimated)

June 2010	<p>The European Innovation Plan. This is mooted as a possible flagship plan¹⁶ to increase R&D funding to the levels of our international competitors. It will be a framework to boost Europe's innovation performance to support recovery from the economic downturn and longer term economic growth. It is anticipated Research and the FP will have an integral role.</p>
October 2010	<p>Commission Report on the Interim Evaluation. This has just begun work. It will focus on issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement of FP7 objectives • Impact on shaping the European Research Area and other policies • Role in positioning Europe on global science & technology map • Efficiency of novel measures (e.g. JTIs, article 169, RSFF etc) • Impact of cross-discipline collaborative research on societal challenges • Simplification • Progress in addressing issues highlighted in FP6 ex post evaluation <p>This will subsequently inform the negotiations regarding FP8 and the Member States position papers.</p>
Q1 2011	Commission Orientation Paper/ Communication on FP8
Q4 2011	Commission Proposal for FP8
Q1 2012	European Parliament First Reading
Q4 2012	Council Common Position
Q1 2013	European Parliament Second Reading
Q2 2013	Council Second Reading
Q3 2013	Conciliation and Adoption of FP8

¹⁶ Presentation of President Barroso to the informal European Council on Europe 2020 on 11th February 2010. http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/president/news/statements/pdf/20102010_2_en.pdf



Source: The Austrian Research Portal, <http://www.era.gv.at/space/11442/directory/15237.html>

4 Key Figures to Establish Contact With.

4.1 Framework Programme 7

As FP7 is already within the implementation stage, there is limited capacity for the Committee to influence its direction or outcomes. It should be noted that, under the FP, there are no fixed national or regional allocations. Funds are disbursed through competitive calls for proposals under the various individual programmes and actions in a given FP. This reflects the aim of encouraging excellence independently of geographical location. This is evidenced in the asymmetries between country success rates across Europe.

At this stage in the FP7 process the emphasis should be focused upon increasing awareness. This can mean awareness in the practical sense; among the European bodies of potential NI projects and the decision makers within the Research Directorate; or the UK representative on the relevant FP7 Programme Committee should a specific project be identified.

Further work could be done within established partners in Brussels such as the European Regions' Research and Innovation Network, the UK Research Office (UKRO) in Brussels and the Knowledge Transfer Network of any industry the Committee has particular interest in.

The Committee may want to pursue the question of investment through the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme for SMEs. The specific programme within this

framework is the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (EIP) which is managed by the Commission and assisted by a management committee made up of representatives from the Member States. As such, it may be useful for the Committee to contact these representatives to gain information on their forward work programme and advice as to how this mechanism might be further used by local SMEs.

4.2 Framework Programme 8

There are two particular areas in which the Committee may wish to be involved at this stage of the programme; the political and the practical levels.

While the official political decision making process regarding FP8 doesn't start until the third quarter of 2010, informal lobbying has already begun. In the UK, both the North East and South West of England have sought to influence the direction of the programme, even though as with previous FPs, an overarching UK final position will be determined at the national level.¹⁷ Therefore, in the political context, it seems appropriate that any attempts to gain influence at the European level are matched by efforts at the national level also. The national public consultation offers us a chance to do so later this year. Contact with the UK Permanent Representation in Brussels could also be advantageous in establishing emerging trends for FP8 and co-ordinating positions.

The new Commissioner for Research and Innovation, Maire Geoghegan-Quinn has been given an 'overarching'¹⁸ responsibility for cross-cutting policy on innovation. The development of FP8 falls under her remit which means she could potentially be a particularly good contact for the Committee to make. The new Commissioner¹⁹ has shown particular interest, in her hearing before the European Parliament, in simplifying the rules for SMEs to access the programme as 'one size doesn't fit all.'²⁰

Another option for lobbying in Brussels is the specific FP8 taskforce created by the European Region Research & Innovation Network. This taskforce is aiming to brief key Commission officials by mid 2010 with a regional plan that enhances the effectiveness of FP on a regional level. Therefore, establishing a link with this group presents an opportunity for Northern Ireland's case to be presented to the Commission from multiple parties. English regions have already actively engaged with this task force.

On the practical level, work can be done in advance to establish who the key decision makers are amongst Commission officials, including the evaluation teams, design and development, and project management. Exploratory meetings may be arranged to further increase understanding of the procedure of determining successful applications, while also gaining an appreciation of how to best to navigate the mechanisms behind the new FP at an early stage.

The establishment of the Northern Ireland Task Force is indicative of the 'sympathetic ear'²¹ Brussels has with regard to NI, and the Commission's willingness to 'work closely with the devolved administration in order to advise on how to take advantage of future opportunities.'²²

¹⁷ DTI, '7th Framework Programme for R&D, A Consultation Document' <http://www.bis.gov.uk/files/file18928.pdf>

¹⁸ European Parliament Press Release: 'Summary of hearing of Maire Geoghegan-Quinn - research, innovation and science' http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/008-67165-012-01-03-901-20100112IPR67164-12-01-2010-2010-false/default_en.htm

¹⁹ Ms Geoghegan-Quinn was formally appointed Commissioner for Research and Innovation on the 9 February 2010, following approval by the European Parliament and the European Council.

http://ec.europa.eu/news/eu_explained/100209_2_en.htm

²⁰ "I'm into Action" says Geoghegan-Quinn'

<http://bulletin.sciencebusiness.net/ebulletins/showissue.php3?page=/548/art/16452>

²¹ J. Morrice, Written Submission in Response to the COFMdFM Report on 'Consideration of European Issues.' p.

374

²² Communication From The Commission To The Council And To The European Parliament On The Report Of The Northern Ireland Task Force. p.3

This opens the door for the ETI Committee to engage with European actors regarding the Framework Programmes, which represent a nexus of the EU's and NI's strategic goals in developing a dynamic knowledge based economy.