Gordon House, 29 Gordon Square
London, WC1H 0PP
T: 020 7679 4994
E: info@sciencecampaign.org.uk
W: www.sciencecampaign.org.uk

CaSE
Campaign for Science and Engineering

Letters from the EU Party Leaders 2014

In the run-up to the 2014 European Elections, CaSE and Euroscience published the responses of the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats, UKIP, the Green Party, Plaid Cymru and the SNP, to our questions on their EU science and engineering policies covering research, skills, innovation and evidence-based policymaking.

The Green Party response from Keith Taylor MEP

How should the EU support the development of science and engineering skills?

Education is a competence of Member States but the EU can support the development of science and engineering skills by providing funding for research and innovation (such as through Horizon 2020 and the European Institute of Technology) and by fostering Member State collaboration and sharing of best practices.

How should the EU support research?

The EU should support research though policies and funding instruments. Achieving a European Research Area (ERA) is one of the policy objectives of the Union. However, the ERA remains fragmented, with too little European cooperation in several important areas of research (for instance health) while free movement of researchers is not yet a reality (no grant portability, obstacles in social and pension rights, no recognition of diplomas).

Initiatives to promote better coordination of Member States research programmes (so called 'Joint Programming Initiatives') have been launched with the support of the Commission. However, all too often, these attempts remain a formal exercise and do not contribute to a common European approach, to synergies of funding and interoperable programmes.

The EU should expand the scope of coordination of research agendas, better pool resources and improve the effectiveness of funding for important challenges facing Europe (health, environment, energy, climate change, food safety, etc.). The EU should therefore step up its cooperation and integration efforts in order to create a truly European Research Area. For this more commitment is also needed from the Member States.

The Union should also continue to support research though its funding programmes such as the Horizon 2020 programme.

Budget: In the adoption of Horizon 2020, the Greens had advocated a substantial increase in research and innovation funds (100bn€) within Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) negotiations, stressing the importance of research and innovation for re-launching the economy and for responding to the challenges of the 21st century. However, these ambitions were watered down by the Council in negotiations who preferred to preserve the most backward-oriented components of the EU budget, at the expense of future-oriented programmes. The envelope for Horizon 2020 which was finally agreed

on is 70bn€, about 10bn€ less than the original Commission proposal. Greens support revising this figure (to increase it) at the mid-term review.

Priorities and principles: the EU research programme should focus the bulk of its funds to support multidisciplinary projects, from basic research to applied research and innovation, aiming at meeting major societal challenges in particular climate change, resource and energy efficiency, health and well-being, healthy food and sustainable farming practices. It should foster in particular the emergence of bottom-up solutions driven by top-down policy objectives.

These public investments should result in the delivery of clear benefits for society, such as more sustainability, better quality of life, social advances, the creation of sharable knowledge and the creation of quality jobs in Europe. In addition, more efforts should be made to:

– Enable SMEs access to R&D&I funds, services and advice – Improve involvement of citizen, civil society organisation and end-users (eg. patients) both in setting the agenda and making science – Improve public return of public invested funds (such as through open access to research results, non-exclusive licensing practices)

At a national level, the Greens are committed to increasing public spending on R&D to at least 1% of GDP. We will ensure funding streams are long-term and ensure sufficient revenue streams are available for the maintenance and operation of all capital investments. We will separate subscriptions for international projects from budgets for research grants and pay those subscriptions directly. We support the Haldane principle that the Government may guide overall strategic direction, but research councils decide which projects are to be funded.

How should the EU support industry to invest in science and engineering?

The Europe 2020 strategy sets an objective to invest 3% of EU GDP in R&D (both public and private) of which the private sector should contribute to 2%, and public sector 1%. The situation is different in every Member States but on average today the EU is not reaching this target, with an overall 2% R&D investment (in 2011) of which 0.72% from the public sector. More effort is needed on both sides. Public sector investments should provide a better incentive for the private sector to invest in research. For instance, the EU should design its research and innovation funding programmes in a way that public funds leverage real private sector investments. Unfortunately today this is not the case: the funding model of Horizon 2020 proposed by the Commission and supported by the Council has the opposite effect. The single reimbursement rate of 100% of direct research costs for all participants in the Horizon 2020 programme (not just universities and researchers but also large industrial participants) reduces the leverage effect of the programme on private funds (the private sector does not need to invest in research if this is paid by public funds) and it will reduce the number of projects financed (the higher the reimbursement rate the smaller the number of project you can finance). Similarly, the establishment of Joint Undertakings under Horizon 2020 provides for in-cash contributions to private industry led research, which contributes mostly in-kind.

Industry is attracted to EU funding programmes mostly because of the knowledge it can reap and the networks it can create. There is no need to finance 100% of its research costs through those programmes. The EU should revise its funding mechanisms to ensure that they do not act as a disincentive for private investments.

The EU should provide better incentives to invest in innovation through:

– investing in its science base and higher education system to develop the skills and knowledge that can be attractive for the private sector. Avoiding brain drain and ensuring an increase in science and engineering graduates that are needed in the business sector should be a priority for public research policy – developing more demand side policies such as product standards, market regulation, innovative and pre-commercial procurement that will incite firms to innovate

- How should the EU support the use of science and engineering advice in policymaking?
Bridges between policy makers and the science community need to be strengthened in order to ensure that policy making is as evidence based as possible. The UK's Royal Society has an interesting scheme on pairing scientists and policy makers, and this should be emulated far and wide: https://royalsociety.org/training/pairing-scheme/

Although links between scientists and policy makers need to be strengthened, the also Greens believe that scientific advisors should be able to work in an environment of academic freedom, able to make recommendations free of political interference.