

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.

Liberal Democrat response from Fiona Hall MEP

Thank you for your letter inviting my party to outline our European policies on skills, research and innovation. Please be assured that Liberal Democrats agree with CaSE that science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) play a crucial role in driving economic prosperity in the UK. Liberal Democrats strongly believe that EU funding for research and innovation can greatly complement national efforts to support academia, industry and other organisations, especially given the high success rate of the UK in obtaining the EU funds. Liberal Democrats are therefore in favour of continuing the current EU research and innovation policy which operates primarily through funding programmes.

Liberal Democrat MEPs have been active in agreeing the new EU research framework for 2014-2020, Horizon 2020, which will see £60 billion invested into research and technology innovation. In the next term, we will work hard to ensure that UK universities and companies continue to be successful in obtaining European Union research funding by seizing the opportunities of this new programme. The new Horizon 2020 is structured around three blocks, two of which – strongly supported by Liberal Democrats during the negotiations – will lead to increased research, investment and development of skills in science and engineering. The first block ‘Excellence in the science base’ aims to reinforce the EU’s world-class excellence in science, particularly by strengthening the European Research Council that focuses on frontier research. The second block ‘Creating industrial leadership and competitive frameworks’ aims to support business research and innovation; its actions will cover increasing investment in enabling industrial technologies and supporting innovation in SMEs.

Since the launch of Horizon 2020 at the beginning of this year, a new innovation investment package has been agreed. This will devote around £7 billion of EU funds to public-private partnerships in areas such as innovative medicines, aeronautics, bio-based industries, fuel cells and hydrogen, and electronics. Liberal Democrat MEPs were closely involved in negotiating this package, which is expected to leverage around £9 billion from industry and a further £3 billion from national funding, with the UK participating actively in all of these partnerships. This package is a good example of EU policy that stimulates industry investment in science and engineering, which our party greatly supports.

Equally, we support the European Commission’s goal of increasing the contribution of European industry to the EU GDP from the current level of 15% to 20% by 2020, mainly by boosting such advanced manufacturing industries as sustainable technologies, ICT and high performance manufacturing. This offers a great opportunity to find new solutions to tackle climate change and to reinvigorate UK ‘green’ manufacturing, create jobs and strengthen the UK economy by decreasing our reliance on oil and ultimately save money for the consumer. Liberal Democrats in the next Parliament

will support policies and initiatives aimed at implementing this goal, in particular as regards promoting green technologies.

On the question of Scotland, our party believes that we are better off in the UK and in the EU. There are many uncertainties should Scotland vote to leave the UK, including whether or not STEM, for example, could still benefit from the EU research funding. The Liberal Democrats believe that at times of economic uncertainty, we should not be putting EU funding at risk by voting to leave the UK.

Liberal Democrat MEPs are key players in the European Parliament when it comes to championing research and innovation. If elected, we look forward to working with you closely to step up STEM on the agenda of the next European Parliament.