



## Open University<sup>1</sup> Submission (August 2013)

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills: Review of UK and EU balance of competences  
Call for evidence on research and development

---

### Introduction

The Open University's mission is to be 'open to people, places, methods and ideas' and since our foundation in 1969, research has been central to this mission. The University has a global reputation for the high quality of scholarship that underpins the learning resources used by almost 250,000 Open University students, as well as by millions of informal learners who access our free online and television content. Overall 87 per cent of all OU research was deemed 'internationally recognised' or better in the 2008 RAE.

We aim at the highest international standards of research across a broad base of subjects, while seeking to enable the wide access to knowledge and learning. We are an international university and have extensive partnerships across the globe with governments, other universities, NGOs and companies. European Commission research funding is a vital source of income for The Open University, making up on average 27% of our research income from 2010 to 2012.

### Impact on the national interest

1. *Where has EU action had a positive impact for the UK on research, technological development, innovation or space? What evidence is there for this? Has EU action encouraged national action in any areas?*

The Open University believes that, through provision of a framework for research and support for research infrastructures (using actions such as ERA-Net), and with innovation such as EU-led Future and Emerging Technology actions (including Graphene), the EU has made a fundamental difference to what is possible. EU strategy supporting development of research and innovation and the positioning of EU Member States as technological world leaders has been a vital part of ensuring our ability to stay at the forefront of some key, cutting edge technologies and stay ahead of development on a highly competitive world stage. Initiatives already supported by research funding and initiatives to support regional growth through structural funds have enabled research and innovation to drive economic growth and create jobs through applied research and collaboration between business and academics.

UK involvement in EU research puts us at the forefront, making us internationally competitive. EU mechanisms enable and encourage collaboration and give the UK access to international research partners. The Open University considers this kind of collaboration to be a vital ingredient for world-leading research.

---

<sup>1</sup> For further information about The Open University please contact Director Research, Scholarship and Quality, Drs. Astrid Wissenburg, on 01908 653684 or [astrid.wissenburg@open.ac.uk](mailto:astrid.wissenburg@open.ac.uk).

2. *Where has EU action had a negative impact for the UK in these fields? What evidence is there for this? Has EU action prevented potentially useful national action in any areas?*

The Open University does not have evidence to support the view that EU action has had a negative impact for the UK in these fields.

3. *How, and where, has UK engagement with partner countries or international bodies, both within and outside the EU, been helped or hindered by EU involvement?*

Collaboration in EU projects means strong partnerships develop between countries and between academic and industrial interests, both within and outside the EU. Projects involving collaboration provide visibility for UK expertise on an international platform. For The Open University, this is particularly so for research in science and space as well as ICT and emerging technologies.

The Open University undertakes many projects in close partnership with European partners and where engagement has been fostered with other international organisations through that involvement. A few current examples include:

- **LinkedUp** – A project which aims to push forward the exploitation of the vast amounts of open data available on the Web, in particular by educational institutions and organizations. <http://linkedup-project.eu/>
- **Creative Little Scientists** – A project that brings a timely contribution to a better understanding across Europe of how science and mathematics education in pre-school and early primary school can nurture creativity. <http://www.creative-little-scientists.eu/>
- **Materials Engineering** – World-leading research in this area by The Open University is underpinned by strong industrial research links with partners including Airbus, Rolls-Royce, British Energy, EDF, AREVA and TWI – facilitated by European research support and access to international laboratory facilities. <http://materials.open.ac.uk/>
- **Centre for Earth, Planetary, Space and Astronomical Research (CEPSAR)** – This Open University centre brings together world-class researchers to work on the origins of life, the exploration of our solar system and discovering of new worlds in other solar systems. A great deal of work in CEPSAR is supported by the European Space Agency. Meanwhile supported by the research framework FP7, projects such as **Europlanet** develop the infrastructure needed to give vital access to information and data for planetary science. Europlanet worked towards a Virtual Planetary Observatory providing European planetary scientists with a unique facility and allowing Europe to set the pace for decades to come, in an increasingly competitive international field. <http://www.europlanet-eu.org/>  
(CEPSAR: <http://www.open.ac.uk/science/main/research/centre-earth-planetary-space-and-astronomical-research-cepsar>)



4. *What benefits or difficulties has the objective of a European research area (ERA) delivered for the UK?*

It is our view that a framework for research across Europe to enable greater access to more integrated resources stands to offer very tangible benefits to research in the UK. Improved access to research infrastructures and support for skills and knowledge transfer across Europe are vital to the successful realisation of the benefits of UK research. It is also the

view of The Open University that the full potential benefits of an ERA have not yet been realised.

5. *How has the EU sought to coordinate the policy instruments at its disposal across different policy areas to create an enabling environment for researchers and innovators? How successful has this been?*

The Open University does not have a view of the coordination of policy instruments by the EU.

## **Future opportunities and challenges**

6. *What could the EU most helpfully do to promote scientific and technological progress and innovation (including in the space sector)?*
- *How could the EU use its existing competence differently to deliver more in your area?*
  - *How might a greater or lesser degree of EU competence deliver more in your area?*
  - *How could improvements to existing EU activities make them more effective and efficient?*

While the EU has a major role in providing support across a broad range of subjects, it focuses most strongly on technological progress and innovation. There is scope for the EU to further enhance support for scientific and technological progress by closer working with research councils in EU Member States. Improvements could be made in this way with more consistent research policy environments (e.g. around data and open access publications); more complementary focus on priority research areas (i.e. less duplication of funding); and better sharing of resources such as facilities and data.

The Open University also notes that the scope for societal challenges proposed under Horizon 2020 leaves little flexibility to adapt to themes that may yet emerge in years to come, particularly in the social sciences and humanities. Future as yet unknown research priorities should be catered for as well as known ones.

7. *Where might future EU level action be detrimental to your work in this area?*

The Open University does not have examples of EU actions that might be detrimental to its work in the future.

8. *Where might action at national rather than EU level be more appropriate / effective?*

The Open University does not have a view on activities which should be taken at national rather than EU level.

9. *How could EU and national policies and funding streams interact better?*

Action at national level and EU level is important to the success of UK research internationally. Rather than positing these as alternatives, it is the view of The Open University that national and EU support aligns very effectively and that this can create opportunities for further collaboration, since the aims of both the EU and UK research funding bodies will foster mutually beneficial projects. Sharing knowledge between national and EU level projects, right from planning stages, could create opportunities for improved research quality and the planning of projects which will more effectively address policy and research needs at both levels.

10. *What impact would any future enlargement of the EU have on this area of competence?*

The Open University does not have a view on EU enlargement and the impact this might have on competencies in research and development.

*11. Are there any other points you wish to make which are not captured above?*

The above points have been raised to argue the view that EU and UK research policies align well, benefiting both UK research and European research more widely. EU mechanisms and structures that support collaborative partnerships across Europe are important, bringing vital opportunities for UK research.

*The Open University  
August 2013*