

# IRISH UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION IUA POSITION PAPER ON DEVELOPMENT OF EU FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME 10 (FP10)



# Introduction

As the European Commission advances proposals for the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10), the Irish university sector, through its engagement with national partners, the European Universities Association (EUA), and Research & Innovation stakeholders across Europe, is strategically positioned to contribute to strengthening the design and effectiveness of this flagship programme.

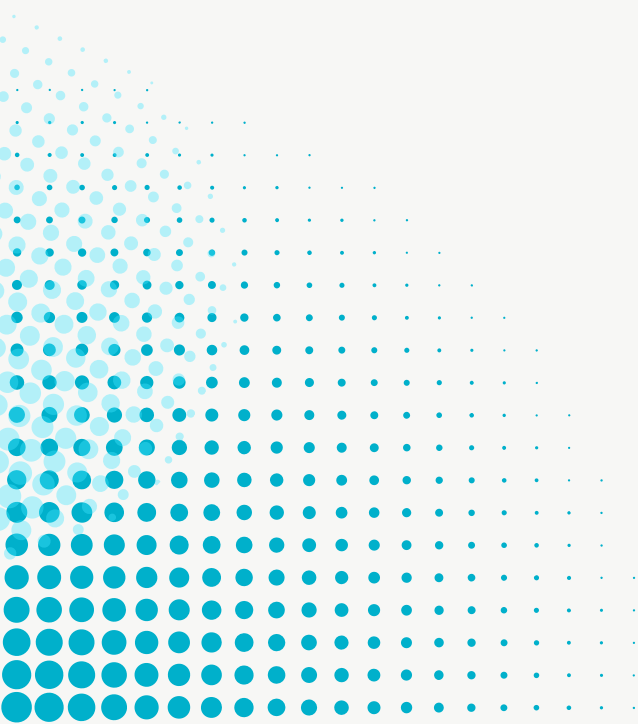
Horizon Europe has been central to Ireland's R&I success. It has enabled Irish researchers to compete internationally, strengthened institutional capability, and anchored Ireland within the European Research Area. FP10 must preserve what works while adapting to new geopolitical, technological and societal realities.

This paper presents the IUA position to support strategic engagement as FP10 progresses through the final stages of the EU legislative process.



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# Strategic Priorities for FP10

**Priority 1: A standalone, ambitious programme** – Obscuring the boundaries between research, industrial and defence funding instruments risks diminishing the clarity of purpose and effectiveness that have underpinned the Framework Programme's success.

**Priority 2: Protecting Research Excellence** – Research excellence must remain a clear, protected and consistently applied principle in FP10, underpinning the programme's capacity to deliver sustained long-term impact.

**Priority 3: Maintaining the Investigator-Driven Core (ERC & MSCA)** – The investigator-driven core must remain autonomous, robustly resourced and scientifically independent, underpinning FP10's capacity to deliver research excellence, attract global talent and generate long-term impact.

**Priority 4: Maintaining Balance Across the Research and Innovation Continuum** – Without balance across the research and innovation continuum, Europe risks weakening the foundations of its future competitiveness.

**Priority 5: Managing the FP10–European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) Relationship** – Preserving the distinction between FP10 and ECF is essential to safeguarding the Framework Programme's effectiveness, identity and long-term impact, while ensuring FP10's autonomy in programming and governance, and maintaining clearly ring-fenced budgets.

**Priority 6: Research Security, Dual-Use and the Civilian Character of FP10** – Ensuring a clear civilian focus, proportionate research security measures and appropriate separation of instruments will safeguard FP10's integrity, openness and long-term effectiveness.

**Priority 7: Reinforcing Horizontal Principles for World-Leading Research** – Embedding open science, inclusivity and disciplinary breadth across FP10 is essential to safeguarding research quality, legitimacy and global leadership.

**Priority 8: Strengthening Cohesion and Equitable Access Across FP10** – Safeguarding fair access to partnerships and preventing fragmentation is essential to maintaining FP10 as a genuinely European programme.

**Priority 9: Genuine Simplification and Administrative Efficiency** – Genuine simplification requires flexible, proportionate funding models that demonstrably reduce administrative burden, rather than default mechanisms that risk transferring complexity and financial risk to beneficiaries.

# Overarching Vision

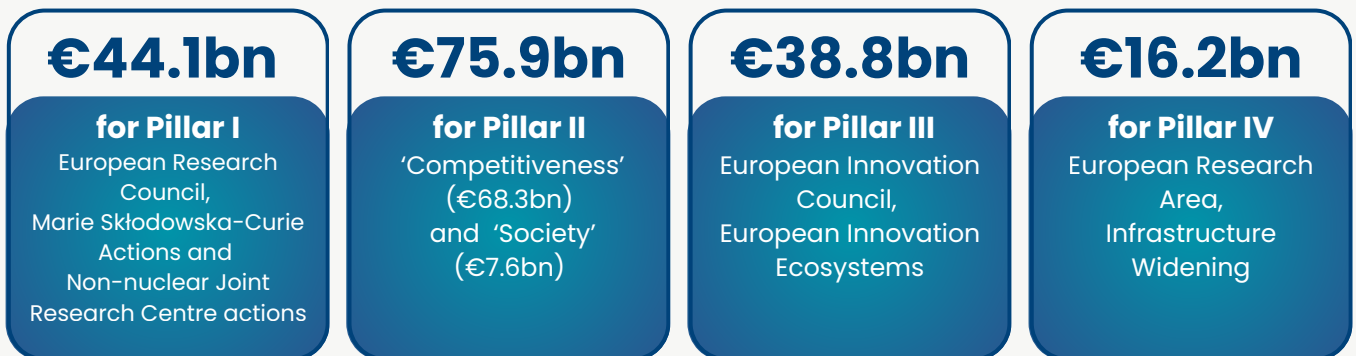
FP10 is part of a system of three autonomous but interconnected programmes -

- Framework Programme 10 (knowledge),
- European Competitiveness Fund (competitiveness),
- Successor to the European Defence Fund (defence).

The proposed structure of Framework Programme 10 is as follows:

- **Pillar I:** Excellent Science, including the ERC and MSCAs, with “science for EU policies” (non-nuclear actions of the Joint Research Centre), transferred from Pillar II, and with research infrastructures located elsewhere in the programme architecture.
- **Pillar II:** Competitiveness and Society: the “Competitiveness” section will be divided into the same four windows as the ECF; the “Society” section will be divided into “global societal challenges”, EU missions and New European Bauhaus.
- **Pillar III:** Innovation, including the EIC and innovation ecosystems, plus the knowledge triangle.
- **Pillar IV:** European Research Area, including ERA policies, research and technology infrastructures and widening participation.

## The Commission is proposing to allocate



**A clear minimum allocation for each of the core instruments (specifically the ERC and MSCA) should be established by the European Commission to prevent any depletion of funds resulting from annual political priorities.**

FP10 should preserve and strengthen Europe’s excellence-driven research ecosystem as the foundation of its long-term competitiveness, resilience and strategic autonomy. It must remain a research programme first and foremost, global in outlook, talent-attracting, curiosity-driven, and grounded in scientific excellence, while operating alongside, rather than being subsumed by, other EU instruments designed to support deployment, industrial scale-up and defence.

Within this role, FP10 should support a wide spectrum of research activity, from frontier and curiosity-driven research through to applied research and innovation. Across this breadth, early- and mid-stage research, where new ideas, skills and future capabilities emerge, must be explicitly protected, as these stages are essential to sustaining Europe’s innovation pipeline over the long term.

# Priority 1: A standalone, ambitious programme

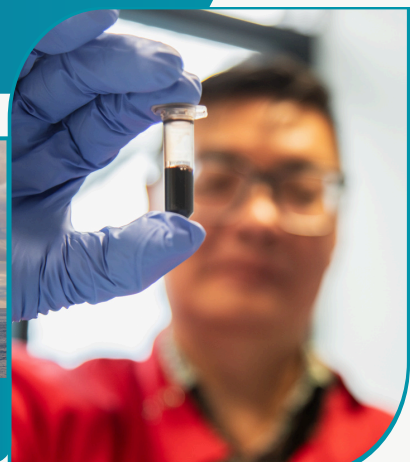
Ireland and Europe benefit strongly from a dedicated, autonomous framework programme with a clear identity and purpose. FP10 must remain excellence-driven, open and collaborative, with a clear focus on foundational research, frontier knowledge and capability-building that sustain Europe's long-term innovation pipeline, supported by stable, autonomous programme objectives.

While deployment, industrial uptake and defence-related objectives are important within the EU's wider policy landscape, they must not displace the core role of the Framework Programme in increasing knowledge and deepening understanding for societal benefit and enrichment.

Pillar II should prioritise open, collaborative, bottom-up challenge-based topics—particularly those addressing global challenges, the New European Bauhaus Facility, and the EU Missions – while maintaining a balanced mix of low- and high-TRL activities. Adequate resourcing is required across both Pillar II and Pillar IV, and FP10 should reinforce support for the European Research Area Act through strong programme-level measures. In this context, FP10 funding should remain focused exclusively on research and innovation activities. While the New European Bauhaus (NEB) is an important EU initiative, any implementation, demonstration or community-based elements that go beyond research and innovation should be supported through other appropriate EU programmes or instruments within the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), rather than through the core research budget.

Furthermore, while the proposed €175 billion budget is welcome, it should be seen as a minimum if Europe is serious about competitiveness, resilience and strategic autonomy.

**Obscuring the boundaries between research, industrial and defence funding instruments risks diminishing the clarity of purpose and effectiveness that have underpinned the Framework Programme's success.**



# Priority 2: Protecting Research Excellence

Research excellence means doing research that genuinely pushes knowledge forward and stands up to the highest international standards. In the EU Framework Programme, excellence is not simply a measure of how well research is conducted; it refers to the **creation of new knowledge, new insights and new understanding that extend the frontiers of a field** and address important questions for science, society and the economy.

In practical terms, excellent research is ambitious and original, goes beyond incremental improvement, and is designed and delivered with intellectual rigour. It generates new concepts, data or approaches that are internationally competitive and valued across borders and disciplines. Excellence is judged on:

- originality
- advancement of knowledge
- intellectual ambition

High-quality execution is necessary, but quality alone is not sufficient: **excellence is defined by the significance and originality of the knowledge being created.**

It is equally important to distinguish excellence from short-term, applied or near-market activity. Applied research, technology development, industry collaboration and activities at higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) play an important role in innovation systems, but they are not, in themselves, a definition of research excellence under the Framework Programme. Excellence-based funding must retain a clear focus on knowledge creation rather than on immediate deployment, scale-up or commercial outcomes.



Technological Readiness Levels (TRLs), as defined by the OECD and applied under Horizon Europe, should continue to guide the classification of technological research, product development and demonstration activities in FP10. TRLs should be applied in a flexible and proportionate manner, avoiding rigid or mechanistic cut-offs that could disadvantage science- and technology-focused universities whose research spans different stages of maturity. At the same time, FP10 grants must focus exclusively on research and innovation activities, with particular emphasis on the earliest, high-risk/high-reward stages of the R&I continuum. Grants should not be awarded for actions where activities extend beyond TRL 8, as the final stages prior to market introduction and deployment are more appropriately supported through other instruments, including the European Competitiveness Fund. Maintaining this clear boundary will ensure that FP10 resources are concentrated where public grant funding is most necessary and most impactful: advancing knowledge, de-risking breakthrough ideas and strengthening Europe's long-term research capacity.

Protecting research excellence matters because it is the starting point of the entire research and innovation pipeline. Europe's future technologies, industries, policies and societal solutions depend on sustained investment in frontier and curiosity-driven research that builds intellectual capability over time. If excellence is blurred or diluted, the long-term foundations of Europe's competitiveness, resilience and strategic autonomy are weakened.

**Research excellence must remain a clear, protected and consistently applied principle in FP10, underpinning the programme's capacity to deliver sustained long-term impact.**



# Priority 3: Maintaining the Investigator-Driven Core (ERC & MSCA)

Nowhere is the principle of research excellence more clearly and consistently realised than in the EU's investigator-driven funding instruments, the European Research Council (ERC) and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). The ERC as an excellence-based, investigator-driven programme focused on frontier science, while the MSCA is the flagship programme for capacity building and researcher development. The sustained success of the ERC and MSCA is fundamental to Europe's global leadership in research. Ireland's own performance underscores this: these programmes represent areas of particular strategic national strength and among Ireland's strongest-performing components of Horizon. These excellence-based, investigator-led schemes attract global talent, support early career researchers, and underpin institutional research capacity across the system. Their integrity, autonomy and scientific credibility must therefore be protected within FP10.

The IUA therefore supports:

## **a) Full preservation of the bottom-up, excellence-driven nature of the ERC and MSCA**

This includes the removal of any provisions that would:

- introduce directionality or thematic steering into MSCA
- weaken the autonomy or perceived independence of the ERC
- reduce the flexibility and scientific freedom that are essential to the success of these schemes

## **b) Reversal of proposed changes that undermine ERC governance**

This includes proposals to shorten the ERC President's term, modify working-time commitments, or impose additional corporate policy requirements that are inappropriate for an autonomous, excellence-driven scientific body.

## **c) Strengthening the scale and ambition of the investigator-driven core**

This includes:

- **maximising the share of FP10 funding allocated to Pillar I**, recognising the extraordinarily high number of proposals deemed fundable but not supported due to budget constraints, across both the ERC and MSCA, where additional investment would yield disproportionate returns in research excellence, talent attraction and long-term competitiveness.
- **sustained growth in ERC and MSCA funding** to consolidate Europe's leadership in high-risk, high-impact discovery science and global talent attraction.

**The investigator-driven core must remain autonomous, robustly resourced and scientifically independent, underpinning FP10's capacity to deliver research excellence, attract global talent and generate long-term impact.**



## Priority 4: Maintaining Balance Across the Research and Innovation Continuum

FP10 plays a distinct role within Europe's wider policy and funding landscape by sustaining the knowledge base and talent pipeline that feeds future innovation. While applied research and innovation are legitimate and valuable components of the programme, FP10 must retain a clear focus on advancing research and innovation activities rather than shifting primarily toward deployment, scale-up or immediate market outcomes. Within Pillar III, the European Innovation Council remains open to all types of innovators, including universities and research organisations, and preserves its bottom-up, excellence-driven character, with synergies to other instruments limited to coordination rather than overlapping research and innovation funding.

Maintaining balance across the research and innovation continuum is therefore essential. Early- and mid-stage research, where new ideas are generated and intellectual risk is highest, must be explicitly protected, particularly in the context of growing pressures to prioritise near-market activities. Without deliberate protection, these stages are at risk of being crowded out despite being the primary source of new ideas, skills and future industries.

**Without balance across the research and innovation continuum, Europe risks weakening the foundations of its future competitiveness.**

# Priority 5: Managing the FP10– European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) Relationship

FP10 and the proposed European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) serve distinct but complementary roles within Europe’s research and innovation architecture. While the objectives of strengthening competitiveness and strategic autonomy are understood and shared, clarity of purpose and separation of function between the two instruments is essential.

FP10 contributes to competitiveness primarily by generating knowledge, talent and capability over time. The ECF, by contrast, is designed to support deployment, scale-up and industrial uptake. Maintaining this functional distinction is critical. Integrating deployment-led or industrial logic too deeply into FP10 would risk crowding out early-stage research, privileging short-term outputs and distorting balance across the innovation pipeline. The ECF should therefore complement FP10 by deploying and scaling innovations that FP10 helps generate, rather than reshaping FP10’s objectives, instruments or funding logic.

A continuing challenge is the limited clarity surrounding the proposed competitiveness coordination tool between FP10 and the ECF, in particular with respect to Pillar II, including uncertainty regarding its governance and operational parameters. Establishing clear steering and governance arrangements will be essential to ensure that complementarity is achieved without compromising the integrity or autonomy of the Framework Programme.



Within this context, explicit guardrails should be established to clarify how Pillars I and II interface with Pillar III (EIC/EIT) and the ECF, ensuring that industrial-only priorities do not dominate and that social sciences and humanities (SSH) integration, gender mainstreaming, impact pathways and the university voice remain protected. FP10 must continue to support a broad spectrum of research activity, from frontier and curiosity-driven research through to applied research and innovation **addressing global societal challenges.**

To reinforce this balance, the establishment of a Strategic Stakeholders Board for Pillar II, composed of experts from universities and research organisations, should be considered. Such a mechanism would help ensure that collaborative research and innovation activities are informed by scientific expertise rather than shaped predominantly by industrial or short-term economic priorities. Regular coordination with the proposed ECF boards would further support coherence between industrial and research and innovation policy.

Further attention is required regarding the distribution of funding across the Pillars, particularly within Pillar II ('Competitiveness and Society'), where the allocation for the Society component (€7 billion) remains comparatively low relative to the Competitiveness component (€68 billion). Ensuring adequate support for societal research – covering areas such as disinformation, democracy, migration, integration and social cohesion – is essential to maintaining balance and addressing Europe's wider societal challenges.

**Preserving the distinction between FP10 and ECF is essential to safeguarding the Framework Programme's effectiveness, identity and long-term impact, while ensuring FP10's autonomy in programming and governance and maintaining clearly ring-fenced budgets.**





## Priority 6: Research Security, Dual-Use and the Civilian Character of FP10

FP10 must remain clearly civilian in focus, with meaningful ring-fencing from defence-specific instruments. Ireland recognises the increasing prominence of security, resilience and defence-related considerations in EU research policy, and there is scope for constructive engagement through a dual-use and civilian security lens, particularly in areas such as cyber security, critical infrastructure protection, health security, energy systems, climate adaptation and crisis preparedness.

Approaches to research security, export controls and dual-use must be proportionate, risk-based and aligned with Europe's interest in openness, collaboration and international connectivity. Overly restrictive measures risk undermining participation, partnerships and talent attraction, all core strengths of Europe's research system.

A clear distinction should therefore be maintained between research conducted explicitly for defence purposes, where the intended endpoint is a defence application, and civilian research that may have dual-use potential. In this context, it would be appropriate for defence-oriented research instruments to be situated within the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) or the European Defence Fund (EDF), rather than within FP10, ensuring that FP10 maintains its civilian focus while allowing defence-specific activities to be managed through the relevant policy windows.

**Ensuring a clear civilian focus, proportionate research security measures and appropriate separation of instruments will safeguard FP10's integrity, openness and long-term effectiveness.**

# Priority 7: Reinforcing Horizontal Principles for World-Leading Research

FP10 should continue to reinforce the horizontal principles that underpin world-leading research and innovation. These include open science and open access, interdisciplinarity (including the social sciences, humanities and the arts), gender equality, diversity and inclusion (to include age, disability, race/ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation), international collaboration, and co-creation with society and stakeholders.

These principles are not peripheral; they are central to research quality, impact and legitimacy, and to Europe's ability to attract talent and collaborate globally.

Support for genuine disciplinary breadth must remain a visible and operational feature of the programme. Greater attention to the inclusion of the social sciences and humanities (SSH) is needed within the Framework Programme, particularly through meaningful and structured integration of SSH (including Arts) across the policy windows shared with the European Competitiveness Fund, rather than treating SSH solely as a horizontal add-on. SSH research plays a critical role in enriching citizens' understanding of the world, addressing societal challenges such as misinformation, social cohesion and inclusion, and underpinning key economic sectors including arts, culture, heritage and tourism.

**Embedding open science, inclusivity and disciplinary breadth across FP10 is essential to safeguarding research quality, legitimacy and global leadership.**

# Priority 8: Strengthening Cohesion and Equitable Access Across FP10

FP10 must operate as a genuinely European programme, ensuring equitable participation and avoiding structural fragmentation across Member States.

Equitable access to Joint Initiatives and Partnerships must therefore be safeguarded. Where participation depends on national co-funding decisions, EU-managed access tracks and an “orphan-country” safety mechanism – such as a pan-EU top-up envelope and grant portability – should be introduced to ensure that high-quality teams can participate even when national agencies’ priorities, scope or budgets do not align. Such measures would help prevent country-specific bottlenecks, protect knowledge development, and reduce fragmentation within the European Research Area.

In parallel, European University Alliances play an important integrative role across the research and innovation landscape. They demonstrate how structured collaboration can leverage synergies across EU funding instruments and reinforce programme-level coherence. Maintaining and developing a dedicated funding mechanism within FP10 would support the continuity and long-term sustainability of this work.

Together, these measures would strengthen cohesion, fairness and long-term system integration across FP10, reinforcing its role as a genuinely European programme.

**Safeguarding fair access to partnerships and preventing fragmentation is essential to maintaining FP10 as a genuinely European programme.**

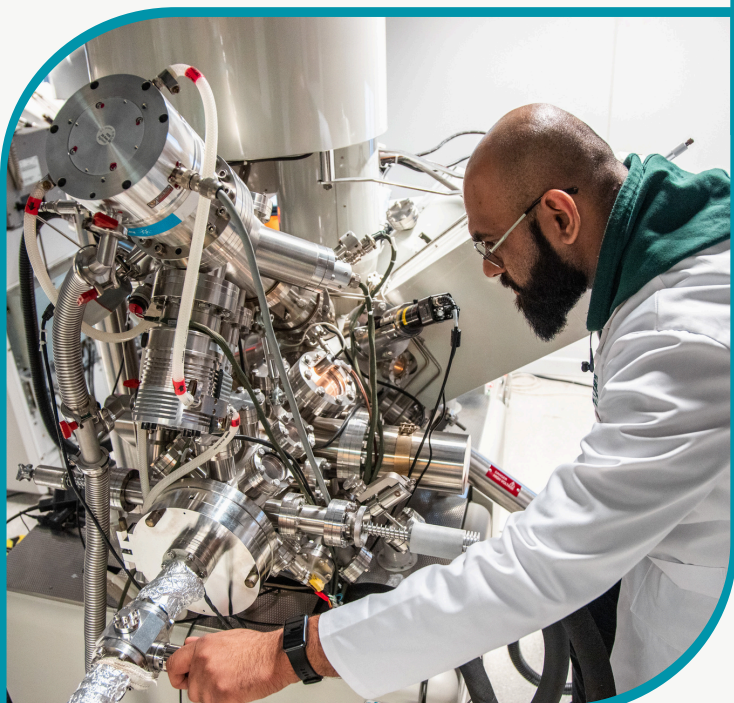


# Priority 9: Genuine Simplification and Administrative Efficiency

FP10 can only deliver on its ambitions if beneficiaries—particularly higher-education institutions—are supported by funding models that reduce, rather than increase, administrative burden. Genuine simplification requires flexibility in funding mechanisms and a clear avoidance of overly prescriptive or inappropriate models. Lump-sum funding and rigid personnel unit-cost approaches, while suitable for certain types of action, can in practice increase complexity for large collaborative projects, undermining the overall objective of streamlining participation.

The choice of funding forms should therefore be adapted to the specific nature and objectives of each action, ensuring accessibility, efficiency, and the space for innovative ideas to develop without unnecessary procedural constraints. FP10 should prioritise measures that create a proportionate, predictable and user-friendly administrative environment, thereby enabling researchers and institutions to focus on high-quality research and innovation rather than compliance-driven workload.

**Genuine simplification requires flexible, proportionate funding models that demonstrably reduce administrative burden, rather than default mechanisms that risk transferring complexity and financial risk to beneficiaries.**





# Conclusion

**FP10 must remain a world-leading research programme grounded in excellence, openness, and scientific independence**, while maintaining a clearly distinguishable yet complementary relationship with Europe's emerging competitiveness and defence agendas. This requires clarity and continuity of purpose across successive Framework Programmes, ensuring long-term stability for researchers, institutions and international partners.

Its success depends on preserving the conditions that enable long-term knowledge creation: stable objectives, investigator-driven funding, balanced support across the research continuum, and proportionate approaches to security that protect openness and international collaboration.

As Europe defines the next phase of its research and innovation policy, clarity of purpose will be essential. A strong, autonomous FP10 is not in tension with Europe's competitiveness and resilience goals; it is a precondition for achieving them sustainably over time.

Through its research-intensive university members, the IUA is well placed to contribute evidence, expertise and system-level insight to these discussions as negotiations progress, including during Ireland's forthcoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union.