
Simplification in the 7th Framework Programme

An Institute of Physics response to a
European Commission working document

A full list of the Institute's responses and
submissions to consultations can be found
at <http://policy.iop.org/Policy/public.html>

26 August 2005

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Institute *of* **Physics**

Dear Sir/Madam

Simplification in the 7th Framework Programme

The Institute of Physics is a leading international professional body and learned society, with 35,000 members, which promotes the advancement and dissemination of a knowledge of and education in the science of physics, pure and applied.

The Institute welcomes the opportunity to respond to the European Commission's (EC) working document on simplification in the 7th Framework Programme (FP7).

Overall, the wish to simplify and introduce flexibility into FP7 is welcome and the changes are positive (although many of them appear to be aimed at helping the EC rather than researchers). It is pleasing to note, in particular, measures to simplify the project proposal process. A significant barrier to many excellent UK academics applying for EU funds has been the complexity of the process – they are deterred by the bureaucracy, by the criteria for assessment, and by the lack of transparency and feedback. Previous Frameworks acquired a well-deserved reputation for over-complexity at the bid stage; a mountain of paperwork was generated for each proposal, much of which was then repeated at the contract negotiation stage. The simplified 'A' forms for FP6 were a welcome development, allowing a more straightforward application procedure.

It is particularly good to see phrases like "avoid inappropriate micro-management" in the working document. In addition, (i) the replacement of pre-defined "instruments" with flexible "funding schemes" is sensible. But the EC must avoid a multiplicity of different rules for different actions. There should be as much consistency as possible between the rules of one action and those of another [section 2.1]; and (ii) improved and simplified communications (particularly the many documents that specify a call) – are much needed and long overdue [section 2.2].

In addition to the guidelines in the working document, the Institute suggests that the following principles should also be considered:

- the effort needed to submit a proposal should be related to the amount of funding involved. In particular, smaller proposals (e.g., Networks rather than full-scale projects) should require substantially less paperwork;

- the sizes of projects sought in calls for proposals should be sensible, so that levels of paperwork are not excessive for smaller proposals; and
- the total costs to proposers (and not just EU overhead staff) should be less than some small percentage of the total funds committed.

However, the biggest omission from the working document, is an appreciation that the full economic costs of EU projects are nowhere near adequately covered by the (usually) 20% overhead rate (it appears that the basis on which indirect costs will be claimed will change under FP7, but details are not provided). To put it simply, if the EC want FP7 to be taken seriously they must pay a realistic overhead.

If you need any further information on the points raised, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Tajinder Panesor MInstP
Policy Officer

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**The Institute of Physics
76 Portland Place
London W1B 1NT**

**Tel: +44 (0) 20 7470 4800
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7470 4848
Email: physics@iop.org
Website: <http://www.iop.org>
Registered Charity No. 293851**