
Written Ministerial Statement

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Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Framework 7: EU Programme for Research and Innovation

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Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The recently published Northern Ireland Economic Strategy places Innovation, Research and Development as its top priority. Innovation is central to rebalancing Northern Ireland's economy into one which is export led and knowledge based.

Today I would like to bring to Members attention the forthcoming opportunities from the EU Seventh Framework Programme (FP7).

Increased engagement with Europe is central to Northern Ireland's economic growth. The European Commission is now placing a greater emphasis on the commercialisation of research, innovation activities and improving the competitiveness of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SME's). This fully aligns with the Executives economic priorities. Our Economic Strategy, in line with Europe's emphasis on Smart Specialisation, recognises the importance of targeting resources and research on key niche areas where we can compete on an EU and global level.

On the 7th June the European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn accepted my invitation to visit Northern Ireland. On her visit she undertook a number of engagements. She was keynote speaker at a FP7 conference organised by Intertradelreland and the NI European Commission office entitled "Collaborate to Innovate" and she met with the Executive

Sub-Committee on the Economy as well as the First and Deputy First Ministers. She continually stressed the importance of European competitive funding opportunities which exist for Research and Innovation under FP7. She made particular reference to the implications of the forthcoming July call which is the final and biggest call for Framework Programme Seven (FP7). Nearly €9 billion will be made available for research and innovation across Europe as an investment in competitiveness and Europe's prospects for growth and jobs.

I would like to outline to Members the relevance of the July funding call from FP7 and its importance for Northern Ireland's prospects for future growth and jobs.

Northern Ireland needs to target and prioritise research to focus on key markets which have the highest possible long term economic and societal impact. FP7 provides an important opportunity to do this.

When it was launched, FP7 was the largest research funding programme in the world with a budget of over €50 billion for the term 2007-2013. It is important to note that it is a competitive programme with average success rates of 20%. Unlike structural funds, Member States are not allocated any specific budget. To secure funding, applicants must collaborate across member states, demonstrate excellence in their field as well as a commitment to Research, Development and Innovation.

Collaboration is vital to build international competitiveness and building a knowledge based economy. It makes sense for a small region such as Northern Ireland to share knowledge and expertise and that is why I am working closely with my Ministerial Colleagues to support business and academic research collaborations across regional and national boundaries.

With support from the Executive and our Northern Ireland businesses, academia and research organisations, recent data from the European Commission shows we will have secured over €43.8 million from FP7 by the end of February 2012. That is €43.8 million Euro of additional funding coming into Northern Ireland.

The July call for projects will cover a range of themes from Health to ICT to Energy to Transport and will have a total budget of nearly €9 billion. I have attached in Appendix A the anticipated breakdown of the key themes in the July call.

It is vitally important that we seize this opportunity to take advantage of our research excellence and continue to focus on this July call for FP7 funding.

To support applications for FP7 funding my Department has been working with other Departments and stakeholders to enhance the level of support that companies and research organisations can avail of in the forthcoming calls.

Indeed both I, Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn and Lucinda Creighton, Minister of State for European Affairs in the Republic of Ireland spoke at the “Collaborate to Innovate” conference, the specific theme of which was the opportunities for SME’s in the forthcoming July Call.

As part of this, Invest NI and Intertradelreland have been involved in a number of awareness raising events to alert organisations on the importance of these funding opportunities

Invest NI has actively supported the participation of researchers in Framework Programmes for a number of years through its Collaborative R&D Support Service and the Enterprise Europe Network. An independent review of Scotland Europa European Union R&D Funding Service concluded that “In contrast to the situation in England where there is not a consistent provision of FP7 support at regional level; it was felt that Scotland Europa and its counterparts in Wales and Northern Ireland are effectively punching above their weight as a result of their dedicated service delivery”.

As well as providing, direct advice and guidance on the individual work programmes, of which there are many, and almost £110K of financial support for the preparation of applications, Invest NI’s Collaborative R&D Support Service has developed a mutually beneficial relationship with theme-specific National Contact Points

in both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. This has enabled the team to provide early intelligence on funding calls, host awareness raising events, provide assistance to find suitable partners and a review of project proposals before submission.

For example, based on an opportunity presented to QUB’s ECIT by the Collaborative R&D Support Service, a team from the ECIT became the first research group from Northern Ireland to co-ordinate and win an FP7 security proposal. The addition of a local firm, Capna DSP in the consortium further highlights our strengths in Northern Ireland and indeed the ECIT Institute environment for international security research and development. Analysis indicates that Northern Ireland is estimated to have won 0.98pc or €2,240,367 of the European Commission’s total security R&D expenditure. If Northern Ireland were a country then on a cash-per-capita basis it would be third among the EC-27, behind Luxembourg and Belgium.

We have also received more good news in that a Regions of Knowledge Digital Agenda project including Momentum, CSIT and Invest NI with partners in Republic of Ireland, France, Germany, Spain, Slovenia and Cyprus was ranked 10th out of 119 submissions – 4 times more submissions than in 2011.

Furthermore, the Invest INI Brussels Office has been active in representing the interests of NI at EU level providing Collaborative R&D support, a strategic link between Northern Ireland and European Union and Access to European Union institutions. This has resulted in key engagements with EU officials on Smart Specialisation and Northern Ireland recently submitting a proposal to become a reference site under the European Innovation Partnership, also known as EIP, in Active and Healthy Aging complementing the Connected Health and Prosperity Memorandum of Understanding Between The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and Invest Northern Ireland.

Intertradelreland is also active in encouraging participation in FP7 by initiatives such as focussed awareness raising events, provision of funding support for travel, assistance with the identification of partners, increased engagement with United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland National Contact Point representatives, promotion of North – South collaboration

and Improving links with Higher and Further Education and SME's.

Research undertaken by Intertradelreland has concluded that FP7 applications from collaborations between Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland have a greater success rate than those which collaborate elsewhere. There is significant potential for increased collaboration between our businesses and research institutions and those in the Republic of Ireland.

InterTradelreland remain committed to developing the collaborations in order to maximise our chances of success.

In respect of the July calls I would encourage Members to alert companies in your constituencies who may be interested in the Framework funding to make contact with Invest NI R&D Collaborative Service Team. Details of which are attached in Appendix B.

The July calls are also important because they are expected to align closely with the new European funding programme for the period 2014-2020 entitled Horizon 2020.

Horizon 2020 will have an estimated budget of €80 billion for Collaboration, innovation and research. This €80 billion is evidence of the importance on Innovation and research in European Economy and effectively mirrors Northern Ireland's economic priorities.

On her visit, Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn stressed the relevance of Horizon 2020 to Northern Ireland and highlighted the new opportunities available for SME's and research organisations.

Horizon 2020 is aiming for simplification, with a single set of rules, less paperwork and faster funding which is designed to enable greater participation with particular emphases on participation and support for SME's.

In January 2014 the Horizon 2020 funding programme will be launched and implemented through three priorities; Excellence in Science, Supporting business research and innovation (with a focus on SME's) and Tackling societal challenges.

The societal challenges priority will address issues on Health and well being, Agri-food, Sustainable transport, Climate change, Secure societies, Social innovation and creativity and Innovation in smart digital public services.

Horizon 2020 priorities will also focus on innovation-related activities, such as; Pilot programmes, public procurement, again with a focus to increase SME participation.

As a small region with an SME dominated economy, Northern Ireland is ideally positioned to avail of these Horizon 2020 opportunities.

To support companies and research institutions to avail of these opportunities my Department recently completed a review of existing supporting mechanisms. That review made 18 recommendations which are in the process of being implemented.

One of the recommendations is the appointment of "Thematic Leads". The "Thematic Leads" focus on key research areas where Northern Ireland has greatest potential to secure additional EU funding and will work closely with Invest NI and Intertrade Ireland to ensure that there is more pro active support to ensure our local industry, particularly SMEs are able to engage in Horizon 2020. I hope to be in a position to make an announcement for the funding of "thematic leads" in the coming weeks.

In addition, my department will shortly be appointing a "Horizon 2020 manager" for Northern Ireland. This appointment will ensure there is greater coordination across the public and private sector in relation to Horizon 2020.

To conclude, in Northern Ireland we need our researchers, in government, academia and companies of all sizes to make full use of opportunities that are available under FP7 and Horizon 2020. Increasing partnerships across Europe and further afield is vitally important, which is why the EU Framework Programme and its successor Horizon 2020, can play an important role in helping us grow our economy.

Our Economic Strategy recognises the importance of targeting resources and research on areas where we have the best opportunities to be leaders on the European or even world stage. Collaboration is vital if we are to strive towards international competitiveness and building knowledge based economy. It makes sense for such a small region as ours to share knowledge and expertise, which is why I am working closely with my Ministerial colleagues to support business and academic collaboration across regional and national boundaries and increased efforts in increasing the drawdown of FP7 and Horizon 2020 funding.

APPENDIX A: BREAKDOWN OF FP7 DATA BY THEME – TOP 5 UNDERLINED AND IN BOLD

Source: EC, FP7 Project and Participants database, version 10.0, released 28 February 2012	N. Ireland (UKN)	
	Participations	EC requested financial contribution, €
SP1 - Cooperation		
1. Health	18	6,778,669
2. FAFB - Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, and Biotechnology	15	4,275,676
3. ICT - Information & Communication Technologies	25	7,014,887
4. NMP - Nanosciences, Nanotechnologies, Materials and New Production Technologies	7	1,741,153
5. Energy	3	625,958
6. Environment (including Climate Change)	5	781,387
7. Transport (including Aeronautics)	10	3,304,599
8. SSH - Socio-economic Sciences & Humanities	4	1,005,591
9. Space	2	464,027
10. Security	10	2,502,329
General Activities		
SP2 - IDEAS		
European Research Council	3	4,417,968
SP3 - PEOPLE		
Marie-Curie Actions	24	7,262,955
SP 4 - Capacities		
Research infrastructures	8	1,633,043
Research for the benefit of SMEs	17	1,448,371
Regions of knowledge		
Research potential		
Science in society	1	89,736
Coherent development of research policies		
International Cooperation		
Euratom	3	507,750
Total	155	43,854,100

Appendix B

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