

# UK participants' view of the EU's Framework Programme

## Benefits of participating, challenges and recommendations

In Framework Programme Six, the UK National Contact Point for Life Sciences, Genomics and Biotechnology for Health (LSH) gathered opinions from UK organisations participating in LSH projects, in the form of case studies. The case studies had a common objective, to learn more about the research that UK organisations are involved in, to determine the benefits to participating and to learn what 'tips for success' can be disseminated to future applicants to Framework, notably FP7.

This collection is based upon discussions with the following organisations. These organisations are co-ordinators and partners in Integrated Projects, Networks of Excellence and STREPs funded in FP5 and FP6.

Subject of case study	Project subject of case study	Role
University of Oxford	SPINE	Co-ordinator
	SPINE 2-Complexes	Co-ordinator
	MolPAGE	Co-ordinator
University of East Anglia	Cancerdegradome	Co-ordinator
MRC Mammalian Genetics Unit	EUMORPHIA	Co-ordinator
Xceleron	EUMAPP	Co-ordinator
Ark Therapeutics	EVGN	Partner
Simcyp	BioSim	Partner
GlaxoSmithKline	GENDEP	Partner
Pfizer	ReProTect	Partner
Lilly	InnoMed	Partner
Stem Cell Sciences	EuroStemCell	Partner
	FunGenES	Partner
Oxford Gene Technology	MolPAGE	Partner

## Benefits of participating

The organisations contacted articulated a number of reasons for participating in Framework.

### Access to new networks and contacts

The majority of the participants consulted, regarded one of the prime benefits of being involved in a Framework project as the development of new networks and contacts. The forging of new interactions at science and business levels, as well as the consolidation of existing links, can be regarded as an early benefit of being part of a Framework consortium. As a result it has been possible for organisations to develop new business contacts from the linkages formed in a consortium, and in some cases to facilitate uptake of licensed technology by other partners.

### Part funding for research

For a company, through receiving part-funding input for research from Framework, it may be possible to allocate other in-house resources to other competitive product development areas. For a company in the early stages of getting established Framework funding may enable that company to more adequately manage limited resources and help to survive early funding rounds.

### Elevated profile

This can come about in a number of ways. Publications in scientific journals may be the most obvious. In one case, the journal Acta Crystallographica Section D (October 2006) dedicated an issue to the achievements of the SPINE consortium. Participation may result in raised visibility, especially for the Coordinating laboratory, with other leading laboratories and consortia in the EU and elsewhere from which successful links may be built. An organisation new to co-ordinating a project may raise considerable interest internally thereby encouraging other research groups to consider participating. Significant interest may develop in a project through press releases for example, via CORDIS or national media.

## Training

Training is an important aspect of Integrated Projects and Networks of Excellence funded in FP6 and is likely to continue to be so in the funding schemes of FP7. Training is being handled in a number of ways by FP6 Life Sciences projects. Some projects run annual training courses and technology workshops to train researchers in the consortium. Such courses are open to the wider scientific community and are seen as a mechanism to showcase developments in the project. Such training courses are also seen as an important mechanism for contributing to standard-setting and to encouraging interaction with other EU projects.

Training can be anticipated to be of particular value in educating the next generation of scientists and in exposing the newer Member State consortium partners to more advanced technologies. Encouraging researcher mobility may also be used to support the training of researchers. The provision of financial 'mobility awards' to support the secondment of researchers between consortium laboratories can be used for cross training and career development.

## Strengthening research capabilities

Framework Programme brings together researchers from many disciplines which can result in additional benefits such as

- Building critical mass to validate and apply emerging technologies and set standards
- Developing increased collaboration between basic and clinical researchers and involving regulatory bodies and patient groups
- Providing a vehicle for articulating company R&D vision and practices to other stakeholders and for learning more about the other stakeholders
- Involvement in informing EU R&D policy formulation in support of innovation.

## Challenges

A number of common challenges were identified by the participants.

### Building the consortium

Consider building the core consortium from organisations you already have collaborations with. For the more experienced Co-ordinators and projects, especially in building a consortium for a second project or follow-on project, it might be assumed that this would be easier second time around. With raised visibility especially for successful consortia, keeping a new project to a manageable size is important. This challenge can be addressed by instituting an informal selection process whereby participants wishing to join, disclose what value they could contribute to the consortium.

#### **Tips:**

- Organise a pre-project meeting of potential members to facilitate interaction and agree the intended programme of work.
- When building a consortium, the engagement of interested researchers with Commission desk officers, best accomplished by visiting Brussels, is very helpful in preventing or dissipating administrative problems.
- Include organisations new to the core consortium, newer research groups and younger investigators as they may help to open up new avenues of work.

Concentrate on the opportunity, rather than potential barriers. Once the collective will has been established in the consortium it becomes much easier to work together to address obstacles. There should be no uncertainty about what the partners have agreed to. A good kick-off meeting is also vital as that then sets the timelines for communication of work package goals and progress.

### Administrative procedures

Following on from proposal preparation and submission, participation in an EU project brings with it the necessity to complete contract forms (now Grant Agreement forms), to record the amount of time and resource spent on a project and regular reports and possibly audits, throughout the lifetime of the project. There is a continuing concern that EU audit rules are too challenging in not allowing adequate time to conduct the independent audit. In a large company, the short time allowed for return of paperwork during negotiation does bring problems for a large, international company whose senior managers may not be

immediately available. In FP7 some of the administrative burden will be lessened for participants due to changes in the requirement for the provision of audit certificates.

**Tip: Internal communication.** A supportive local environment and a commitment to internal communication is vital to raise awareness within an organisation regarding participation in a Framework project. In particular, to explain the necessity for recording and costing research done for a project so as to prepare for reporting and, if necessary, audits. It is also important that internal expectations are managed to be realistic and that the benefits obtained in participating are seen to justify the time and resource devoted to the administrative aspects. Making this reality check is a key task once the Consortium begins to advance in the project lifecycle. **Tip:** Adopt the same general approach to EU funded projects as to other external collaborations, evaluate on a regular basis in terms of value for money and time invested.

### **Need for disciplined partnership**

It is important, especially for short projects, to ensure that all partners understand the need for setting and maintaining a rigorous timetable for reporting and delivery of results. One key issue for project coordinators, especially if they are an SME, is the obligation to respond to the frequent reporting requirements set by the European Commission. Previous experience in collaborative research is an asset, but the frequency of formal communication mandated is unusual for many scientific SMEs. **Tip:** Implement appropriate project management tracking and reporting procedures.

### **Participating fully in meetings and reporting**

An early benefit of participating is the relationship with the network of partners in the Consortium but achievement of this benefit is a demanding responsibility for each of the partners, for example, to participate fully in reporting and meetings and the continuing challenge to ensure effective contribution from all the partners in a large Consortium should not be underestimated.

**Tip:** This is an area where professional Project Management and good communication channels can benefit partners.

### **Project communication**

Good communication and management procedures are essential in all projects, especially large projects. Excellence in scientific leadership must be augmented by the professional management competencies that are needed for strong coordination. Good internal communication and leadership is also essential to clarify the scientific responsibilities of the partners and to encourage individual partners to come together as a team.

**Tip: Good communication tools and infrastructure.** These should be agreed and developed by the consortium. They can subsequently be used to provide a means of monitoring individual scientific interactions between partners and to document the status of each partner's contribution. A central database for the Minutes from all work package meetings could be introduced from the start.

### **Project Management**

The larger consortia in Framework require professional project management. Not just with respect to financial aspects and reporting commitments, there is also need for very good management with regard to the monitoring of scientific progress for example ensuring that achievements obtained during earlier phases of the project are managed so as to support increasingly focused outputs in the later stages. Additional roles for the project management team may include redeployment of funds, settling disputes and promoting a culture of inclusiveness.

**Tip: Dedicated resource for project management.** In many larger consortia a full-time individual is employed at the organisation of the Project Co-ordinator. The Project Manager can provide very significant support to the scientific leadership. Good Project Managers can ensure momentum is maintained in the project by the regular monitoring of scientific progress and reporting and maintain good interaction between the consortium and the European Commission. Project Managers can facilitate interaction between the different clusters in the consortium and assist the development of new synergies across the project partners.

### **Intellectual Property**

A significant concern for organisations, especially companies, when considering joining a consortium is the handling of IP. Companies are rightly concerned that involvement in Framework could leave them exposed to the use of their technology by others without payment of licensing fees.

**Tip: The Consortium Agreement (CA):** A Consortium Agreement will be mandatory in FP7, unless stated otherwise in the Calls for Proposals. Writing the CA can be viewed as a collective exercise, not something only for the Project Coordinator, and at an early stage the consortium agreement should be drafted and discussed to identify key issues for Intellectual Property (IP) and project management so as to serve as a basis for consortium confidence building. The CA should state clearly what IP is included or excluded from the project. Experience shows that delineating the work and responsibilities allocated within the consortium, so that demarcation of roles is agreed early on during the consortium discussions can avoid internal confusion and conflict. Contrary to some expectations, conflict regarding arrangements for sharing of confidential information and IP can be avoided if a consortium collectively determined to resolve these issues early on.

## What do companies want from Framework Programme?

The primary focus for companies, as for other project participants is research excellence. In addition, company scientists have articulated a variety of reasons for getting involved:

- Access to specific external expertise, complementary skills, biological tools and new targets technology watching brief and acquisition.
- Prelude to recruiting additional internal resource and development of new directions.
- Particular value of Fellowship training programmes for mobility and diversity goals.
- Identification of new IP opportunities and consolidation of existing IP.
- Benefits of involvement in large infrastructure projects that could not be funded within any single country.

In appraising their experience, companies concluded that those who get involved as a means to expand their own R&D work, progress better than those who see Framework only as a source of money. Ensuring that the work being done by the project is highly relevant to a company's core business is also a prime consideration.

The willingness shown by leading scientists from academia and industry, not just to become involved in specific projects but also to share their personal lessons learnt with others across the R&D community, testifies to the merits of Framework Programmes in building cooperation at the European level.



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