

PS PUBLIC SERVICE REVIEW

European Science & Technology 12

an independent review

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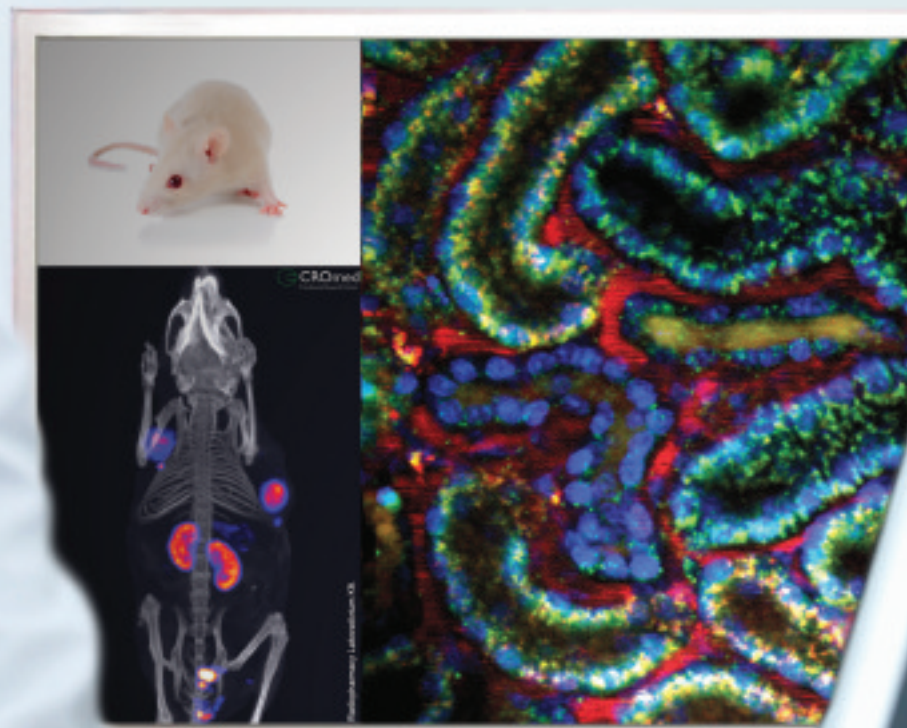
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Editor Amy Caddick acaddick@publicservice.co.uk	Production Manager Chloe Collins	Senior Design Coordinator Andrew Bosworth	Sales Manager Sukhi S. Shetra	Distribution and Circulation Adam Eardley Samantha Kensett
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publicservice.co.uk Ltd
Ebenezer House, Ryecroft,
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Staffordshire ST5 2UB
United Kingdom
tel: +44 (0)1782 630200



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A valuable lesson

Leif Moos et al, of EERA, underline the importance of education research in addressing the challenges facing Europe...

The European Educational Research Association (EERA) consists of 27 national and regional organisations from all over Europe. It is committed to the construction of a European Research Area within the field of educational enquiry and research and so naturally looks for what it can contribute to the EU common strategic framework for research. EERA also wants to contribute to the implementation of that framework in partnership with public and private sector institutions, as indeed it did under the 7th Framework Programme. Sustainable economic and social development on a European level cannot happen without close attention to what happens in education at all levels within the different nation states in Europe. Education research is fundamental to this.

‘To respond successfully to the challenges of climate change, depleting natural resources, population growth, globalisation and multiculturalism, our lives and lifestyles must change and this necessitates an educated understanding of these issues and their consequences.’

However, while in the Commission’s official strategies we can see descriptions of the grand challenges of the global economy, transnational financial governance and the competitiveness of the nation states – and how research, innovation, technology and hard science can give answers to these challenges – there is a silence about the role of social science, humanities and educational research.

The picture of research and in particular social and behavioural science research created by the Commission in ‘Innovation Union’ (2010), ‘Europe 2020’ (2010) and the EU green paper ‘From challenges to opportunities: Towards a common strategic framework for EU research and innovation funding’ is based on an economic and technological worldview. The preoccupation with science and technology distorts the vision of research and innovation in many ways, for example in considering research on social innovation. The green paper seems to

suppose an outdated linear relationship between research and practice. It follows the research development and diffusion paradigm in which once research has been conducted, a separate task of ‘knowledge transfer’ has to be carried out. Change and development is then merely seen as something that could happen through transformation of information from one entity to another.

The failure of this approach to innovation has been documented for a long time. The linear research agenda laid out: research – innovation – products/services (technologies) ignores the knowledge of both social and behavioural science and humanities research. It makes no reference to the role that social scientific, and even more broadly, arts and humanities research can play in informing dimensions of innovation, creativity, social innovation and changes in practices.

European societal development, economic growth, balance of trade and competitiveness do not rest simply on the products of science and technology. Within a production paradigm some of the more ‘soft’ areas of



The European Commission’s research strategy is, at present, too reliant on an economic and technological worldview, EERA believes

human cooperation and development are often overlooked. EERA's argument is that if the European Commission wants to support research in order to stimulate sustainable growth and development, this cannot be done solely through an emphasis on one kind of research. We are of course not taking a stance opposed to science and technology. This would be absurd. We want, however, to emphasise the insufficiency of these disciplines alone in tackling the sort of issues and in serving the priorities that are indicated in the green paper and elsewhere – and hence the need for the sort of research provided by the social sciences and humanities to be part of the EU's vision.

Today and in the near future we will need to tackle, for example, the problems of climate change and environmental sustainability; this will require responses rooted in science and technology, but also an understanding of human behaviour, sensibility and responsibility. This entails having an awareness of being a global citizen and being open to thinking creatively about finding solutions for all citizens. None of this can happen without education. Hence the need for research in order to expand our knowledge of these huge challenges and shape how we can educate and change our perspectives and behaviour.

‘...if the European Commission wants to support research in order to stimulate sustainable growth and development, this cannot be done solely through an emphasis on one kind of research.’

There are several grand challenges that are not mentioned in the EU papers, including health (other than in terms of medical science), cultural learning and the creative economies, social inclusion and social justice, democracy, multiculturalism and immigration, the mobility of the EU population, identity and citizenship, and arts and culture. These are all areas that require sophisticated knowledge if we are going to be able to handle or possibly solve some of the issues involved. As part of this process education cannot be overlooked, and in order for education to function properly educational research is needed.

Educational research draws on multiple scientific disciplines. Social and behavioural science and humanities are occupied with the very foundations of education: the search for explanation and understanding of human thinking, creativity, action and behaviour, and of social interactions, structures, change and communication. All disciplines can make a claim to relevance, but the following three examples are illustrative of the important contribution that educational research can make to society:

- Societies, economies and technologies change rapidly and this requires continuous professional development of the workforce, opportunities for re-skilling and thus for lifelong learning. This in itself is an area requiring research, but as change brings about the need for new knowledge this has to be connected with developing new teaching approaches, methods, situations and material;
- The appreciation of what innovations in science and technology might offer in terms of wealth creation and the solution of social and environmental problems requires an educated understanding, an educated creativity, and an educated framework of individual moral and social responsibility;
- To respond successfully to the challenges of climate change, depleting natural resources, population growth, globalisation and multiculturalism, our lives and lifestyles must change and this necessitates an educated understanding of these issues and their consequences.

There is a danger that the current EU Commission strategic policy preferences will push the social and behavioural sciences and humanities, including educational research, to the margins of the research arena and thereby ignore the insights into the human condition that these provide. Any sustainable future cannot be based on science and technology alone, but requires a continued engagement with the human factor, an engagement central to educational research.



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