

Further Development of the Humanities, Social and Cultural Sciences

The Austrian Council presented its first recommendation for the humanities, social and cultural sciences in 2003 and gave them due consideration in its recommendations regarding the use of funds from the action programmes. It is apparent that despite considerable financial investments (also on the part of the FWF) only a small proportion of the Austrian Council's recommendations have been implemented. The Council has, therefore, found it necessary to once again issue a recommendation regarding the further development of the humanities, social and cultural sciences in Austria, which should form the basis for evaluating and structuring what has been achieved so far.

Research funding for the humanities, social and cultural sciences in Austria suffers from three problems:

- Grants are short-term and fragmented.
- The funding schemes have an inadequate thematic and programmatic orientation.
- Almost no strategic use is made of research results with relevance for social policy produced by the humanities, social and cultural sciences.

This leads to:

- Structural fragmentation, thematic and organisational segmentation
- Lack of transparency in terms of resource allocation (with regard to human resources and existing scientific expertise and key research areas) and scientific output
- Separation of basic and applied research as well as between the university and non-university sector

The recommendation focuses on the following areas:

- Medium-term thematic priorities should be set with a view to encouraging collaborative research and facilitating new structures. An evaluation should be carried out to ensure that these key areas will be useful in the long run.
- Thematic priorities should be defined according to socio-political urgency. Issues of high social relevance and dynamism are to be tackled in a manner that helps develop structures but also corresponds with international practice in terms of thematic depth and breadth.
- The necessary structural reform of research funding for the humanities, social and cultural sciences includes bundling and coordinating all funding measures by means of concentration at the planning level and direct consultation with the management level.
- Every award of a grant must be designed as an instrument of quality assurance. Quality in the humanities, social and cultural sciences should be measured and safeguarded by forms of evaluation that make allowance for the differing innovation cycles and systems of work and organisation of the various disciplines.
- Care should be taken that priority is given to allocating funds to research in the humanities, social and cultural sciences that at least allows a doctoral project (3 years) to be completed within the funding period.
- Existing measures that were not designed for the humanities, social and cultural sciences should be examined to see if they are basically suited to these disciplines. This compatibility must be ensured in the case of planned measures, e.g. the excellence clusters.
- Following a detailed study of international research funding models, greater tax incentives must be introduced to encourage corporate research funding and the establishment of foundations specifically to promote the humanities, social and cultural sciences.