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News on EU Research Policy and Programmes

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EU Policy

Mixed news for Commissioners in EP hearings

There was mixed news in the recent EP hearings for the new Commissioners-designate. The Commissioners-designate have to appear in hearings in the EP to exchange views with the relevant committee of MEPs on their priorities for their prospective areas of responsibility, before MEPs vote on approving the whole college of Commissioners. Whilst most of these went smoothly, the Commissioner-designate for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Rumiana Jeleva, from Bulgaria, fared badly and has since withdrawn her candidacy. This means a new Commissioner for Bulgaria will need to be put forward and the overall approval process delayed.

Other Commissioners-designate fared better. The Commissioner-designate for Research, Science and Innovation, Maire Geoghegan-Quinn from Ireland, had what most commentators felt was a good hearing with the EP's committee for Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE). Geoghegan-Quinn stated her commitment to delivering results, creating jobs, completing the European Research Area and addressing the current grand societal challenges such as climate change, energy and the ageing population. Others included the outgoing Commissioner for Research, Janez Potočnik, who is now the Commissioner-designate for DG Environment. He said his priorities in post would be promoting a green economy, halting the loss of biodiversity and implementing and improving existing environmental legislation.

Further information

EC Press Release MEMO/10/6 of 19 January 2010 is available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid>

The EP website on the hearings gives full details of the Commissioners-designate, their background, and their written responses to questions asked in the proceedings:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/hearings/default.htm?language=en>

EIT chooses first three KICs

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) has announced the results of its first call for proposals. Three Knowledge Innovation Communities (KICs) cover the fields of future information and communication society, sustainable energy and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Of the three chosen, Climate-KIC will initially focus on achieving excellence in four areas: assessing climate change and managing its drivers; transitioning to low-carbon resilient cities; adaptive water management; and zero carbon production. The co-location centres, which form the structure of all KICs, are to be in London, Zürich, the Berlin metropolitan area, the Paris metropolitan area and the Randstad metropolitan area.

For the InnoEnergy KIC, the technological approach covers the most challenging areas of the Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET Plan) and the co-location centres are to be Karlsruhe, Grenoble, Eindhoven/Leuven, Barcelona, Krakow and Stockholm. The aim of ICT Labs, the third KIC chosen, is to generate a faster transformation of ideas and ICT technologies into real products, services and business, boosting Europe's future competitiveness in all sectors of society. The co-location centres are to be Berlin, Eindhoven, Helsinki, Paris and Stockholm.

Further information

Full details of the three successful KICs is available from the EIT website at:

<http://eit.europa.eu/about-eit/at-a-glance/eit-mission.html>

EC Press Release IP/09/1950 of 16 December 2009 is available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/>

Spanish Presidency identifies research priorities

The Spanish Presidency of the EU, which has a mandate until the end of June 2010, has identified innovation and equality as the two key priorities to be addressed across all areas of its Presidency Work Programme. The research programme outlined within this has the overall objective of further promoting and consolidating the construction of the European Research Area (ERA), and will address the principles of innovation and equality through three main areas of activity: integration, involvement and inclusion.

The 'integration' strand aims to respond to the need to place research and development policies at the centre of the European project, and to fully integrate the ERA into the EU 2020 strategy. The 'involvement' strand aims to ensure that R&D instruments in Europe are equipped to respond more effectively to major challenges, and identifies science and innovation as key factors in the recovery and strengthening of the economy. Finally, the 'inclusion' strand aims to ensure that science and innovation play a more active role in the promotion of social cohesion and the fight against poverty and exclusion. Events to take place during the Presidency include the sixth European Conference on Research Infrastructures, the WIRE Conference on Innovative Regions in Europe and the Science Against Poverty conference looking at the role of scientific research in the alleviation of poverty and exclusion.

Further information

The website of the Spanish presidency can be found at: <http://www.eu2010.es/en/index.html>

UK plans for researcher mobility and careers

The UK Government recently published the 'UK National Action Plan on Researcher Mobility and Careers within the European Research Area' which presents the current UK situation, including case studies, and outlines future initiatives. The action plan was developed in response to a 2008 EC communication entitled 'Better careers and more mobility: A European Partnership for Researchers', which invited Member States to adopt a national action plan addressing the aims of the partnership. These included the development of systematically open recruitment by all research institutions, the adoption of measures which would meet the social security and pensions needs of mobile researchers, a commitment to attractive employment working conditions and the broadening of the research skills base through strengthened links between academia and industry.

The UK plan addresses these issues by describing the current UK practice, presenting case studies and highlighting future initiatives in four areas: open recruitment and portability of grants; meeting the social security and supplementary pension needs of mobile researchers; attractive employment and working conditions; and enhancing the training, skills and experience of European researchers. In his introduction to the plan, Lord Drayson, UK Minister for Science and Innovation states that the UK "strongly supports the careers and mobility pillar of the European Research Area initiative".

Further information

The 'UK Action Plan on Researcher Mobility and Careers' is available from: http://www.dius.gov.uk/dius_international/science_and_innovation/eu_research_and_innovation_policy/~media/publications/R/Researcher-UK-National-Action-Plan

The EC 'Better careers and more mobility: a European Partnership for Researchers' is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/comm_pdf_com_2008_0317_f_en_communication.pdf

Outcomes of recent European Research Council calls

The European Research Council has published the results for the 2009 Advanced Grants call. So far, 236 proposals have been selected for funding, amounting to a total of €515 million and giving an overall success rate of around fifteen per cent. The Physical Sciences and Engineering subject domain accounted for 105 of the funded proposals, 44 per cent of the total, while 89 of the funded proposals, representing 38 per cent of the total, came from the Life Sciences domain. The Social Sciences and Humanities domain saw 42 proposals funded. The individual researchers selected for funding are nationals of 26 different countries, and will be hosted by institutions in 18 countries. Of the projects funded, 58 will be based in the UK, while 55 of the Principal Investigators are British nationals.

The 2010 Starting Grant call, which is currently under assessment, saw an increase in the number of proposals submitted, with 2873 received in comparison to the 2503 received in the 2009 call, representing a rise of 15 per cent. In spite of this, the success rate is expected to go from around 9.5 per cent in 2009 to approximately 15 per cent, due to the substantial increase in budget from €296 million to €528 million. Of the proposals submitted, 1205 were submitted to the Physical Sciences and Engineering Domain, 1029 to the Life Sciences Domain and 639 to the Social Sciences and Humanities Domain.

Further information

Full details of both calls are available from the European Research Council's news page at: http://erc.europa.eu/index.cfm?fuseaction=page_display&topicID=47

Joint Research Centre support to Haiti rescue efforts

Assessment work has been carried out by the EC's Joint Research Centre (JRC) which illustrates the degree of devastation that occurred in the Haitian earthquake on 12 January 2010. This work will complement the visit to be made by European Commissioner for Humanitarian and Development Aid, Karel de Gucht, in which he will assess the level of the disaster and measures required to assist Haiti, by generating data and maps which demonstrate the extent of the devastation caused by the earthquake.

The maps, which reveal extensive damage and destruction in the capital of Haiti, Port-au-Prince, are based on analysis of high-resolution satellite imagery of the city taken both before and after the earthquake. Since satellite images do not show internal damage to buildings, the levels of damage revealed in the maps are likely to be underestimations. Rapid damage assessments provide valuable information to help governments and rescue workers plan relief and reconstruction measures.

Further information

EC Press Release IP/10/25 of 15 January 2010 is available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/>

Funding for European humanities research projects

The Humanities in the European Research Area Joint Research Programme (HERA JRP) recently announced the results of its first call for trans-national Collaborative Research Projects (CRPs). The €16.5 million call, launched in January 2009, asked for proposals in two humanities research themes, 'Cultural Dynamics: Inheritance and Identity' and 'Humanities as a Source of Creativity and Innovation'. Consortia who wished to apply were required to have a minimum of three partners from different eligible countries: Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK.

In total, 55 full proposals requesting a total of €49.6 million were received, of which nineteen were recommended for funding. The UK performed exceptionally strongly in the call, leading on eleven of the nineteen funded projects. Subject areas covered by the successful projects range across the full remit of the humanities, including history, music, literature and the visual arts. HERA is a partnership between Humanities Research Councils across Europe and the European Science Foundation created with the aim of firmly establishing the humanities in the European Research Area and the Framework Programme.

Further information

Details of the HERA Joint Research programme and the most recent call are available at: <http://www.heranet.info/Default.aspx>

Modernisation agenda for European universities

A number of actions and studies have recently been launched examining issues around modernisation and the future of universities in Europe. The first of these, a project funded by DG Education and Culture, aims to develop and test the feasibility of a new ranking system with a sample of 150 higher education institutions. Alongside this, a DG Research expert group on university rankings has been established, and is expected to report in early 2010.

The European Universities Association (EUA) is also carrying out a number of EU funded projects, including one looking at the take-up of the modernisation agenda for European universities, which will focus on the transparency and appropriateness of measuring tools for the assessment of university-based research and on the sustainability of university funding. The EUA also recently published the findings of their study on the autonomy of universities, while a project to be launched imminently will examine collaborative doctoral education involving regional actors and SMEs. Other recent activity on

the future of European universities includes the European Social and Economic Committee's adoption of an own-initiative opinion on Universities for Europe, while the European Parliament's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) has also produced an own-initiative paper on 'University-Business Dialogue' for discussion.

Further information

Details of EUA activities are available from: <http://www.eua.be/>

Further information on the EU University-Business forum is available from:
http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc1261_en.htm

Summary of results of consultation on innovation policy published

The EC has published a summary of the results of the consultation that it recently issued on innovation policy. The results will provide important input to the preparation for the EC's forthcoming Innovation Act, which is scheduled to be published in spring 2010. Some 215 responses were sent to the EC by universities, research institutes, governments, industry, NGOs and individuals across Europe and further afield. Several recurring themes in the responses are highlighted by the EC in its summary.

The first is greater simplification and streamlining of EU funding programmes, so as to make them more user-friendly and less complex. The second is a better and more co-ordinated implementation of EU innovation policies at national and regional level. The third is to pay greater attention to more complementary policies in research, education and innovation to better exploit Europe's knowledge base. A stronger focus on SMEs was another key recommendation, with respondents pointing to the role innovative small firms can play in stimulating economic growth and stressing the need for increased SME involvement in European funding programmes. A range of specific proposals were suggested to bring this about. A greater orientation of innovation policy towards major challenges such as climate change and ageing was frequently mentioned, as was more investment in education and training and the promotion of innovation in public services.

Further information

The responses to the consultation on innovation policy, as well as the EC's summary, are available at: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/innovation/future-policy/consultation/results_en.htm

Expert Groups publish European Research Area reports

Three Expert Groups have recently published reports addressing key issues and challenges concerning the European Research Area (ERA). All of these reports had been requested by the EC and are now available online following their discussion at an EC conference entitled 'Working together to strengthen research in Europe', which took place in Brussels in 2009. The first report, entitled 'A Knowledge-Intensive Future for Europe', was published by an Expert Group chaired by Professor Bjorn von Sydow of the Swedish Research Council. It underlines the importance of improving Europe as a business environment, and recommends a series of structural reforms in the knowledge infrastructure necessary to achieve this. Research and innovation are identified as the core long-term factors that contribute to business success, productivity and employment.

The second report, entitled 'ERA Indicators and Monitoring', was published by an Expert Group chaired by Professor Rémi Barré of the CNAM in Paris. The report outlines a comprehensive set of indicators designed to measure progress towards fulfilling the objectives of the European Research Area and the EU as a knowledge-based economy. Finally, the third report, entitled 'The Role of Community Research Policy in the Knowledge-Based Economy', was published by an Expert Group chaired by Professor Luc Soete of Maastricht University. This report emphasises the need to capitalise on the increasing globalisation of research, increased innovation clusters and more interconnected research, and provides suggestions on how to do so.

Further information

All three Expert Group reports are available at: http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/publication_en.cfm

The website of the conference at which the three reports were first tabled is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/research/conferences/2009/era2009/index_en.htm

ESF - Call for Proposals for collaborative research projects in social sciences

The European Science Foundation (ESF) has published a call for proposals for the European Collaborative Research Projects (ECRP) Scheme in the social sciences. The ECRP scheme supports investigator-driven, international collaborative research in all fields of the social sciences in 19 countries in Europe. ECRP operates in the responsive-mode and its annual call for proposals is open to applications in all fields of the social sciences.

The scheme offers opportunities to test innovative ideas, pool expertise and strengthen research capacity in line with the objectives of the European Research Area. Researchers may collaborate across participating countries on any subject which demonstrates a need for international co-operation, while the funding remains at a national level. ECRP has a one-stage application procedure and a two-stage international peer review process co-ordinated by ESF which sets a high quality benchmark for the funded proposals.

Further information

Detailed information is available from the ESF ECRP website:

<http://www.esf.org/activities/eurocores/running-programmes/ecrp/ecrp-vi-2010-call-for-proposals.html>

Innovative Medicines Initiative: call for expert evaluators on drug development

The Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI) Joint Undertaking (JU) is encouraging experts in drug development to register as evaluators for IMI proposals. If you are an expert in drug development and interested in evaluating project proposals submitted to IMI calls for proposals you can register online with the FP7 Experts Management Module (EMM).

Evaluations usually take place in the context of short sessions, lasting a maximum of around ten days a year. These may be in Brussels - or Luxembourg for some innovation actions - or carried out remotely (i.e. at the evaluator's home or place of work). The number of proposals which an expert deals with depends very much on each area.

Further information

To register as an expert please visit the FP7 Experts Management Module (EMM) at: <https://cordis.europa.eu/emmf7/index.cfm>

Contracts awarded to launch first Galileo satellites

The EC recently announced the winners of three contracts awarded to launch the first batch of 14 satellites for Galileo, which is the EU's global navigation satellite system. ThalesAleniaSpace, a joint venture between Thales and Finmeccanica, has been awarded the contract for system support services. This contract is worth €85 million and is to provide industrial services to support the European Space Agency with the integration and the validation of the Galileo system. Arianespace of France has been awarded a contract, worth €397 million, to cover the launch of five Soyuz launchers from French Guiana, with each one carrying two satellites. Finally, OHB of Germany will receive €566 million for the first order of 14 satellites.

The combined total of these contracts is over €1 billion and they will allow Galileo to become operational in early 2014. By this point it is expected that there will be up to 16 spacecraft in the Galileo infrastructure and this will allow users such as those with satellite navigation systems to benefit from the service.

Further information

Further information is available at: http://www.esa.int/esaNA/SEM2UYBV34G_index_0.html

General information on Galileo programme is available at: <http://www.gsa.europa.eu/>

EC Press Release IP/10/7 of 7 January 2010 is available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/>

NMP Expert Advisory Group publishes report on future research activities

The Expert Advisory Group for the Nanosciences, Nanotechnologies, Materials and New Production Technologies (NMP) theme of FP7 has recently published a position paper on future research activities for the period 2010 – 2015. The NMP Expert Advisory Group comprises 25 experts from various domains within the NMP field. It brings together representatives from academia and industry from 17 different countries.

The report is likely to shape the direction and content of future calls within the FP7 NMP theme. It provides an analysis of the economic impact of NMP and puts forward conclusions and priorities for future research direction. For each of the main areas of the NMP theme it looks at the following: the scope and objectives of the proposed science and technology research activities; the state-of-the-art in Europe and in the world; the required fundamental developments with regards to the application objectives; the potential market applications and relevant industrial sectors; and the expected economic and societal impact of the research and technological developments.

Further information

The EC website on Expert Groups is available at:
<http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/faq.cfm?aide=2>

The NMP Expert Advisory Group Position Paper is available at:
http://ims.ukro.ac.uk/NR/rdonlyres/2CFB8710-AD9B-4BFB-8A92-7D83B5255B63/7951/nmpexpertadvisorygroupreport_en.pdf

Consultation on Nanotechnologies Action Plan

A consultation on a potential new 'Nanotechnologies Action Plan' has been launched by the EC. The deadline for responding is 19 February 2010 and all stakeholders are welcome to submit a response. The action plan, which at this stage is still being considered by the EC, would focus on the technological and societal challenges of nanotechnologies over the coming five year period. It would have a particular focus on implementing a dynamic and responsive policy that addressed legal, societal and ethical issues and on strengthening research and innovation efforts with an increased emphasis on sustainable development, competitiveness, health and safety and environmental issues.

The consultation takes the format of an online questionnaire and includes questions on which EU research activities related to nanotechnologies should be reinforced or reduced. It also seeks to gather respondents' views on the main concerns about the present situation of nanotechnologies and which new EU policy activities related to nanotechnologies should be covered by the action plan.

Further information

The consultation website is available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/consultations/snap/consultation_en.htm

Consultation on late payments

The European Ombudsman has launched a public consultation on problems with late payments by the EC. Since the opening of the Ombudsman's office in 1995, numerous complaints have been filed on late Commission payments to research organisations, universities, companies and associations. A 2007 investigation into the issue found that 20 per cent of EC payments were late, while data from the Commission itself shows that in 2008 there were delays in 22 per cent of cases. Since then, the Commission has launched a number of measures to improve the situation, but delays still remain an issue.

The consultation addresses these concerns, with the Ombudsman inviting views from citizens, companies and associations on whether efforts taken by the Commission to reduce late payments are sufficient, or whether further steps could be taken. Comments can be submitted by letter, fax or e-mail to the Ombudsman, but it should be noted that the inquiry will not examine individual cases of late payments.

Further details

The consultation pages are available at:

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/press/release.faces/en/4503/html.bookmark>

Research News

FP7 study publishes new findings on the origins of species

A Marie Curie Fellow participating in an Outgoing International Fellowship has demonstrated how sexual selection and environmental pressures could interact to cause a species to split into two, even where there are no geographical barriers separating the new species. While it is now widely acknowledged that natural selection is behind the birth of new species, the exact mechanisms that drive the development of new species (a process known as 'speciation') remain the subject of debate. If two populations of a species are separated by a geographical barrier, the populations will drift apart over time. Yet new species also arise in situations where populations are not completely cut off from one another in this way.

In this study, the researchers created a mathematical model in which two populations of a species live in different environments. The model assumes that 'specialist' individuals that are highly adapted to their own local environment will survive better and have more offspring than 'intermediate' individuals with parents from both populations that are not specialised to thrive in either environment. Taking into account sexual selection, the researchers found that the females evolve a marked preference for males that are best adapted to the local environment (e.g. males with brighter plumage) and it follows that their offspring will most likely be well adapted to the local environment too. The research model demonstrates that even relatively weak natural selection can split a species in two if boosted by strong sexual selection.

Further information

Further information about this project is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/infocentre/index_en.cfm

If you didn't realise.....men and women are different, official!

Researchers at the Jagiellonian University Medical College in Poland have discovered that brain patterns differ in men and women following certain stimuli. The research team used functional

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), to enable them to get a close look at how the stimuli activate various areas of the brain in both sexes. Dr Andrzej Urbanik, chairman of the college, explained: 'Men may direct more attention to sensory aspects of emotional stimuli and tend to process them in terms of implications for required action, whereas women direct more attention to the feelings engendered by emotional stimuli'.

For the male participants, the researchers noted strong activity in their left insula (insular cortex), which is involved in decision-making systems and can trigger subjective feeling that lead to action. For the women, the left thalamus was more active. The thalamus is an area linking the cerebral cortex to pain and pleasure centres. 'The brain activation seen in the women might indicate stronger involvement of the neural circuit, which is associated with identification of emotional stimuli' stated Dr Urbanik, however, 'the more pronounced activation of the insular cortex in the men might be related to the automatic components, such as elevated heart rate or increased sweating, that accompany watching emotional material'. The greater stimulation of the automatic system in men can mean they are more likely to take action when confronted with dangerous situations.

Further information

Further information is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/infocentre/article_en.cfm?id=/research/headlines/news/article_10_01_07_en.html&item=&artid=14433

EU project looks into health benefits of breast feeding

Researchers in Norway have discovered that breast milk is not as important to the health of children and mothers as was previously thought. The study discovered that it is not the milk that makes breastfed babies slightly healthier than bottle-fed babies; rather a baby's health is determined before he or she makes their entrance into the world. Hormones play an important role in determining whether mothers will breastfeed or not. The researchers found a correlation between testosterone in pregnant women and how much the women breastfed after birth.

"Pregnant women who have higher levels of androgens breastfeed less," explained Professor Sven Carlsen, one of the Norwegian researchers. Past studies found a connection between testosterone and breastfeeding ability as the mother's glandular tissue in the breasts will be less developed. The result is that the mother will not be able to provide enough milk because the ability to produce it will not develop properly. Also the more a baby is exposed to testosterone as a foetus, the greater the chance it will suffer from obesity, Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) or type 2 diabetes. The only area the research found for which breastfeeding is beneficial was in mental abilities. According to Professor Carlsen, "it appears that children who are breastfed have a small IQ [intelligence quotient] advantage, but this needs to be confirmed in new, carefully planned and conducted studies".

Further information

Further information is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/headlines/news/article_10_01_14_en.html

Study sheds light on link between plants' flowering and gene control

New insights on how plants adapt their flowering to climate and how genes are controlled have resulted from a project led by researchers from the UK and Poland. Entitled SIROCCO ('Silencing RNAs: Organisers and Coordinators of Complexity in Eukaryotic Organisms'), the project received €12 million in FP6 funding, as well as support from a Marie Curie Early Stage Training Fellowship. The results of the project have been published in the journal 'Nature'.

Led by Professor Caroline Dean of the John Innes Centre, the project particularly focused on the role of non-coding RNA – much less studied than coding RNA – in regulating gene activity. The

researchers were able to determine how plants control flowering in various different climates by concentrating on a gene, Flowering Locus C (FLC), which suppresses gene control. The research shows that several signals interact with FLC to maintain or release its suppression of flowering, a process known as vernalisation which guarantees that flowering begins in positive conditions. The FLC gene and vernalisation thus provide important insights for scientists seeking to understand the complexities of gene regulation and the likely impact of climate change on plants. Given that rapid changes in climate affect plants' adaptation mechanisms, ultimately disrupting food supply, the latter will be an increasingly significant area of study.

Further information

Further details are available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/infocentre/article_en.cfm?id=/research/headlines/news/article_10_01_13_en.html&item=&artid=14513

Education, Training and Culture

Positive evaluation of Erasmus Mundus Programme

The EC recently published a report on the ex-post evaluation of the Erasmus Mundus Programme 2004-2008. The aim of the programme, continued in the current 2009-13 programme, is to promote the EU as a centre of excellence in learning around the world. Erasmus Mundus 2004-2008 comprised four actions: Erasmus Mundus Master's Courses; Erasmus Mundus scholarships; Partnerships with higher education institutions from third countries; and projects to enhance the worldwide attractiveness of European higher education.

Overall, the study concluded that the programme was effective in achieving its objectives and had created significant added value for the EU. 103 new joint Master's programmes created under the scheme were considered by both academics and Erasmus Mundus students to be of high quality, while large numbers of third-country applicants were attracted by the courses. Recommendations of the report addressed issues including the recruitment of EU students and expanding the relatively narrow range of third-countries from which students applied. Sustainability of funding was also covered, with the report suggesting that participating institutions need to be made more aware of the importance of exploring alternative funding sources. The 'under-representation' of new EU Member States and the need for consortia to pay greater attention to the gender balance in their courses were also highlighted.

Further information

The full report is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-mundus/doc/eval/695_en.pdf

Further details of the current Erasmus Mundus programme (2009-2013) can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc72_en.htm

First ever survey on creativity and innovation in schools

The overwhelming majority of teachers in Europe believe that creativity is a fundamental competency to be developed at school and that everyone can be creative. This is documented by a recent study on creativity and innovation in schools. The survey, which was carried out by European Schoolnet (EUN) and the Joint Research Centre's Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS), was supported by the EC's DG for Education and Culture. It aimed at understanding how teachers in Europe conceptualise creativity and what support they receive to foster students' creativity.

According to the survey, most teachers in Europe believe that creativity can be applied to every domain of knowledge and school subject. Teachers participating in the study considered Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as vital to achieving creativity. At the same time, the survey also found that the conditions for favouring creativity in schools are not always ideal. Opinions differed on the role creativity plays in national curricula - while three out of four teachers in the UK, Italy and Latvia thought creativity played an important role in their curricula, less than 50 per cent of teachers in countries such as Germany, Spain, France and Hungary shared this view. Six out of ten teachers said they had received training in innovative pedagogies but only 36 per cent of teachers received training on ICT in the classroom.

Further information

The full study results are available at:

<http://ipts.jrc.ec.europa.eu/publications/pub.cfm?id=2940>

Essen: 2010 EU Capital of Culture

The city of Essen has been officially inaugurated as a European Capital of Culture 2010, with some high profile attendees witnessing the occasion. President of the EC José Manuel Barroso and German President Horst Köhler attended an official ceremony in freezing conditions at the Zollverein industrial complex, which is on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Essen is one of three EU Capitals of Culture for 2010, the other two being Pécs and Istanbul.

The Essen's European Capital of Culture Programme or 'Essen for the Ruhr', involves the city and the Ruhr region, which is characterised by its traditional coal and steel industry. The cultural programme which has been put in place for the coming year is based on 'mythology, metropolis and Europe' and through image, theatre, music, language, creative industries and festivals, the history of Essen and the Ruhr region will be depicted evolving into a new metropolis which stands out at EU level. Essen will receive over €70 million of European funding for the events.

Further information

Further information on the programme of cultural activities which are taking place during Essen's term as European Capital of Culture can be viewed on its dedicated website:

<http://www.essen-fuer-das-ruhrgebiet.ruhr2010.de/en/>

Statistical overview of Erasmus Programme

The EC's Directorate General for Education and Culture has published a statistical report on the implementation of the Erasmus Programme in 2007-2008. The report shows an overall increase in participation, with almost 183,000 students from around 2,500 higher education institutions undertaking mobility and a further 32,000 academic and other staff mobilised to teach and receive training in another European country.

The report finds that France, Germany and Spain are the most popular destinations for Erasmus students, while also the biggest student senders. The report estimates that around four per cent of all European students will participate in the programme at some stage during their studies. Of the UK student population, 0.43 per cent participated in the programme during 2007/2008. In terms of Erasmus teaching mobility, Germany, Poland and Spain are the biggest sending countries, with France, Germany and Italy the top host countries for Erasmus teachers.

Further information

The full report and statistical analysis are available from:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/news2080_en.htm

External Collaboration

Report published on 'Drivers of International Collaboration in Research'

The report, 'Drivers of International Collaboration in Research', has been written jointly by the Technopolis Group consultancy and the Manchester Institute of Innovation Research (the University of Manchester). It comprises a literature review, the analysis of science, technology and innovation (STI) co-operation policies in EU-countries and in ten non-EU countries and the identification and development of a set of indicators to measure the progress and success of international STI co-operation policy.

The report found that policy attention for international research collaboration is growing rapidly in all countries. Factors that have led to this include globalisation, fast emerging large economies (India, China) and the opening up of their STI systems. Further, international STI collaboration policies and programmes that combine various policy drivers (e.g. research excellence with a diplomatic choice for the geography) usually have very unclear goals and the envisaged outcomes and impacts are not well defined. In line with this, the report outlined that although policy makers and research funders apply many assumptions regarding how international STI collaboration has an effect on various policy goals, these are rarely specified or operationalised in the implementation of the instruments in place. Finally, given the multitude of actors involved in implementing STI collaboration, the variety of drivers, and the different starting position of countries, it is not likely that EU Member States can easily develop a coherent evaluation and indicator framework.

Further information

The report is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/drivers_sti.pdf

Events and Awards

Consultation workshop on future research topics for ICT and ageing

The EC has organised a consultation workshop in Brussels to gather ideas for future topics on ICT and ageing. The event takes place in Brussels on 15-16 February 2010. The objective of the first day is to provide strategic guidance for future research under the Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) Joint Programme. There will be a focus on innovative ICT solutions for 'Ageing Well', with a market perspective of two to three years.

On 16 February, a second meeting will look at possible future topics for the ICT Policy Support Programme in the field of ICT and ageing for 2011 and beyond. In particular, discussions will concentrate on demand-driven pilot projects involving regions and local authorities and related to independent living of elderly people, addressing ICT solutions for fall prediction, prevention and protection of elderly people and the enhanced mobility of elderly people.

Further information

A draft agenda is on the EC's web page for the event:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/events/workshop_aal/index_en.htm

Those interested should register as soon as possible at: einclusion@ec.europa.eu.

Information event to focus on language technologies

The EC is organising a series of 'Language Technology Days', to be held in Luxembourg on the 22 and 23 March 2010, with the aim of informing prospective applicants about opportunities for language technology projects in the fourth call of the ICT Policy Support Programme and the FP7 ICT work programme for 2011-2012. The particularities of each programme and call will be presented and potential applicants will have the opportunity to meet with EC Project Officers and to promote their projects. High-level speakers will also make presentations covering a variety of related topics, including newly started projects, the commercial viewpoint and future prospects. Participants also have the opportunity to organise a session on a specific theme of interest to them.

The event will build on the recent consultation relating to Language Technologies in the 2011-12 ICT Work Programme, which asked for comments on the proposal that topics were likely to fall into four broad action lines: content production and management; information access and mining; natural interaction, in particular conversational systems supporting spontaneous communication between humans and ICT services, product and appliances; and horizontal actions cutting across actions lines, including such issues as shared and reusable language resources, community-based repositories and services and metadata and linguistic standards for interoperability.

Further information

Further information and registration for the Language Technology Days is available at: http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ict/language-technologies/info-days_en.html

Details of the consultation (now closed) are available at: http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ict/language-technologies/consultations_en.html

Spanish EU Presidency conference on 'Science against Poverty'

The Spanish Presidency of the EU has announced that there will be a major conference on 'Science Against Poverty' held in Segovia in April 2010. The conference aims to bring together around 200 international experts, including academics and policy makers, to explore the possible contributions which research and innovation could make to the fight against global poverty. Particular focus will be given to the question of how the design of European and national level research and innovation policies should be adopted to reflect the possible contribution of science programmes to the alleviation of poverty and exclusion. The conference will also examine the role of socio-economic sciences in understanding poverty dynamics and proposing plausible remedies.

There will also be a range of parallel sessions addressing issues such as: food and nutrition; energy, environment and climate change; water and sanitation; health; and education and training. The ultimate goal of the conference will be to produce a clear set of high level recommendations to be presented by the Spanish Minister of Science and Innovation, Cristina Garmendia, at the second Competitiveness Council meeting to be held in Brussels during May 2010.

Further information

The conference website can be found at: <http://www.scienceagainstopoverty.es/Publico/Home/index.aspx>

European biomass conference and exhibition

The eighteenth European Biomass Conference and Exhibition will be held in Lyon (France) from 3 to 7 May 2010. The Conference is the leading platform for the world's biomass specialists. The event will feature: plenary lectures focusing on the state-of-the-art in biomass technologies; oral and poster presentations on research, development, demonstration and commercial projects; an exhibition of biomass products, utilisation and conversion technologies; workshops and scientific tours; and a social programme.

The subjects to be covered at the event include: biomass resources; biomass conversion to heat, electricity, and bio-products; fuel from biomass; industrial demonstration and market implementation; policies; and ensuring sustainability. Registration for the conference is now open.

Further information

Detailed information about conference is available from the Biomass Conference website at: <http://sysconf.conference-biomass.com>

EU sustainable energy week

The 2010 EU Sustainable Energy Week (EUSEW) will be held in Brussels from 22 to 26 March 2010. EUSEW is the reference event for sustainable issues in Europe. It forms part of the Sustainable Energy Europe Campaign which is an EC initiative launched in 2005. The campaign contributes to achieving the EU's energy policy targets within the fields of renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, clean transport and alternative fuels.

The EU Sustainable Energy Week will feature a series of events, including a high-level intelligent energy policy conference, the presentation of the Sustainable Energy Europe Award, conferences and workshops focussed on energy efficiency and renewables, and EU funding and networking seminars.

Further information

Further details and registration are available from the European Sustainable Energy Week Website at: <http://www.eusew.eu>

New Publications and Online Resources

New EC Public Health website launched

The EC launched its new Public Health Website in January. The website is now clearly structured around eight main themes: steering EU public health; ensuring health security; taking action against diseases; health in the society; fostering good health; improving healthcare, indicators and data; and risk assessment. Around 150 new texts have been added as part of the launch and the existing 14,000 public health related documents have been allocated according to their thematic area.

Updated sections include a policy summary on health security in the European Union, a new information sheet on 'Data on the Healthy Life Years in the European Union' and new studies and reports in the section 'EU-compass for Action on Mental Health and Well-being'.

Further information

The new Public Health website is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/health/index_en.htm

Twenty years of cultural heritage research

The EC has produced a publication highlighting over twenty years of research in the area of cultural heritage. 'Preserving our Heritage, Improving our Environment' consists of two volumes. The first of these gives an overview of activities in this area, while the second comprises synopses of projects funded under FP5 and FP6 in eight different areas, including: atmospheric pollution and climate

change impacts for cultural assets; damage and restoration of monuments and historical buildings and industrial heritage; novel microbiological tools for conservation; and fostering integration of cultural heritage in the urban/rural setting, monitoring and archaeology.

The overview section documents how the EU's commitment to co-operation in this field has developed since the Framework Programme started supporting research on cultural heritage in 1986. Milestones identified include the 1993 EC Treaty, which placed culture firmly within the Community's remit, and the 2007 Communication to 'promote a European Agenda for Culture in a Globalising World'. It concentrates on the priorities of FP5 and FP6, implemented between 1999 and 2007, before concluding with a brief section outlining the approach taken in FP7, in which cultural heritage projects are largely funded through the Environment Theme of the Co-operation Specific Programme.

Further information

Both volumes of "Preserving our Heritage, Improving our Environment" are available from: http://ec.europa.eu/research/environment/index_en.cfm?pg=publications

Science in Society report on emerging trends

The EC has recently published a report from the Monitoring Activities of Science and Society in Europe (MASIS) expert group, which identifies a number of emerging trends relating to issues such as the place of science in society, social actors as stakeholders and science communication. The report is addressed to policymakers and researchers and is designed to contribute to the development of the European Research Area (ERA).

The overarching trend highlighted by the report is the increasing re-contextualisation of institutions and practitioners of science within society, with connected issues identified including a growing interest in strategic research, greater citizen involvement and a greater level of reflection within the science community on its role and impact. The report also examines the role of governance in this context, looking at the arguments surrounding issues such as ethics and the impositions of codes of conduct. The continued under-representation of women in many areas of science and the decline in numbers of talented young people choosing science careers are noted with concern, while the development of interactive modes of science communication using the internet is also identified as an issue requiring attention.

Further information

The full report is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/the-masis-report_en.pdf

EC policy review of corporate social responsibility projects

The EC recently published a policy review examining the results of socio-economic research projects on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funded under FP6. The publication, entitled 'Towards Greater Responsibility – Conclusions of EU-funded Research' looks at the outcomes of the projects with a view to developing a general concept of Corporate Social Responsibility, defined in the report as "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operation and in their interactions with stakeholders." It also aims to develop specific EU Policy in this area, by identifying policy recommendations made in the projects and finding policy gaps at a European level.

The report names four areas which would merit exploration through research in the future: the mainstreaming of CSR in firms' strategic processes including SMEs; the linkage between CSR and innovation; performance and impact indicators; and global supply chain management.

Further information

The full report is available from: http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/policy-review_en.html

CORDIS

CORDIS is the official Community Research and Development Information Service for science, research and innovation provided by the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. The interactive website offers daily news and detailed information on the EU's research programmes.

URL: <http://cordis.europa.eu>

IGLO Project Search

The IGLO Project Service offers a forum for publishing and disseminating details of proposed FP7 projects and/or research skills offered. The service enables researchers to find contacts and partners within the international research community as well as contributing to the mobilisation of a critical mass of researchers in a specific research area.

URL: <http://www.iglortd.org>

EUR-LEX (Official Journal C and L)

This website provides information on EU Law. It includes electronic copies of EU treaties and recent copies of the Official Journal of the European Communities (OJ). The OJ, published daily in 23 languages, consists of two related series: the L series (Legislation) and the C series (Information, notices and preparatory EU legislation), a supplement and an annex. EUR-LEX provides free access to the C and L series of the Official Journal for a period of 45 days following publication. (The OJ issue with the Euro exchange rates (L 359, 31/12/1998) is permanently available in PDF format on EUR-LEX).

URL: EUR-LEX <http://www.europa.eu/eur-lex>

Official Journals C and L <http://www.europa.eu/eur-lex/en/oj>

Treaty of Amsterdam <http://www.europa.eu/eur-lex/en/treaties>

EUROPA

EUROPA is the official EU server. It contains links to the EP, the European Council, the EC and other EU institutions and contains information on EU policies listed by subject area.

URL: <http://www.europa.eu>

RAPID

RAPID is a database giving a daily view of the activities of the EU as presented by the institutions in their press releases.

EC Press Releases are available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid>

cubed... from the British Council

cubed, the monthly webzine from the British Council discusses the science that's shaping our society and bringing a new dimension to everyday life. It brings the latest innovations in fashion and music, design and digital, film and life, and the products and ideas that will change our world.

Visit: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/science-cubed.htm>

Talking Science

Created by the British Council, the Talking Science website provides up-to-date information and links to the latest ideas in science communication in the UK: www.britishcouncil.org/talkingscience

GLOSSARY

Capacities

Capacities is the fourth Specific Programme of FP7 and is worth over €4 billion from 2007 to 2013. It aims to enhance research capacities throughout Europe and ensure their optimal use. It is made up of the following broad areas: Research Infrastructures; Research for the Benefit of SMEs; Regions of Knowledge; Research Potential for the Benefit of Convergence Regions; Science in Society; Support to Coherent Development of Research Policies; and International Co-operation.

<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/capacities>

CIP

The Competitiveness and Innovation Programme will run from 2007 to 2013. With a budget of €3.6 billion, it is made up of three Specific Programmes: the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme; the ICT Policy Support Programme; and the Intelligent Energy-Europe Programme

<http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/cip>

Co-operation

Co-operation is the first Specific Programme of FP7. Worth over €30 billion between 2007 and 2013, it is made up of ten thematic areas: Health; Food, Agriculture, Fisheries and Biotechnology; Information Communications Technology (ICT); Nanosciences, Nanomaterials, Materials and New Production Technologies; Energy; Environment; Transport; Socio-economic Sciences and the Humanities; Space; and Security.

<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/co-operation>

COST

European Co-operation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research is a framework for scientific and technical co-operation, allowing the co-ordination of national research on a European level.

<http://www.cost.esf.org>

'Council'

'Council' refers to the 'Council of Ministers', the principal decision-making body within the European Union. It has both executive and legislative powers, the latter in some cases exercised jointly with the EP (co-decision procedure). The Council is composed of one representative at ministerial level from each member state. Which ministers attend each Council meeting varies according to the subject discussed, e.g. the Minister of Science in the UK attends the Research Council.

http://consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/showPage.ASP?lang=en

EC

The EC - made up of 27 commissioners nominated by the member states - both initiates proposals for EU legislation and executes EU policies and actions.

<http://ec.europa.eu>

EP

The European Parliament is made up of elected representatives (MEPs) from all the member states. It shares decision-making power with the European Council in a number of areas, including research and education.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/default_en.htm

ERA

European Research Area. On 18 January 2000 the EC issued a communication entitled 'Towards a European Research Area' that proposed ways in which research in Europe could be more effectively organised and co-ordinated.

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/era>

ERC

The European Research Council, which is the Ideas Specific Programme of FP7, is worth over €7 billion from 2007 to 2013. New to the Framework Programme, the ERC will fund investigator-led, frontier research. It consists of two grant schemes, the Starting Independent Researcher Grant and the Advanced Investigator Grant.

<http://erc.europa.eu>

ESA

The European Space Agency is responsible for designing and developing the European space programme. The Agency's projects are designed to find out more about the Earth, its immediate space environment, the solar system and the universe, as well as to develop satellite-based technologies and services, and to promote European industries.

<http://www.esa.int>

ESC

The European Economic and Social Committee is a consultative body made up of representatives of Europe's employers' organisations, trade unions, farmers, consumer groups and professional associations.

<http://eesc.europa.eu>

ESF

European Science Foundation

<http://www.esf.org>

ESF

The European Social Fund, part of the EU's Structural Funds

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf2000/index_en.html

ETP

European Technology Platforms are stakeholder groupings, led by industry, that help to define research and development priorities, timeframes and action plans on a number of strategically important issues.

http://ec.europa.eu/research/energy/nn/nn_rt/nn_rt_hlg/article_1262_en.htm

Euratom

The European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) was set up in 1957 and is legally separate from the European Community. Euratom will have €2.7 billion from FP7 to fund nuclear research and training activities between 2007 and 2011.

<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/euratom>

Eureka

Eureka is a Europe-wide network for industrial research and development.

<http://www.eureka.be>

FP (FP5, FP6, FP7)

The EU's Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development. The Fifth Framework Programme (FP5) was adopted in 1998 and ran until 2002, with FP6 then running from 2002 to 2006, and FP7 running from 2007 to 2013. The budget for FP7 is over €50 billion.

Further information on the thematic and horizontal programme composition of FP6 is available at:

<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp6>

Further information on FP7 can be found at: <http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7>

Green Paper

Green Papers are communications published by the EC on a specific policy area. Primarily, they are documents addressed to interested parties who are invited to participate in a process of consultation and debate. In some cases they provide an impetus for subsequent legislation.

ICPC

An International Co-operation Partner Country is an economically less developed country, which is not an EU member state or associated state. ICPC partners can participate in FP7 projects and receive funding.

Ideas

Ideas is the second Specific Programme of FP7 worth over €7 billion from 2007 to 2013. New to the Framework Programme, Ideas will fund investigator-led, frontier research. It is implemented through the European Research Council and consists of two grant schemes, the Starting Independent Researcher Grant and the Advanced Investigator Grant.

<http://erc.europa.eu>

ITRE

The European Parliament Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy (FP7)

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/itre_home_en.htm

JRC

The EC's Joint Research Centre acts as a scientific and technological laboratory in support of EU policies, with a range of institutes and research activities.

<http://www.jrc.cec.eu.int>

LLP

The Lifelong Learning Programme is made up of four pillars: the Comenius programme for pupils, teachers and schools; the Erasmus programme for students, scholars, professors and universities; the Leonardo da Vinci programme for apprentices, workers and employees; and the Grundtvig programme for adults and teachers and related organisations. There is also a transversal programme (for policy development, languages, information and communication technology) and the Jean Monet programme (dealing with issues relating to European integration, European institutions and associations in the fields of education and training).

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/en/llp/index_en.htm

MEDIA

The MEDIA Programme aims to strengthen the competitiveness of the European audiovisual industry.

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/avpolicy/media/index_en.html

NATO

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

<http://www.nato.int>

People

The third Specific Programme of FP7 is worth over €4 billion during the period from 2007 to 2013. Made up of the Marie Curie Actions, it aims to improve the quality of human resources in European research through training and trans-national mobility of researchers.

http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/people/home_en.html

RTD

Research and Technological Development

SICA

Specific International Co-operation Actions are FP7 call topics where a partner from an ICPC country has to be involved.

SME

Small and medium sized enterprises

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/enterprise_policy/sme_definition/index_en.htm

Specific Programme

FP7 is made up of seven Specific Programmes: Co-operation; Ideas (implemented through the European Research Council); People (the Marie Curie Actions); Capacities; the Joint Research Centre (JRC); Euratom and the JRC implementing Euratom.

SSH

Socio-economic Sciences and the Humanities is the eighth theme of the FP7 Co-operation Specific Programme.

Treaty of Amsterdam

The Treaty of Amsterdam was signed in October 1997 and entered into force on 1 May 1999.

<http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/en/treaties/index.htm>

UUK

Universities UK (formerly the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals)

<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk>

White Paper

White Papers are documents containing proposals for Community action in a specific area. They often follow a Green Paper.

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