

Session 6: Plenary Session

Title: An Insight into the EU's Policy and Programmes

Presenters: Dr A Mitsos, Director General for Research, European Commission
Mr D Coyne, Director of Education, DG for Education and Culture

Chair: H.E. Professor Senake Bandaranayake, Sri Lankan High Commissioner to India and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

Rapporteur: Svava Bjarnason, ACU

The Challenge of European Research (Dr Mitsos)

It is generally felt that there is a fragmented landscape in terms of European and global research which is expounded as the 'era of the knowledge society'. The EU research programme is only a small part of the global scene, so there is a 'fragmented landscape' in terms of the national public policies of member countries, privately funded programmes and such other meta organisation as also play a role. The links between the EU 'Framework Programme' and the activities of member states is not sufficiently advanced. The aim therefore is to create the European Research Area – to link together national and (European) Community efforts and integrate policies into a coherent body. This has been welcomed by member states and parliaments and as a result the Commission presented the new framework programme for 2002 to 2006.

New elements include, for example, a concentration of efforts and the creation of 'European added value' – improving links with policies and schemes of national and regional authorities and other European actors. The budget proposed for the new programme will have 17.5 billion euros, which is approximately 4% of the Community budget and reflects approximately 9% increase in real terms. This is the highest area of expenditure that does not go directly through the member states.

The decision to concentrate efforts presents tensions that have to be resolved, however. These include, for instance:

- present priorities versus future needs
- basic research versus applied
- industrial competitiveness versus other EU policies
- established centres versus new teams

Any decision to concentrate is necessarily a political decision and will lead to the exclusion of a number of important areas.

The objective in this new framework programme is not simply to fund new research but rather to create an EU Research Area, to have a first step toward a European Research Policy, and to have a new way of adding coherence to the various national programmes.

*For a general description of the various elements and sums of money available please refer to his slide presentation. **KS please can you create a link?***

Discussion

How can the developing countries participate? Dr Mitsos would like to see more flexibility in putting money into the universities that have experience in particular areas. The issue of 'foot and mouth' disease was raised as an example of where African universities, by virtue of having had to deal with it over a number of years, have far more research experience than many European universities - yet none of the afflicted governments looked to Africa for advice or expertise in this area.

Contributors asked why the EU's application forms were so very long and complex and whether there were other ways to access the funds. There was a call for the forms to be more transparent and accessible. Dr Mitsos responded by saying that if the new changes are implemented they will no longer have to fill in the forms as the new instruments will not be based on funding of each particular input, but will be based on a global subsidy to cover a percentage of the total funding. Recipients will not be required to explain how each cent is spent, but will need to show the total budget has been spent appropriately.

As a general policy, the EU is keen to bring into its programmes the best researchers in the world and not just those in the EU member states. They are also developing Fellowships specifically with a view to attracting top researchers from non-EU countries to come to the EU.

The European Union and Education (Mr Coyne)

In 1987 the EU launched the Erasmus programme as there was a feeling that education needed to look more widely than national borders. They felt that student and faculty exchanges would lead to sharing of good practice and quality enhancement. At that point, inter- and trans-national education was dominated by France, Germany and the UK and it was felt that there should be some system to facilitate the movement of students and faculty through some concrete expression of the 'European ideal'. These activities have been concentrated around three main areas: inter-university co-operation; student and staff mobility; and thematic networks.

Mr Coyne went on to describe the developments of the Erasmus programme over the past decade-plus, as well as the TEMPUS programme. In his closing section he suggested that it should be relatively straightforward to involve non-EU countries in these programme - but the will to do so needs yet to be developed.

*Please refer to the full text of his presentation for further details of the programmes.
KS can you please create a link?*

Discussion Points

- With the exception of the thematic networks, the programmes are not discipline specific – the activities that are funded can come from any area and there is no requirement on application to relate specifically to science and research.

- There are no specific programmes relating to literacy as it is the position of each of the Member States that basic literacy is addressed at the school levels.
- The EU does not accredit courses as accreditation is organised in different countries in different ways. Because it is not undertaken at the EU level they have to rely on the institutions themselves to determine with whom they will partner to ensure equitable quality and recognition.
- The EU does not have a policy on the ‘intellectual property’ of shared research when academics are on exchange. This is left to the research teams to determine for themselves - but they are urged to do so at the outset of any exchange.
- There is a specific element of the programme called ‘Minerva’ that supports trans-national projects around the development of curricula and teacher training issues.