



EUROPEAN SCIENCE & RESEARCH NEWS

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European science & research news

Agreement on FP7 budget 'within reach'

While the overall EU budget for 2007-2013 was agreed on 4 April (see below), the final budget of the Seventh Framework Programme on Research and Development (FP7) which will run from 2007-2013 is still being finalised. However, on 21 April the Austrian Presidency announced that the allocation of **54 billion Euro** for the budget of FP7 was within reach. It is expected that EU member states will agree on this figure in June. If agreed, the distribution of the FP7 budget under its four headings will be as follows:

- Cooperation (large-scale transnational research projects): 32 billion Euro
- Ideas (projects funded by the European Research Council): 7.5 billion Euro
- People (mobility programmes such as Marie Curie Actions): 5 billion Euro
- Capacities (SMEs, research infrastructure): 4.2 billion Euro

For more information on the FP7 budget see: <http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/>

European Research Council reveals its strategy

On 28 April 2006, the Scientific Council of the new European Research Council (ERC) published its outline strategy for the launch of the ERC. During its start-up phase the ERC will give priority to supporting the careers of excellent independent researchers who are at the stage of establishing their first research team or pursuing their own independent research (the ERC Starting Independent Research Grant Scheme). Grants under this scheme will receive about 1/3 of the ERC's annual budget (300-350 million Euro per year). Another funding stream with a focus on researchers at later career stages will be established in due course. Commissioner Potočník stated that he will do everything he can to defend the ERC's budget (1 billion Euro proposed per year over seven years) which has not yet been finally decided. The ERC will be in operation from the start of FP7 in January 2007.

For more information on the ERC and its strategy notes see: http://europa.eu.int/erc/index_en.cfm

UK Government announces changes to research funding system

In his 2006 budget speech UK Chancellor Gordon Brown announced a "radical simplification of the research funding system". A treasury report setting out the Chancellor's ten-year-strategy for science published in late March did not rule out that the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), a mechanism to distribute funding to universities on the basis of research excellence, could be dropped "if an alternative system is agreed and widely supported". The Government will consult on the plans over the next few months, but has stated that its preferred option would be a metrics-based scheme focusing on research income and citations. Other proposed changes include merging the budgets of the Medical Research Council and of the Department of Health, as well as linking the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils with the research facilities run by the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council. The announcements - especially concerning the RAE - have caused alarm in universities (particularly in the arts, humanities and social sciences) which fear that they will be losing out on research funding. Source: The Times Higher Education Supplement, 24 & 31 March 2006

France launches six key technology projects

French President Chirac has announced funding for six new large technology projects aimed at boosting France's industry. Among the projects which will receive funding from France's new industrial innovation agency (AII) are 'Quaero', a multimedia search engine envisaged to rival market giants such as Google; NeoVal, an ultra-light train; and BioHub, a method to produce plastics from starch. Source: <http://www.cordis.eu.int>

New statistics for women in science in Europe

The European Commission has published figures on the participation of women in science, confirming that numbers are increasing but that a significant gender imbalance persists. While female participation in research is generally low in the EU, women are even more underrepresented in the private sector (18%) than in the public (35%). For more information on "She Figures 2006" see <http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/women-science>

EU policy developments affecting science & research

EU budget for 2007-2013 finally agreed

On 4 April a deal was reached in the tripartite negotiations between the European Council (represented through the Austrian Presidency), the European Commission and the European Parliament on the level of funding for the EU's

Financial Perspectives for 2007-2013. The deal ended an earlier deadlock which had emerged as the European Parliament rejected the compromise reached by Heads of State in December (see earlier reports). As a result 4 billion Euro have been added to political priorities and an additional 2.5 billion Euro have been mobilised by the European Investment Bank (EIB) for reaching the Lisbon objectives. The overall ceiling for the EU's budget for 2007-2013 has been increased from 862.4 billion Euro to 864.4 billion Euro, as compared to December. An extra 2.1 billion Euro has been allocated under the heading 'Competitiveness for growth', namely:

- 300 million Euro for Research and Development
- 800 million Euro for Lifelong Learning (with 300 million for the Erasmus student mobility programme)
- 400 million Euro for Competitiveness and Innovation
- 500 million Euro for Trans-European Networks (TENs)
- 100 million Euro for the Social Agenda

For more information on the EU's budget see: http://ec.europa.eu/financial_perspective/index_en.htm

European Commission calls for reform of university system in Europe

On 10 May EU Education Commissioner Figel and Research Commissioner Potočnik jointly presented a Communication by the European Commission calling on EU Member States to press on with the modernisation of Europe's universities. The aim is to increase the contribution of European universities to the Lisbon agenda for more growth and more and better jobs. The Communication identifies nine areas for immediate, in-depth and coordinated change: from the way in which university systems are regulated and managed, to the ways in which universities are governed. The recommendations cover all aspects of Europe's universities: delivery of education, research activities and technology transfer/innovation.

For more information see: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/lisbon_en.html

EU leaders give their backing to European Commission's relaunched Lisbon agenda

European Heads of State endorsed the European Commission's proposal to address four priority areas in order to strengthen Europe's competitiveness over the next 18 months: investments in knowledge and innovation; unlocking business potential (particularly in SMEs); increasing employment opportunities; and, creating environmentally stable growth. In terms of increasing investments in knowledge and innovation, the Council welcomed the setting of national targets for research and development and urged Member States to continue to work towards the three percent target. It also noted the findings of the Aho report on building a more innovative Europe, and invited the Commission to develop a 'broad-based innovation strategy for Europe' based on the report.

The Council Conclusions can be accessed on: http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/pdf

For further information on the Growth and Jobs strategy see: http://europa.eu.int/growthandjobs/index_en.htm

Plans for European Institute of Technology agreed among criticism

On 23 March the European Council endorsed the establishment of a European 'flagship' Institute of Technology (EIT) in the form of a network of existing institutions, rather than on a new or existing *single* campus. However, some European Heads of State have expressed reservations about the plan which had been announced in February. The Council asked the European Commission to come up with a concrete proposal (including operational and financial details) by July 2006. At the same time key higher education and research associations (such as EUA and EURAB) and universities across Europe continue to criticise the proposal. Background report available upon request.

Developments in thematic areas of potential relevance for Australia

Report warns Europe over lack of nano-patents

A report by a leading firm of patent and trademark attorneys warns that Europe is in danger of 'missing the boat' on the commercial returns of nanotechnology, as the number of patent applications remain significantly below those from the US and Asia. The report states that the number of patent applications in Europe is not matching the substantial investment in research in the fields of nanoelectronics, nanoenergy and nanotechnology in health and personal care. Source: <http://www.eubusiness.com/Rd/patents.2006-05-10t>

World-largest CO2 capture pilot plant inaugurated in Denmark

The world's largest pilot plant for capture of carbon dioxide (CO₂) from conventional power plants has been inaugurated at the Elsam power stations near Esbjerg in Denmark. It is the result of research carried out under the EU Framework Programme. Source: Bulletin Quotidien Europe No. 9155, 21 March 2006

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