

**HRK German Rectors' Conference
Information Day for the Heads of German Universities
12-13 January 2006 (KOWI & EUA, Brussels)
“Current Developments in the European Research and Higher Education Area”**

**Summary of the Presentation by Dr. John H Smith, Deputy Secretary-General,
European University Association (EUA)**

**“The Activities of the EUA as Representation of European Universities in particular
in regard to the 7th Framework Programme”.**

The EUA's work in relation to the future development of EU Research Framework Programme needed to be viewed within the context of the full range of its activities (i.e. European Higher Education Development, Bologna process, TRENDS reports, the International Evaluation Programme and other Membership activities). EUA activities in the area of research policy have evolved primarily through focusing attention on doctoral programmes, the “3rd Cycle of the Bologna Process” and the pivotal position of doctoral training in linking the development of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. Attention was drawn to the recent publication of the report of the EUA project on “Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society”.

The conduct of the Doctoral Programme project illustrated the key approach adopted by the EUA – to involve its membership actively in its projects and hence link institutional practice and experience with the development of its European policy positions. Such strong linkage between its membership and its policy development enabled the EUA to speak effectively as an independent voice for the university sector in the European policy debate. The Doctoral programme project was being followed-up in two parallel activities (i) Bologna Follow-Up Group Activities on the 3rd Cycle – a series of seminars/conference exploring further the Salzburg Conference “ten basic principles”- the results of which would be reported to the Spring 2007 Inter-Ministerial Conference, and (ii) a DG Research funded Special Support Action, entitled “DOCAREERS”, which focussed on doctoral training needs in relation to changing labour markets, particularly in relation to careers in industrial/ business enterprises.

With respect to its broader work on EU Research Framework Programme policy development, the EUA had established in 2005 three Working Groups to examine the European Commission's proposals for FP7 in areas of key importance to the university sector i.e. WG1-Support for Basic Research/European Research Council; WG2-Mobility, Research Training and Careers (Marie Curie Actions); WG3-Simplification of Funding Mechanisms and Conditions to Strengthen University Cooperation. Working Group members were nominated by the National Rector's Conferences and a high level of participation and input has been achieved with a valuable dialogue taking place with senior European Commission officials on the Working Groups' reports and viewpoints on the FP7 proposals.

The **main issues** raised on key aspects of the FP7 proposal of central concern to the EUA membership were as follows:

European Research Council

On the **Scientific Council**, the EUA is approaching the Chairman to establish an early dialogue with the Council, through participation in a “User Forum” or whatever consultation method is chosen. The EUA will wish to provide advice on the best mechanisms through which to gain visibility for the ERC’s “calls for proposals” and engage fully universities in the application process, peer review, evaluation and grant procedures.

On the proposed **Executive Agency**, it is felt to be important for the EUA to take a position in the present debate on whether the alternative option of establishing the ERC as a specific structure under Article 171 would be more appropriate. It is felt that to proceed with Article 171 procedure would be likely to cause a serious delay to the full launching of the ERC beyond January 2007 (the start-date for FP7). Furthermore, there were serious grounds for concern that the establishment of an ERC under Article 171 procedure would run the serious risk of bringing “juste retour” considerations into play, and hence undermine the principles of scientific autonomy and efficiency on which the case for the ERC has been built

On the **staffing** of the Executive Agency, EUA would argue strongly for the funding of a secondment mechanism for university financial and administrative personnel to work within the new Executive Agency for fixed periods. This was an issue which EUA could valuably take up with National Rectors’ Conferences to raise at the national and regional level.

Salary remuneration for recipients of ERC grants across Europe was recognised to be a difficult issue. European Commission should seek to find the most equitable solutions, which could, for example, include the identification and calculation of “standard” salary categories for senior and younger researchers with supplementary payments to reflect local conditions.

On the **ERC budget**, EUA would continue to mount a strong position on the need for an ERC with a budget as close as possible to the originally proposed scale of €1.5 Billion per year to be fully launched from January 2007. EUA will monitor closely and maintain its position defending a substantial budget for an ERC as the debate on the modified FP7 budget proposal evolves in the coming weeks/months.

Marie Curie Actions

EUA will wish to maintain a dialogue with the European Commission to provide advice from the university perspective on the **criteria for the assessment of national programmes** bidding for co-funding under the proposed FP7 Marie Curie Individual Fellowship scheme. It is felt to be essential that national programmes must be required to

demonstrate the “European added-value” of the addition of Marie Curie fellowships to their activities. Otherwise, there was a considerable risk that the MC fellowships would be used to “top-up” national programmes – as a substitution for national funds.

EUA will press for clarification of **the proportion of funds** to be allocated to the two proposed streams, i.e. (i) the continuation of the present European level competition managed by the European Commission, and (ii) the proposed scheme to co-fund national programmes on a competitive basis. The preference would be for the new co-funding arrangements to be launched on a pilot basis with a review of the operation of the criteria for assessment of the national programmes and their progress in meeting the goals of the scheme.

On **Industry/Academia partnerships**, it is felt to be important that EUA argues for the opening-up of the term “industry” beyond manufacturing industry to include business, legal, financial and other professional services in the health sector, insurance etc.

EUA will argue that the success of Marie Curie Actions “Reintegration Fellowships for returning scientists to New Member States” will depend upon the complementary use of **EU Structural Funds** for strengthening science and technology infrastructure.

Simplification of FP7 Procedures – “The Rules of Participation”

A valuable link had been achieved between the EUA FP7 Working Group 3 on Simplification of Funding Mechanisms and EUA involvement in the work of the “Sounding Board” addressing this issue established by the EU Research Commissioner, J. Potocnik. It is felt that there is a specific need to improve financial support for indirect costs of research projects which were crucial to the future sustainability of university research costs, and the need to move towards a “full research costs” funding model. The European Commission’s proposal for the FP7 “Rules of Participation” have just been published and EUA will be examining them carefully and presenting viewpoints from the university sector.

In an initiative related to FP7 development, EUA will be launching in 2006 a wider consultation on the further development of the “**Responsible Partnering**” guidelines and to seek to promote their broad implementation. This follows upon the publication in 2005 of the “Responsible Partnering” guidelines as a voluntary code of conduct reflecting established good practices on collaborative research between universities and industry. The “Responsible Partnering” initiative is being developed as a joint activity of four organizations, EUA, EIRMA (European Industrial Research Management Association), EARTO (European Association of Research and Technology Organizations) and ProTon Europe (European Network of Knowledge Transfer Offices linked to Universities and Public Research Organizations).

EUA will be further developing its policy positions/input on FP7 through a Research Working Group chaired by EUA President, Professor Georg Winckler.