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Executive Summary

The Commission suggests ways in which European performance may be strengthened in the field of basic research in order to play a full part within the European Research Area

Enquiries

Chris Hale/
Davina Blake

Tel

020 7419 5462

Fax

020 7383 4236

Email davina.blake@UniversitiesUK.ac.uk

@UniversitiesUK.ac.uk

Keywords

Europe, Research

16 February 2004

European Commission Policy Document: Europe and Basic Research

1. The attached Communication from the European Commission focuses on an important debate which is taking place in Europe today on the subject of basic research, the issues involved and the best way of dealing with them at European level.

An electronic version of this document is available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/secretariat_general/regdoc/liste.cfm?CL=en

Background

2. The debate on basic research has so far essentially taken place within the scientific community, in the form of thinking about the need for a "Basic Research Fund" and a "European Research Council". The European Commission, in a move which has been supported by the Parliament, now seeks to contribute to this debate and help launch discussion at the political level.

Definition of basic research

3. Basic research is defined by the Commission as research 'with no direct link to a given application and if not exclusively, in any case and above all with the objective of progressing knowledge'.

The Commission considers that basic research is likely to remain a central feature of the activities and tasks undertaken by universities.

Objectives

4. The objectives of this policy document are three-fold:

- To make a broad analysis of the basic research situation in Europe and at a European level, through highlighting the related issues, as well as the European strengths and weaknesses in this field
- To clarify and elaborate upon various points and issues raised during the debate
- To suggest ways in which European performance may be strengthened in the field of basic research and to provide it with sufficient resources to play a full part within the European Research Area.

Chief Executive
Baroness Warwick

Europe Unit
Universities UK
Woburn House
20 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9HQ

Tel +44 (0)20 7419 4111
Fax +44 (0)20 7388 8649
Email info@UniversitiesUK.ac.uk

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Proposals

5. The Commission recognises the need to:

- Introduce a European level support mechanism for research projects
- Strengthen European support for research infrastructures and support the creation of centers of excellence in the enlarged Union
- Increase support for the development of human resources, researcher training and the development of careers in science
- Support collaboration and networking
- Improve the coordination of national activities, policies and programmes

Next Steps

6. This policy discussion will feed into the proposals for a European Research Council. A second communication specifically on the ERC is expected to follow sometime in May 2004. We will continue to keep members informed of developments and look forward to being fully involved in ongoing discussion around the creation of the ERC, and responding to future formal consultation. We will be in touch with members in due course to seek their views.

16 February 2004

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