



Welcome to the second ever ERA-LEARN newsletter, where we update you on ERA-LEARN and ERA-NET activities. ERA-NETs serve to encourage EU member states and other potential partner countries to combine their existing research and development resources on projects where their common interests intersect.

ERA-LEARN continues to facilitate the exchange of ideas and good practice between ERA-NETs. On November 8th and 9th, 2011, ERA-LEARN ran training sessions and workshops in Brussels.

The training session “Implementing ERA-NETs” was aimed particularly at new ERA-NET coordinators and participants and focused on the practical implementation of joint calls. Through training sessions, attendees were introduced to the ERA-LEARN online toolbox, which was practically demonstrated during group sessions. This toolbox is based on best practices and experiences from ERA-NETs in FP6 and FP7.

During group work, attendees were asked to plan a fictional ERA-NET call, making sure to include topic specs, timeline of call, evaluation, funding and monitoring. The ERA-LEARN toolbox facilitates ERA-NETs in mapping programmes and scientific capabilities,

implementing calls and conducting internal reviews. The tools can be accessed through the online platform NETWATCH.

A work shop focusing on cost-benefit analysis was held, addressing ERA-NET coordinators and other interested parties, with a view to benchmark or improve efforts and outcome. Participants in this workshop brought along data on efforts and call outcome of at least one established ERA-NET; this data was then shared and discussed among participants during the session.

Christian Listbarth and Peter Hahn presented a practical approach to effort, cost and performance indicators of ERA-NETs, before closing with a discussion on whether there is a future for benchmarking of ERA-NETs.

A workshop entitled “Experience of Member States and Associated Countries with the ERA-NET instrument” focused on the ERA-LEARN informal

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analysis of the experiences of member and associative states with the ERA-NET setup and the emerging Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs).

The shift of topic focus in moving from the FP6 bottom-up approach to FP7 top-down selection of topics by the European Commission was examined and the relevance of merging of multiple ERA-NETs in related areas was discussed. High-level analysis was presented of boundary conditions and environmental factors influencing the number of projects and funding levels achieved across existing ERA-NETs.

The ERA-LEARN project facilitates learning among national and regional funding organisations in order to optimise the performance of their ERA-NET activities. The ERA-LEARN Toolbox is available at <http://netwatch.jrc.ec.europa.eu/nw/index.cfm/static/eralearn/eralearn.html>

The NETWATCH portal has been upgraded, with improved accuracy and speed of publication of information. Network coordinators can now directly update network and call information by accessing a restricted area via the public site. While information can be updated at any time, comprehensive twice yearly information updates ensure that the information is as complete as possible for the scheduled mapping and monitoring of ERA-NETs.

Following an information update in January 2011 a 'Mapping and Monitoring' report is now available to compare the information collected with that from the mapping in 2010. In 2011 the scope was increased to include Article 185s. In both years France and Germany appear as the leading participants and the most frequent coordinators of networks. The most common type of participating organisations continued to be national research funders, but participation by international organisations increased in 2011. The design and implementation of joint calls remained of great importance and the proportion of active networks launching joint calls increased from 49% to 66% between 2010 and 2011.



ERA-NET Plus

In other news, the Commission has published a modified annex to the grant agreement for ERA-NET Plus actions, as part of their simplification of FP7. The calculation of the EU contribution and the reporting will now only be based on the costs defining the ERA-NET Plus contribution – the costs for the funding of selected transnational projects. The result is a simplified reporting procedure. No further reporting on any coordination or management costs is required. The sole cost the partners must report on is the public funding they have spent on projects that have been selected and funded. An updated background document on ERA-NET Plus, together with the new Annex II, is available on cordis: http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/coordination/library_en.html

Horizon 2020 and ERA-NET

The European Commission proposal for Horizon 2020 has been published and is currently under discussion. It is expected to be adopted in 2013 with the launch of first Calls in 2014. Horizon 2020 currently proposes to contribute to the strengthening of public-public partnerships where actions at regional, national or international level are jointly implemented within the European Union. Special attention is to be devoted to joint programming initiatives between Member States.

Horizon 2020 is to support approaches aimed at pooling and leveraging other sources of funding through a simplified ERA-NET scheme. It will provide support from coordination of national programmes up to the co-funding of joint calls for proposals. A clear set of criteria for joint programmes and joint

undertakings will, it is proposed, enable a stronger set of initiatives, taking into account the experience and evaluations under FP7 as well as the revisions to the Financial Regulations.

Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs) allow member states band together to do some heavy lifting and deal with the big societal challenges. Horizon 2020 will aid JPIs in the development of their strategic research agendas. Moreover, where the challenge addressed by a JPI is in line with the priorities of Horizon 2020, ERA-NET or co-funding may be used to provide further support.

With the aim to achieve the greatest possible impact of Union funding, Horizon 2020 is to develop closer synergies, which may also take the form of public-public partnerships, with national and regional programmes that support research and innovation.

NEWLY FUNDED ERA-NETs 2011

ERA-NET NEURON II: Network of European Funding for Neuroscience Research

ERACAPS: ERA-NET for Coordinating Action in Plant Sciences (ERA-CAPS)

FORESTERRA: Enhancing FOrest REsearch in the MediTERRanean through improved coordination and integration

ANIHWA: Animal Health and Welfare

SUSFOOD: Sustainable Food

ERA-IB-2: ERA-Net for Industrial Biotechnology 2

ERASynBio: Development and Coordination of Synthetic Biology in the European Research Area

M-ERA.NET: From materials science and engineering to innovation for Europe

ERA-MIN: European Research Area - Network on the Industrial Handling of Raw Materials for European Industries

SAFÉRA: Coordination of European Research on Industrial Safety towards Smart and Sustainable Growth

Geothermal ERA NET: Geothermal ERA NET

Electromobility+: ERA-NET Plus on Electromobility

HERA JRP CE HERA: ERA-NET Plus on Joint Research Programme Cultural Encounters

Materials science and engineering are the unseen hands behind many of the advances in consumer and industrial technology that marks modern living.

After 2008 when ERA-NETS began to focus on themes, there was a splintering of topics and funding organizations became involved in multiple ERA-NETs, each with their own subtopic. This permitted partial overlap of activities and duplication of efforts.

M-ERA.NET offers a new path. This expansive consortium encompasses 37 partners, including 28 national organizations, covering all aspects of materials science and engineering. “We are now covering basic research and applied research, and so addressing the whole innovation chain,” says Dr Roland Brandenburg, who coordinates the new ERA-NET.

This broad street was purposely constructed and the plan is to stay flexible and cover emerging topics within the existing consortium. “The Commission allowed us to be as broad as possible to make sure we are not excluding anything that would be covered at a national level,” Brandenburg explains.

“We are looking to fund excellent projects that boost the European economy and society,” he says, “so that in the end we will have products and knowledge in relevant areas where there is a technological challenge for society.” The aim is to achieve annual spending of at least 35 million euro on core research projects, with each project perhaps receiving one million euro each, giving rise to around 50 projects each year.

“We are also setting up international cooperation systematically, and this is also something new. Especially the order of magnitude we are targeting,” says Brandenburg. International partners have jumped on board in past projects, but usually singly; in this case, the aim is to attract a number of countries outside Europe, with no limit set. “It will be interesting to see if we can find an arrangement with, for example, the Americans or the Koreans to fund transnational projects,” says Brandenburg.

The key is to demonstrate that there is joint benefit for all organizations that participate. It is all about building trust and ensuring that national efforts have an impact at a national level back in the original country, he adds. “I am now going to spend a lot of time building trust among network partners and set up structures for smooth networking.”

Targeting strategic programme cooperation at an international level M-ERA.NET will identify appropriate fields and relevant countries outside Europe. First contacts have been established with possible partners in Canada, the United States and Taiwan, among other countries, who have already expressed expressed a concrete interest.

Dr Roland Brandenburg





M-ERA.NET kicked-off 27-28 February in London and is already busy organizing a first joint call, which will probably be launched around September 2012. A strategic programming policy has been set up to systematically integrate national and regional interests on materials science and engineering with European needs and global challenges. Experts will analyse national and regional programme priorities as well as roadmaps published for example by relevant networks such as European technology platforms. The plan is to identify attractive core topics, which will attract many excellent proposals. A comprehensive monitoring policy will

be established including assessment of the overall impact of the project against the defined success criteria, highlighting options for future development.

“At the end of the four years, we should have identified the best way for maintaining our network. If it is a positive experience, people will have some interest in continuing joint activities,” says Brandenburg.

www.m-era.net

It is critical that our brain keeps in proper working order, something we can easily take for granted, yet clinical disorders involving the brain are all too common and costly. A recent analysis estimated total costs related to brain disorders in Europe at 386 billion euro per year. The study reaffirmed that brain disorders are a key element in total direct and indirect health care costs, but behind the cost figures are pain and burden for the person affected and their family members.

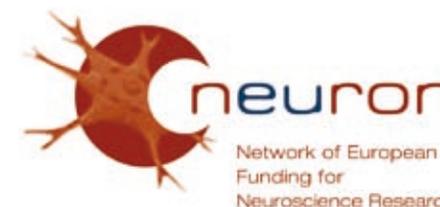
NEURON seeks to address this disease burden and support research in a way which will allow patients reap the rewards. Much funding is already directed to this area from funding organisations all over Europe, says Dr Marlies Dorlöchter, so “we thought that coordinating that funding would be a good thing to do.” Dorlöchter is a senior programme manager who coordinates the Network of European Funding for Neuroscience Research (NEURON) project.

“We are funding more than 40 consortia so far,” says Dorlöchter, with each consortium consisting typically of three to five research groups. Each call sees 40 to 45 research groups funded in areas such as mental disorders, cerebrovascular diseases and neurodegenerative diseases from across Europe, Israel and Canada.

NEURON began a second funding phase on January 1st this year, following on from a successful first run out from 2007 to the end of 2011. Twenty-one ministries and funding organisations from 16 countries have hooked up for this ERA-NET, and the markers laid down during the first phase have set lofty standards.

Dorlöchter has been particularly pleased with the positive feedback from the scientific community, who like the way the calls are designed and the minimal amount of bureaucracy involved. In October, during the final NEURON meeting in Berlin, neurodegeneration researchers presented their work and Dorlöchter recalls how impressed she was by the volume of published papers and the patents filed. “They had tens of papers in the highest impact journals – *Nature*, *Science*, *Lancet*, and so on. That was really amazing and clearly exceeded my expectations,” she adds. “We are really funding the best research groups across Europe.”

Given the experiences of NEURON, Dorlöchter has advice for new ERA-NETs. The initial launch of a joint transnational call for proposals takes dedication and enthusiasm, she says, and “there is a lot of small but very important things that need to be thought about and need to be discussed with partners.” She recommends that you be democratic in your structure and talk with partners.





“The vocabulary about mutual trust and understanding is not just empty talk. It is very important for ERA-NETs. If you trust your partners, then even if something goes wrong, it is relatively easy to manage,” she explains, “and a lot of hurdles can be overcome.” Also, it has helped NEURON that it encompasses an important and recognised research area. “Many European funding organisations have this research area in their portfolios,” which she says is crucial because “only then will you get the national support that is necessary for the work of an ERA-NET.”

Dorlöchter’s role as coordinator, on behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, has been a rewarding experience. Initially it takes commitment and hard grind to put the network together, but now that it is running smoothly the work is more distributed among the partners and it’s a very stable network, says Dorlöchter, who has a neuroscience research background from her university career and now works as a scientific officer at the Project Management Agency in the German Aerospace Centre.

At that October meeting, the European Commission’s scientific officer made an unexpected request: “She asked if we had videotaped this discussion because the feedback was so positive and she wanted to have this tape, but unfortunately we hadn’t,” said Dorlöchter, laughing. They are hoping for a repeat episode at future meetings, however, with NEURON seeking to pick up more papers, patents and accolades during phase II.

JOINT PROGRAMMING NEWS

JPIs to Co Work has been launched to assist the Joint Programming Initiatives with implementation of Framework Conditions and common guidelines. The project is led by the Instituto de Salud Carlos III, Spain and includes the JPIs on Neurodegenerative diseases, Water challenge, Antimicrobial resistance, More Years Better Lives, Healthy Diet for a Healthy Life, Urban Europe and Climate knowledge.

The Annual Joint Programming Event 2011 took place in Brussels in November. The conference has become the major event for research funders and offered opportunities to discuss the latest policy thinking as regards Joint Programming of research and innovation in Europe and Public to Public Partnerships in general. The final report is available at: http://netwatch.jrc.ec.europa.eu/static/download/jpi_2011/FinalReport_JPevent%202011.pdf

The next Joint Programming Event will be hosted in Dublin, under the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Date for your diaries: 28 February – 1 March 2013 [exact date to be confirmed.]



PLATFORM – Building a new network

More than one-hundred ERA-NET actions have been launched, with over a thousand participants from over forty countries. Now a new network will embrace those ERA-NETs and JPIs which are specifically relevant to the knowledge-based bioeconomy: PLATFORM (Platform of Knowledge Based Bio-Economy relevant ERA-NETs).

By bringing together over 20 ERA-NETs and two JPIs and sharing views and best practices, PLATFORM will create a space for networking, set a stage for mutual learning and build a strategic forum where overarching strategic issues can be discussed.

“People can learn here what other ERA-NETs have already done and consider if they would like to do similar things. They can hear about best practices and get ideas about different ways of doing things,” explains network coordinator Dr Christine Bunthof.

With so many ERA-NETs alive and thriving, the European Commission looks out at a somewhat fragmented range of groups, but the new network will facilitate the commission and PARTNER participants relevant to the bio-economy. “It is a platform for a joint development of a common vision and action plan for the role and position of the ERA-NETs in the European research landscape,” Bunthof says.

The Commission can benefit because a joint framework of understanding can be constructed and it is an easy way for the Commission to be in dialogue with a whole group of ERA-NETs. National funding organisations will gain because this activity will be overarching and the discussions that take place can help national funders decide which ERA-NETs to take part in and which activities to join, taking into account expected impact and cost-benefit assessments, Bunthof adds.

Dr Christine Bunthof





A lively kickoff meeting in the Hague began with a cooking workshop, allowing participants cook and talk and socialise before getting down to the serious stuff. Bunthof describes the initial meetings as animated, with people actively participating in discussions. PLATFORM is especially interested in scanning the future under Horizon 2020: “We will be giving inputs and making suggestions and thinking about the ERA-NETs and perhaps other instruments, let’s say like public-public collaborations, in Horizon 2020,” says Bunthof.

The network also presents an ideal opportunity for two or more ERA-NETs to bond together and organise cooperative activities such as a joint call: “Contacts for that could be established and ideas developed in this platform,” says Bunthof. For now, a steering committee with a representative from each ERA-NET or JPI has been formed and has met to discuss the network. The first workshop is scheduled for June in Denmark and each project will send probably two delegates.

Bunthof hopes that the platform will strengthen the ability of projects and individuals to run their ERA-NETs in the bioeconomy, and she would like to invite

new ERA-NETs to sit around the table, as well as projects that are associated with but not directly involved in this sphere. Her aim is for the network to be as inclusive as possible; a website is planned along with an electronic forum for interested organisations and individuals.

Once around the table, PLATFORM members will look to issues of overarching strategic importance, such as the role of ERA-NETs, the synergy between national, intergovernmental and European research programming, and modalities for collaboration. The plan is to deliver a vision paper on the role of international public-public partnerships and the network will pitch in to a common strategic framework for EU research and innovation policy. “It is important to have the ERA-NETs look and evaluate their current position and see what they consider as their role and place and the possibilities in future,” says Bunthof; there are lots of practices to talk about and learn from.

The network will run for three years and two more workshops are planned after June. A newsletter is to be set up and Bunthof says she is happy to hear from people who would like to be placed on the mailing list. Please email christine.bunthof@wur.nl



ERA-LEARN Newsletters are available on-line at <http://netwatch.jrc.ec.europa.eu/nw/index.cfm/static/events.html>