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reverse the brain drain – p4

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Cern opens membership to the rest of the world

Cost and traditional rivalry means US unlikely to be full member

THE COUNCIL of the European particle physics laboratory, Cern, has voted to allow any country in the world to apply for full membership, consolidating its status as the leading international facility of its kind.

Cyprus, Israel, Serbia, Slovenia and Turkey have applied to become full members. But a 390-million-euro price tag is likely to deter the US from coming aboard.

Until now 'full' membership of Cern has been limited to European countries. The US, Russia and Japan have 'observer' status, which allows them to construct and run experiments, and attend—but not vote at—council meetings.

In an effort to recognise "increasing globalization in particle physics," the council ruled on 18 June to allow non-European members to join and also replaced observer status with a new category of associate member, costing 10 per cent of the price of full membership.

US researchers already represent the largest national group at Cern, making up 1,609 out of some 10,000 physicists and engineers. Even as an observer, the US has contributed more than 420m euros towards individual experiments, but does not pay for core funding of Cern or the Large Hadron Collider.

Cern's 20 member states contribute to the central budget as a proportion of their gross national income—but no one country is allowed to pay more than 25 per cent of Cern's costs. In 2009, Germany was the largest donor, contributing 144m euros, just less than 20 per cent of the total, followed by France and the UK. If the US were to apply for full membership the bill would be 390m euros, based on 2009 figures.

US full membership is unlikely, according to Cern spokesman James Gillies. "No-one [from the US] is expressing that interest and the agreement that we have with the US runs for a number of years," he said in an interview with *Research Europe*.

"I think it's far more likely that if the US decides they want to continue to work with Cern, which I think is quite probable, they would go for associate membership," Gillies said. This would have the US

by **Elizabeth Gibney**

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contributing at the level of Austria and Switzerland.

Sources close to the US Department of Energy also agree that associate membership is more likely as the US will want to retain an independent identity as a particle physics nation—and not be seen as part of a European-led club.

International particle physics is best served by the US retaining a strong national programme while "collaborating wholeheartedly" in outside projects, adds Chris Quigg, a professor in theoretical physics at the US Fermi National Laboratory in Illinois. The US and Cern, moreover, are rivals to host the LHC's planned successor, the International Linear Collider.

Steve Ellis, a professor in particle physics at the University of Washington, Seattle, says the US particle physics community does support a more formal relationship with Cern. "[Cern] will surely be a primary focus of research in particle physics on the 10-year-plus time scale," he says. But in the current fiscal climate, new money will not be easy to find.

CERN MAY BE OPENING UP to the world, but it plans to retain its European spirit, adds Gillies. The council agreed to recognise "the importance of respecting the European foundation and maintaining the European character of Cern" and ensure the majority of member states remain European.

A delighted president of the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, Israel, Daniel Kajfman, told *Research Europe*: "We've been involved with Cern for many years, contributing equipment, people and knowledge. So that's no different to any European country. Given the size of financial and human investment needed to run a facility like this, this is needed. If you really want to go to the next generation you need more people sharing the load, both financially and intellectually speaking."

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Making ESOF stronger

The EuroScience Open Forum meeting, which took place in Turin this past week, has evolved quickly into a vibrant and significant forum for researchers, administrators and students in Europe. It is a bold attempt to forge a genuinely European research community.

ESOF is supported by the not-for-profit organisation, Euroscience. The first event took place in Stockholm in 2004. The subsequent meetings in Munich in 2006 and Barcelona in 2008 have seen ESOF steadily develop attendance and momentum (*see our Editorial two years ago [RE 24/7/08, p2]*).

The event has two main components: a structured, multidisciplinary scientific meeting with parallel sessions and lectures on different branches of research and research policy; and a public celebration of science for the citizens of the host city and its surrounding region, featuring all kinds of events, lectures and exhibits in prominent settings.

The first included much intellectually fascinating content, ranging from a discussion between the novelist AS Byatt and neuroscientist Giacomo Rizzolatti on the 'art and science of the brain', to a seminar on the state of radioactive fall-out on the former Soviet Union's disused nuclear test site at Semipalatinsk in Kazakhstan.

However, the meeting still has to make headway to attract more researchers. It also has some way to go in engaging with contentious political issues—such as, in the Turin meeting's case, the current cut-backs to Italian research budgets.

That being said, plenty of tough questions were aired at the meeting, including very serious doubts about the prospect of Europe's research agenda being driven by sweeping 'grand challenges', such as climate change and food security. A great deal of scepticism was expressed about the wisdom of re-orientating research programmes in order to address huge socio-political problems that cannot, several speakers pointed out, be 'solved' by research.

So where next for ESOF? The development of the meeting is still constrained by the fact that Euroscience relies on modest private and corporate membership fees for support and has limited resources. The public component of the meeting, which takes place in the streets of host cities, ought to be widening that membership support. The fact that it hasn't raises questions about whether there is, in fact, the popular constituency for 'European science' that Euroscience's founders hoped to tap into.

Diversity of language, culture and outlook is one of Europe's strengths but it also makes large Europe-wide events particularly difficult to organise. ESOF has to go the extra mile to make sure that a student, researcher, administrator or reporter visiting ESOF from Albania for the first time feels as much at home as does a regular attendee.

ESOF also faces organisational hurdles. There seems to be little transfer of knowledge between the biennial meetings. Each time, local organisers who raise most of the money start anew. Euroscience is aware of this, and has created a permanent ESOF 'hub' in Strasbourg to address the problem.

It is not the luck of the Irish that the next meeting—Dublin 2012—will almost certainly take place in a sharply harsher budget climate for research than any of its predecessors. It will be interesting to see how an experiment born of optimism about the future development of research in Europe copes with the far tougher times that lie ahead.

elsewhere

"We are afraid we will be stuck as ricercatori for the rest of our lives."

Alessia Tessari, a researcher at the University of Bologna, is concerned that reforms to the Italian academic system do not allow ricercatori, the lowest academic grade, to switch to the new tenure-track system. The ricercatori are threatening to strike later this year. *Nature*, 30/6/10.

"In the US, there are too many paper researchers. Here, they are doing things."

S Ming Sung, the chief Asia-Pacific representative for the Clean Air Task Force, says the most exciting research is taking place in China. *Washington Post*, 28/6/10.

"We are down in terms of time to pay, we're down in terms of time to make contracts. We are starting to give a good service to the research community."

Graham Stroud, director of the Research Executive Agency, which funds research projects for small businesses, says the agency has made good progress in its first year of operation. *ScienceBusiness*, 24/6/10.

"Years of research, much of it conducted by distinguished seismologists in your country, have demonstrated that there is no accepted scientific method for earthquake prediction that can be reliably used to warn citizens of an impending disaster."

Alan Leshner, chief executive of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, tells Italian president Giorgio Napolitano that the manslaughter charges against six Italian scientists for failing to predict the L'Aquila earthquake last year are "unfair and naive". *Science Insider*, 29/6/10.

"We have begun to sound out the terrain just now in recent months."

Janne Wallenius, a reactor physicist at the Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, says Swedish researchers are looking for funding to establish a nuclear test reactor as the country is set to allow new nuclear build in the country for the first time since 1980. *Dagens Nyheter*, 18/6/10.

decade

"Rethinking the management of SME projects is fine, but one thing we need to avoid is re-nationalisation."

Hans-Werner Müller, secretary general of SME association UEAPME, is unsure about plans to move funding for small and medium-sized businesses out of the Framework Programme.

Research Europe, 13 July 2000

what's going on

Monsanto withdraws DNA patent action

US biotech company Monsanto has withdrawn a DNA patent action days before a landmark European Court of Justice decision was due. The case concerned the import of Argentinean soy meal which contained a DNA sequence to make soy plants resistant to the Roundup herbicide. Monsanto held European patents relating to the sequence and was attempting to use these to enforce a ban on the import of the meal. Advocate general Paolo Mengozzi advised the court that a patent for a chemical substance like DNA did not apply to the meal grown from the seed. The terms on which Monsanto has settled with the growers and importers of the meal have not been disclosed, according to Bloomberg Businessweek.

Infighting mars Framework 7 coordination efforts, says mid-term review

Internal strife is putting the European Cooperation in Science and Technology initiative at risk, according to a Framework 7 mid-term evaluation published on 29 June. Cost, coordinated by the European Science Foundation, will receive up to 40 million euros of Framework 7 funding to 2013. The disputes concern Cost's funding, independence and work with the European Commission and follow long-standing debates about its legal status, the report said.

Commission releases joint programming summary

The European Commission has published a "vision" document encouraging member states to collaborate in research to combat food shortages and the effects of climate change. The document, published on 28 June, suggests how joint programming initiatives could exchange information on ongoing research, launch joint foresight initiatives to establish which technologies will be needed in the future, and create joint calls and pooled funding pots.

Researchers and policymakers differ on nano code of conduct

Policymakers have unanimously backed a proposal to review the European Commission's Code of Conduct for Responsible Nanosciences and Nanotechnologies Research. A survey launched 18 months ago to assess the code's impact found that nearly four in five respondents, including all of the policymakers surveyed, would like to see a review. However, 37 per cent of researchers said the code should remain as it is. The survey was undertaken by the Commission to find out how the code is being implemented two years after its adoption.

Framework 7's loss of 1bn euros to Iter a "catastrophe", says Nowotny

A plan by European nations to divert over a billion euros from Framework 7 research grants to make up a budget shortfall at the experimental Iter fusion reactor has alarmed scientists, reports *Nature*. It will rob researchers of vital funds just as governments are poised to slash domestic research budgets to balance their books, says the report. European Research Council president Helga Nowotny said it was, "a small catastrophe...It's bad for European research".

Researchers call for government support on university autonomy

A manifesto from the Expert Group on European Universities calls for greater university autonomy and internationalisation, and more differentiation between teaching and research universities. The group, including Helga Nowotny, president of the European Research Council, Tessa Blackstone, a former UK higher education minister, and Jo Ritzen, the Dutch education minister, backs an EU goal of spending 2 per cent of GDP on education. The manifesto was presented to education commissioner Androulla Vassiliou on 17 June.

europe

East must collaborate to stem its brain drain

Europe's eastern member states should cooperate more with each other on research and education, a panel at the Euroscience Open Forum in Turin concluded on 3 July. This would counter the low levels of R&D investment and the loss of its best brainpower.

By pooling their experience in training scientists and coordinating research, and by sharing each others' best equipment, Europe's eastern countries can reach critical mass, said the panel, which included researchers and policymakers from Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania.

Policymakers are increasingly worried about the lack of funding for excellent basic research coming into the region from international sources.

One panellist, Adrian Curaj, Romania's state secretary for research, later told *Research Europe* that many newer member states struggle to nurture and retain talent because they do not invest enough in research. "We are not able to give our researchers a proper framework," he says. "They have little incentive to come back." Romania spent less than 0.5 per cent of its GDP on research in 2008.

A second panellist said a lack of national funding does not stunt the development of talented researchers, but they need better incentives to stay at home. "Hungary

by Inga Vesper at ESOF in Turin

comes first if you compare European Research Council grant wins to national research funding," said Andras Malnasi-Czismadia, a Hungarian Starting Grant winner from Eötvös University, Budapest. Hungarian researchers won eight ERC grants in 2008—though that fell to just one in 2010. "The problem is the high mobility after the degree, the best researchers do not return."

Most ERC grant winners from Eastern Europe choose not to work in their home country, because the portable grants allow them to pick virtually any European institution to pursue their projects. As a result, more than 80 per cent of ERC money goes to research institutions in the 15 older member states. Malnasi-Czismadia was one of four Hungarians to win an ERC grant in 2009, but is the only one who still works in the country.

If the situation is to change, researchers from new member states must work harder to lobby their national governments for more science spending. "With the economic crisis it is hard to make a political case for spending on basic science," says Curaj. "Scientists should learn to use innovation and new technologies as arguments. Then they have better chances of being heard by governments."

Big science steps up advice for EU policymakers

Europe's largest science organisations are to set up contact points within the European Commission to increase their influence on policymaking for large research infrastructures.

The seven members of EIROforum—which includes organisations such as the particle physics project Cern, the European Space Agency and the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility—signed a collaboration agreement with the Commission in Berlin on 24 June. A statement of intent from 2003 was renewed, giving the organisations more opportunities to work with the European Commission on developing policy.

The science giants will work with Commission officials on training scientists, coordinating workshops and developing large European research infrastructures. The contact and advice points will increase knowledge exchange with the Commission, but also with other policymakers.

Silke Schumacher, the international relations director at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory, says that EIROforum wants to support the ESFRI roadmap, a European wish list of large research infrastructures.

by Inga Vesper

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"EIROforum wants to position itself as a pool of expertise in this context," she says. "We have a long experience of operating large research infrastructures on the European level, so we want to make it known that we are available to give advice to anybody who needs it."

EIROforum produced a policy paper in March, detailing its members' expertise in setting up and running large research infrastructures, which will be used as a base for advisory activities.

The partners will also work together on more general issues, such as increasing the number of researchers being trained and research mobility. These areas are of particular interest for EIROforum members, who see their researchers struggle with insurance and pension rights when moving between countries, says Schumacher.

The Commission is a significant contributor to EIROforum institutions. The EMBL receives around 12 per cent of its funding through Framework 7, mostly from health and information technology funding.

Something for everyone in Europe's flagship survey into public attitudes to science

The European Union's vision of becoming an 'innovation union' needs better public awareness of science, according to research and innovation commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn.

Speaking at the launch of the European Commission's latest five-yearly Eurobarometer survey into public attitudes to science, *Science and Technology*, in Brussels on 21 June, she asked, "How can we promote debate? How can we communicate better? How can we take Europeans with us, because we cannot impose an innovation union from the top down?"

Only 11 per cent of the survey's respondents feel 'genuinely' well informed about science, said Geoghegan-Quinn. "We need to change that and that is why I am putting communication near the top of my list of priorities." Half the respondents say they feel 'moderately' well informed about science.

Public surveys of science and technology are notoriously tricky for policymakers. They invariably throw up diverse opinions, including many that are not in line with current public policies in science and technology. *Science and Technology* is no exception.

For example, 66 per cent of respondents support using animals in research if it produces new information about human health; 66 per cent agree that science makes lives healthier and more comfortable; and 61 per cent agree that the application of science makes work more interesting.

by Ehsan Masood and Research Europe staff

At the same time, 62 per cent agree that science can sometimes damage people's moral sense; 50 per cent say it can threaten human rights; and 58 per cent say it makes our ways of life change too fast. Three in four respondents say the EU should invest more in universities, but close to one in two feels that scientists have "tunnel vision".

Increasing the amount industry spends on R&D is a perennial objective for Europe's politicians. But not, it seems, for Eurobarometer respondents. More than half agreed with the statement: "We can no longer trust scientists to tell the truth about controversial scientific and technological issues because they depend more and more on money from industry."

These results, says Brian Wynne, professor of science studies at the University of Lancaster, UK, indicate that public institutions such as the Commission "need to listen and reflect" on what people are saying when making decisions about funding or governance of science. "Communication is not a one-way activity," he said in an interview with *Research Europe*.

The survey, carried out between 29 January and 25 February 2010, interviewed 31,238 people from across the EU's 27 member states. The previous survey was published in 2005.

europe Trieste academy awards women scientists

Twelve women scientists from Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean received awards for research excellence from the Italy-based TWAS academy for sciences on 27 June. The Elsevier Foundation New Scholar's award, worth \$5,000 (4,100 euros), supports researchers in biology, chemistry, physics and mathematics in their careers and while writing bids for further funding.

Euro report recommends innovation incentives

Incentives for private innovation and research spending would improve Europe's international trade, and support the euro, says a Commission report. The *Quarterly Report on the Euro Area 2010* urges national governments to offer tax breaks for innovation and support for research collaboration, to improve the business environment.

Germany reiterates plan for innovation in FP8

Germany has doubled its efforts to lobby for more innovation funding under Framework 8. Its politicians met science organisations and Brussels-based diplomats at

a meeting in Nuremberg organised by KoWi, the German science office in Brussels, on 22 to 24 June. Germany wants extra money to go towards bringing research results to market and to support pan-European industry collaboration.

Virtual HIV lab to go online this year

A virtual laboratory to allow international HIV and AIDS researchers to share results and organise clinical trials is ready for launch, says the European Commission. ViroLab was developed under Framework 6 with 3.3 million euros and it is expected to go online before the end of 2010. Seven hospitals are already using ViroLab to treat HIV patients, the Commission said.

Philippines and EU sign collaboration agreement

Europe and the Philippines signed an agreement in Brussels on 25 June to work together on science, information technologies and education. The Philippines is the second member country of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to enter such an agreement since the European Commission decided to step up collaboration with Asean countries in 2004.

Embryonic stem cell research not to be neglected for other methods, says ESF

European funders must continue to back embryonic stem cell research alongside other less contentious methods, a European Science Foundation working group has said.

The group, chaired by Outi Hovatta, a conception researcher at Sweden's Karolinska Institute, says that while methods that derive stem cells from adult cells are promising, public funding must support embryonic research in parallel. Researchers hope stem cells will be useful both as therapies and drug-testing models.

"It is far too early to say if we are going to have any normal cells from induced pluripotent [adult-derived] cells. For example, we already know that these carry more of certain tumour-forming mutations," Hovatta told *Research Europe*. "So they are very promising, but today it is too early to say that they will be better."

Stem cell research is a hotly debated issue in Europe. Research on induced pluripotent cells, made by reprogramming adult cells rather than obtaining stem cells from embryos, is permitted in some countries where embryonic stem cell research is forbidden. Sweden and the UK, for example, have fairly liberal laws while Lithuania, Poland and Ireland ban embryonic stem cell research.

Hovatta is concerned that policymakers may choose to focus public funding on less controversial research.

by Elizabeth Gibney

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"I heard from some European Commission [staff] that such discussions have been conducted. And that's very concerning," she says. Public funding would ensure that all promising avenues are followed, and that any eventual therapies are available across Europe in a way that private funding cannot, she says.

Patenting is another problem that affects stem cell R&D. In interpreting European law, the European Patent Office's highest body ruled in 2008 that any invention that involves killing a human embryo cannot be patented.

The office is now working on interpreting the ruling more fully, says Siobhan Yates, head of biotechnology at the European Patent Office. "For example, if the embryonic stem cells were derived from already established cell lines, so you're not having to kill embryos, it might be that these are patentable."

Restrictions and the lack of clarity could hold up both clinical and basic research, says Hovatta. "It's bad because any inventions we make here can't be patented, whereas colleagues in the US and Asia patent all the time," she says. "In principle they could patent our experiments if we don't publish them first."

Top research institutions rally against rankings

The idea that university rankings can identify the best institutions in the world is a "travesty", the League of European Research Universities has said.

In a paper published on 23 June, the group warns that league tables such as the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Academic Ranking of World Universities and the Times Higher Education ranking fail to represent the multitude of services provided by universities and "create a pattern of esteem" with perverse effects.

Leru is an association of 22 universities across Europe, many of which are recognised among the best in the world. More than half featured in the 2009 Shanghai top 100, making their opposition all the more significant.

"You might say that it's in the self interest of those institutions to think that rankings are a good thing, but underlying all this there has to be a degree of honesty in the way in which universities work. Otherwise they're worth nothing," says Geoffrey Boulton, author of the advice paper. "I think, at heart, we believe that many ranking schemes do what we teach our students not to do—they fail to say precisely what it is that's being ranked apart from a combination of proxy attributes."

This tendency to focus on characteristics that cannot be directly measured is the main concern for Leru. The

by Laura Hood

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organisation questions how well rankings can assess an institution's performance by measuring such variables as the amount it spends on teaching or the number of publications it produces.

The paper adds that rankings promote a research-intensive model that is not necessarily suited to all institutions. This means they undervalue other activities such as teaching and regional engagement. It is therefore a "terrible mistake" for institutions to set policies with the aim of climbing rankings, says Boulton.

Leru is more supportive of U-Map, which aims to provide a more detailed picture of institutions according to a broader range of activities without seeking to place them in a hierarchy. But the group remains apprehensive about its use of proxies and the data collection issues that come with attempting a pan-European system.

The same applies to U-Multirank, a project funded by the European Commission to develop an alternative to existing classifications. Leru agrees with the goal of increasing transparency, says Boulton, but remains concerned that the system will end up being just as opaque as existing rankings.

marja makarow **view from the top**

Towards a code for science

Scientific integrity is not negotiable. There can be no first-class research without it. Since science is a shared enterprise, and researchers build on each other's results, they must be honest with themselves and with each other, and share the same standards of fairness. Science is a global enterprise, involving partnerships across all the continents, and the scientists in these partnerships need to understand that they share a common set of standards.

That is why the proposed European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity is a vital document. It addresses good practice and bad conduct in science, it offers a basis for trust and integrity across national borders and it provides a possible model for a global code of conduct for all research.

The code grew out of the first World Conference on Research Integrity, in Lisbon in 2007, and it will be presented to the second world conference in Singapore this month. The process was initiated by the European Science Foundation and the US Office of Research Integrity, and the text and its principles emerged from debates within a member organisation forum launched by the ESF.

We need such a code. Research misconduct is relatively rare, but a university, a research community, or a national institution needs just one extraordinary case to endanger its reputation, and the reputation of science itself. A single well-publicised allegation of research dishonesty or malpractice can cast doubt on the efforts of thousands of scientists and decades of research effort.

Europe has experienced several well-publicised allegations recently: at the University of East Anglia, in the UK, and at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden. The media has a duty to draw attention to such things. Some might argue that the press and broadcasters have made too much of such episodes. Others might argue that the very scale of publicity reflects the public's high expectations of science, and perhaps they are right. Most research is funded by national governments, by charities or, ultimately, by the consumer: in a word, by the public.

Scientists and other university-trained researchers enjoy a privileged position. They are funded by the taxpayer, and their professional integrity should be above suspicion. The good thing about the cases in the UK and Sweden was that there were agreed and transparent mechanisms for dealing with such matters. How much greater the embarrassment, and how much greater the public concern, if the institutions in question had been

Marja Makarow is the chief executive of the European Science Foundation, one of the co-organisers of the second World Conference on Science Integrity to be held in Singapore from 21 to 24 July.

without guidelines for such affairs?

That is why the ESF has been pressing for a Europe-wide code of conduct for the last decade. During that time it has become clear that there are universities and institutions that have no such agreed code, and no transparent mechanism for dealing with allegations of misconduct.

Research is competitive, and more than a million researchers in Europe are under pressure to publish, to make their mark in their disciplines. They need to know, for their own protection, what constitutes misconduct and bad practice, and how it should be confronted.

There is a new dimension which makes the code even more timely: the European Research Council has begun to hand out grants—the largest ever to young researchers—whose recipients have a free hand to use the money as they wish, and go to any research centre they choose. This makes guidelines that will be clearly understood across the entire continent, from Aberdeen to Istanbul, from Uppsala to Palermo, more necessary than ever.

At one level, the argument is simple: everybody endorses the principles of honesty, fairness and transparency; everybody wants research that can be trusted; and every institution wishes to preserve a reputation for integrity. But it has proved surprisingly difficult to produce a document that can be widely agreed, perhaps because Europe is a mosaic of different traditions of academic discipline, and perhaps because terminology can be so difficult to define, and then to agree.

So the new code is the product of hard and determined discussion, and careful scrutiny, and all the more valuable for that. If it is adopted, the rewards will be considerable: researchers in partnership across national borders will all subscribe to one agreed international set of principles that they all understand. The code could become the basis for a document that holds not just across national borders, but across oceans, as European researchers build on partnerships in Asia and the Americas, and establish new links in Africa and other parts of the developing world.

Science is a global enterprise: knowledge needs no visas. But science needs mutual trust and a common understanding of integrity. To invoke Isaac Newton, we scientists stand on the shoulders of giants. But like those giants, we must in every sense be upright, and be sure of our standing in the eyes of others.

More to say? Email comment@ResearchResearch.com

'Researchers in partnership across national borders will all subscribe to one agreed international set of principles that they all understand.'

letter from greece ino agrafioti

Research policy and more in crisis

Greece has one of the weakest research systems in Europe. How did it come to this? While Greece's politicians have always paid lip service to the importance of science and technology, they have stubbornly maintained the same misguided policies since the mid 1980s—even though the body that designed them, the General Secretariat for Research and Technology, has fallen under the responsibility of four different ministries during this time.

The secretariat's central research and technology development policy was to strengthen ties between research and industry. It has been notoriously unsuccessful, in spite of substantial public investment over the last two decades. An ex post facto review and analysis of this failure is urgently needed before embarking on a new round of what are essentially subsidies disguised as R&D investments.

Greece has a low gross domestic expenditure in R&D (Gerd), which stabilised at around 0.58 per cent of GDP over the last decade. The public sector's contribution has been disproportionately large compared with that of the business sector—70 per cent and 29 per cent of Gerd respectively. The remaining 1 per cent comes from the not-for-profit sector. Most public funding has come from the European Framework Programme and Structural Funds. It is not surprising that the Lisbon target of 3 per cent by 2010 was deemed too unrealistic for Greece and the Greek authorities chose a lower target of 1.5 per cent of GDP by 2015 instead.

Then came the financial crisis. One of the first decisions of the Pan-Hellenistic Socialist Movement (Pasok) government elected last October was to move—yet again—the secretariat from the Ministry of Development to the Ministry of Education, Life Long Learning and Religious Affairs. Achilleas Mitsos, who served as director general of the European Commission's Research Directorate, was appointed the secretariat's general secretary, the Greek equivalent of an under secretary

(or junior minister) for research. Investment in R&D, which had a central place in Pasok's electoral platform, was translated into an increase in Greece's Gerd target to an extremely optimistic 2 per cent of GDP, at the same time bringing forward the deadline from 2015 to 2013.

This task becomes even more ambitious when combined with the multidimensional challenge faced by the new government: simultaneously increasing private-sector R&D investment, restructuring the

research system, introducing a corruption-proof evaluation scheme, and aligning policies in other sectors of the economy with research policy.

Mitsos is very optimistic, claiming that in a devastated Greece "there is one area in which there is hope and this area is research". He plans to spend fast the so far untouched reserve of almost 1.5 billion euros in EU structural funds earmarked for R&D for 2007-13. Starting this year, 300 million euros will go to: strategic research; human resources; participation in such EU initiatives as the KM3NeT telescope; research infrastructure; and science-in-society projects. All proposals will be peer-reviewed for excellence so that only "useful research"—defined as research that balances demand from the production sector with high contribution to growth, and exploits the country's advantages in geography, climate and human resources—will be funded.

In addition, the secretariat aims to release a new legislative framework for Greece's research system by the end of 2010. The government does seem to want to bring research policy to the forefront for the first time.

Injecting money into R&D will of course have an impact on the research system, but this is not the whole solution. Changing some of its structural features is likely to prove more challenging. There is no clear and strong demand for research products from either the private or public sector. In recent years Greece has lost ground in international competitiveness and no clear and robust plan has been established between research, innovation and technology, and competitiveness. Targets and objectives have been set without justification from meaningful and well-founded financial analysis of the research system, rendering decision-making even more uncertain.

Where is the evidence that justifies an increase in the Gerd target? Even though a foresight exercise was published in 2005, the scenarios supplied by this exercise have not been considered in any plan.

Finally, the cultural legitimacy of research and science in the framework of Greek society is an open issue.

Many believe that the Greek crisis could provide a fertile ground for much-needed change to Greece's R&D system. Perhaps, despite the difficulties, Mitsos is right to be optimistic because at last something is moving.

The question now is, at a time when "Greek tragedy" has come to mean the collapse of the economy, will Greece finally put its words into actions to weather the economic and political storm?

More to say? Email comment@ResearchResearch.com

Ino Agrafioti is a science administrator for KM3NeT based at National Centre for Scientific Research-Demokritos. She is expressing a personal view.

'Greece has established no clear and robust plan between research, innovation and technology, and competitiveness.'

Lithuania must reach Scandinavian standards of innovation, says PM

Lithuania is to step up spending on higher education and innovation as part of its Lithuania 2030 Strategy to help boost the economy.

The strategy, to be developed by a State Progress Council launched in April this year, will aim to encourage education and innovative thinking in Lithuania. Andrius Kubilius, the prime minister, wants his country to catch up with its Scandinavian neighbours in terms of innovation and technology development by 2030.

"In 20 years we want to see 30 per cent of people with a degree and maximum cooperation with other Baltic states on technology development," he said in an interview with *Research Europe*. "Our citizens should not be afraid anymore of new technologies or international competition."

Lithuania has been hard hit by the global financial crisis, seeing its GDP fall by nearly 15 per cent in 2009-10 alone. Unemployment stands at around 17 per cent and, according to this year's Innovation Scoreboard published by the European Commission, innovation spending by businesses has come to a standstill. The prime minister has cut his own pay by 40 per cent this year to set an example for curbing public spending.

by Inga Vesper

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Kubilius presented the Lithuania 2030 Strategy to students and researchers at the London School of Economics on 22 June. The strategy, modelled on the Europe 2020 Strategy to boost growth and jobs, is meant to move Lithuania towards a more technology and innovation-based economy to ensure economic growth for the future. However, it is not yet clear which technological fields Lithuania will pursue, a question the State Progress Council is set to answer along with details on spending distribution.

Lithuania's scientific strengths at the moment lie in the social sciences, biomedicine and engineering. Kubilius, who has a PhD in physics, wants to increase research in biofuels and energy, but underlines that the strategy is more about providing the right education and mindset than setting technological goals.

"Soon innovation will transfer from west to east, with India and China playing a major role in developing future technologies," he says. "The plan is to use education to make Lithuanians ready to be part of this change."

nations in brief

Commission takes Poland to court

The European Commission has referred Poland to the European Court of Justice for failing to implement a binding directive to make public data accessible to international researchers. Poland was meant to comply with the directive on data used for navigation systems, financial services and climate studies by October 2008.

CNRS 'stronger' after reform

France's national research centre the CNRS is a stronger, more transparent organisation one year after signing a multi-year contract with the government, French research minister Valérie Pécresse has said. The move set in motion the controversial reform that has seen the research centre handing power to universities and dividing into 10 thematic institutes.

France creates humanities alliance

The French government has launched a fifth thematic alliance as part of plans to bring greater coherence to its research efforts. The Athena alliance will lead the country's humanities and social sciences research by developing a strategy for the fields and identifying new research priorities. It will be run by the CNRS, the Conference of University presidents, the Conference of Grandes Écoles and the National Institute of

Demographic Studies. Alain Fuchs, a chemical engineer and president of the CNRS, will lead the alliance.

German neutron reactor closed after 50 years

A neutron research reactor based in Geesthacht was switched off on 28 June after more than 50 years of continued use. The FRG-1 reactor, which was used for material research involving neutron and synchrotron radiation, had outlived its capabilities. Ongoing research at the facility has been transferred to its sister reactor, the FRG-2 in Munich, and the Petra ring in Hamburg.

Rhineland-Palatine ministers look into science

A government programme to help high-level politicians learn more about research has taken place in Rhineland-Palatine. Cabinet members, ministers and state secretaries of the federal state visited local research institutes, universities and science academies between 10 and 22 June to make them more aware of research issues and teach them how science can contribute to policymaking.

Netherlands backs Australia to host telescope

The Netherlands and Australia have agreed to work together on the Square Kilometre Array, a radio telescope collaboration between 20 countries. They will cooperate on developing and testing technologies. Australia is competing with South Africa to host the telescope, to be the largest radio telescope in the world.

nordic

Norway's government 'hid' delays to prestigious carbon capture project

Norway's parliament, the Storting, is in turmoil after it emerged last month that the government kept quiet for more than a year about embarrassing delays to a flagship carbon capture and storage project.

Opposition members have been harrying the government for hiding the delays. The government says secrecy was necessary to protect the commercially sensitive venture. But legal experts including Harald Hove, a jurist and opposition MP who chairs the parliament's freedom of information act committee, say that the government's actions amounted to censorship and that the public's right to knowledge about government expenditure outweighs commercial interests.

The delays are an embarrassment to Norway, a world leader in CCS technology. In 2007, the project was dubbed Norway's Moon Landings by prime minister Jens Stoltenberg. But the project has been hampered by problems finalising the technology design. One uncertainty is whether the amine solvents used to capture the carbon dioxide might cause cancer and would pose a health risk to workers and people living in the area.

So far, the government appears to be holding the line. On 18 June, the governing alliance survived a no-confidence

by **Linda Nordling**

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vote in Terje Riis-Johansen, the oil and energy minister, which had been tabled by opposition parties. The Storting has now broken up for summer, but the issue is likely to remain on its agenda when MPs return in the autumn.

The CCS project is being built at the Mongstad industrial site in western Norway. It is a partnership involving Norway's state-owned petroleum company Statoil and Gassnova, a company set up by the government in 2007 to manage its CCS technology development. When completed the plant will divert carbon dioxide from a gas-fired power station providing electricity to Mongstad's oil refinery and Troll, an off-shore gas field.

The power station started up in October last year. Its construction was conditional on the CCS plant coming online in 2014. In May, the government announced that the plant had hit delays that meant it may not be operational until 2018. In June, it emerged that Gassnova and Statoil had told the government about the delays in reports dating as far back as April 2009. The reports were released last month—heavily censored at first, but with some hidden material reinstated in later copies.

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Swedish polls: can research be a winner?

Sweden's centre-right coalition government is preparing to defend its record at the polls on 19 September. With current opinion polls too close to call, what's in store for research if the incumbents win—and if they lose?



by John Fogarty

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fund more research in 'strategic' areas.

By contrast, a red-green alliance led by the Social Democrat party might put the breaks on the concentration of research funding in elite institutions. The Social Democrat party says it is mindful of this issue, although it refused to confirm what some vice-chancellors are saying that it has promised to give newer universities 100 million kronor (10.5m euros) in compensation for their losses in the past four years.

Sweden has fixed-term parliaments of four years, with research bills presented to parliament two years into each term. The most recent was delivered in October 2008 and featured a significant cash boost for Swedish researchers. The next, due in 2012, will be a new government's first chance to make significant changes to the country's research policy.

The 2008 bill gave more research funding for the country's old, elite universities than its younger, more teaching-focused ones. It also introduced funding streams for strategic research areas selected by the government, giving politicians more say over the research agenda.

If re-elected, the centre-right alliance is expected to continue in this vein. The Swedish Research Council has begun negotiating with the government about the 2012 research bill, and a source in the council who did not want to be named told *Research Europe* that the government is likely to put pressure on the council to

A left-wing government may have other benefits. Per Eriksson, VC of Lund University—Scandinavia's largest research university—says it could improve links between academics and industry. "The Social Democrat party is strongly linked to the unions so would be more likely to support collaborations between universities and industry, which would be better for commercialised outcomes," he says.

However, most people *Research Europe* spoke to said that the two main party blocs differ little on their policies for research. In general, academics seem content that the 2008 bill will see them unscathed through the financial crisis. And they hope that their good luck will continue beyond 2012, whichever bloc ends up winning the election this autumn.

nordic in brief

Sweden gets species database

An open-access database containing information about every known living species in Sweden is to be made available online by 2013, the Swedish Research Council announced on 28 June. The council is funding the 45 million kronor (4.7m euros) Life Watch project jointly with the Swedish Natural History Museum, the Swedish Board of Fisheries and the University of Gothenburg.

Wealth and research support go hand in hand

Swedes on large incomes are more likely to approve of public spending on research than those who earn less, according to a report published on 24 June by think-tank Public and Science. Right-wing voters were also more likely than their left-wing counterparts to place high trust in researchers and their work.

Copenhagen to get Niels Bohr science park

A 1.2-billion-kroner (161m-euro) science park will be built at the University of Copenhagen to house its faculty of science. The park will be named after Nobel-prize-winning physicist Niels Bohr and will open in 2015. "Niels Bohr would have been proud of this project," Ralf Hemmingsen, the university's vice-chancellor, said on 30 June.

Science cuts flop in Denmark

The Danish government's plans to cut back funding for research and higher education has been voted one of the biggest failures of this parliamentary session, in a poll published by Altinget, an online newspaper, on 24 June. DEA, a think tank focused on education, calls the plans "disappointing" and the Danish Society of Engineers said their answer to the cuts was: "Oh, no!"

Minister pledges research funds for SMEs

Trond Giske, Norway's trade minister, said on 25 June that he wants to increase government research support for small and medium-sized enterprises to ensure their research activity is maintained in the wake of the financial crisis. "Research and innovation activities in companies must be maintained through the crisis," he said.

Denmark tops *Nature's* happiness poll

Danish researchers are among the happiest and most satisfied in the world, according to a career survey conducted by *Nature*. The study asked 10,500 researchers in 16 countries to rate their salary, health care, pension and degree of independence. Danish researchers are given an "excellent all-round experience" according to the survey, which was published on 24 June.

uk & ireland

R&D biggest loser as regional agencies close

A powerful source of support for R&D could be lost with the abolition of regional development agencies, innovation specialists have warned.

The UK government is to produce a White Paper in the summer, setting out its plan for closing the RDAs. Their replacements, Local Enterprise Partnerships, will be led by local authorities and businesses.

The partnerships will drop some activities, while others will be managed centrally. Ed Metcalfe, formerly the chief scientific adviser at the South East England Development Agency, is concerned that smaller businesses will struggle to stay on the radar if a central body takes over.

"The general view is that innovation is best done at regional level," he told *Research Europe's* sister publication *Research Fortnight*. "The national programmes know all the big companies but a lot of the competitiveness, the growth in the country, comes from some of the newer, more dynamic businesses who may not be visible on the national stage."

Brian Clements, director of the Institute for Innovation and Enterprise at the University of Wolverhampton, says the same applies for accessing European funding. He says the RDAs have been particularly important in securing money from the European Regional Development Fund.

by Laura Hood and Inga Vesper

Metcalfe worries that the loss of the RDAs will leave a gap in the "innovation landscape" that could take years to fill. "I'm sure the vast majority of local authorities and county councils would be first to admit they don't have any capacity or competence to operate in the innovation landscape. There would have to be a huge amount of relearning to fill that vacuum," he says.

The value of the RDAs was recognised in former science minister David Sainsbury's 2007 review of government science and innovation policies. This originally proposed that the RDAs invest £180 million in projects with the government's Technology Strategy Board over three years. However, the partnership was considered such a success that the investment was expected to grow to over £400m by March 2011. Neither the TSB nor the RDAs were able to comment on the fate of this funding under the new government.

In a report published in February, the TSB described the RDAs as "crucially important" to its mission to promote UK business. Joint work includes technology platforms, science parks and knowledge transfer partnerships, through which academic institutions collaborate with businesses.

uk & i in brief

Wales prepares to rationalise universities

The Welsh Assembly government is preparing to reduce the number of universities in Wales because some are too small to compete internationally. The plan is part of The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales 2010-13 strategy, which sees 80 per cent of funding spent on national priorities. Trinity University College and Swansea Metropolitan University are thought to be in line for mergers.

UK caps migrant worker numbers

The UK Home Office has announced a temporary cap on the number of non-EU migrant workers while it consults on the level of a permanent cap to be introduced next year. The number of skilled workers without a job offer entering under the points system will be held at 5,400, and the threshold for eligibility will rise by five points. The number of migrants allowed to enter the country with a job offer will be reduced by 1,300, to 18,700.

Galway company wins space contracts

Galway-based firm ÉireComposites Teoranta in Indreabhán has won contracts worth 1.9 million euros for the development of technologies for the European Space Agency's next generation of space launchers and satellites. The deal was made with the support of Enterprise Ireland.

Medical funder joins neurodegenerative partnership

The UK Medical Research Council has formed an alliance with the German Centre for Neurodegenerative Diseases and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to accelerate progress in understanding neurodegenerative diseases and seek new approaches for treatment. The project will run for three years, with each agency committing £3m (3.6m euros).

Funding council invests in museums

The Higher Education Funding Council For England has announced £10.5 million (12.7m euros) of support for 33 museums and galleries in 19 universities and colleges in England in the 2010-11 academic year. The museums and galleries cover a wide range of topics, including fine arts, cartoons, design, science, archaeology and rural life.

Lloyds of London eyes research talent

Insurance giant Lloyds of London is offering prizes of up to £5,000 for the best research papers on how risk will affect the insurance industry. The group is looking for risk-related research from PhD students or post-doctoral researchers in the fields of natural hazards, climate change, and technological, biological and behavioural risks. Lloyds says the aim of the competition is to find scientists who can help insurers overcome such technical challenges.

Malawi punches above its weight in research

It may be one of Africa's poorest countries, but Malawi is a "real leader" in research according to a report by Thomson Reuters.

Global Research Report on Africa, published in April, shows that while South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, Tunisia, Algeria and Kenya produce the most research papers, it is Malawi that does the most with the resources it has.

The authors of the report divided African countries' research articles published in internationally indexed journals between 2004 and 2008 with the sizes of their economies, measured by their GDP. In this measure, Malawi scores higher than its more prolific neighbours.

"The real leaders are Tunisia and Malawi with very different economic bases but strong relative productivity in both cases," write the authors: Jonathan Adams, the British director of research evaluation for Thompson Reuters, Christopher King, editor of *ScienceWatch.com*, and Daniel Hook, managing director of the UK-based research management company Symplectic.

"Malawi, with one-tenth the annual research output of Nigeria, produces research of a quality that exceeds the world average benchmark while Nigeria hovers around half that impact level," they add. Conversely, Nigeria is not returning as much research as would be expected

by Alex Abutu

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given the size of its economy.

Malawi's surprise performance may be due to its strong relationships with institutions in the UK and the US, says Robert Heyderman, a professor of tropical medicine working on a University of Malawi and University of Liverpool Wellcome Trust project in Malawi. "Nigeria is a rich country with big GDP but viewed against her GDP, Nigeria is underperforming," he says.

But African scientists say the rating is not a true reflection of research conducted on the continent.

"You cannot compare the level of research going on in Nigerian universities and research institutes to what happens in Malawi," says Oye Ibidapo-Obe, president of the Nigerian Academy of Sciences. "Here in Africa we all know the strength of each country as far as research is concerned. It is common knowledge on the continent that South Africa leads the way in space and astronomy research and Nigeria is also a leader in engineering, agriculture and medicine."

Mammo Muchie, a development studies professor at the University of Tshwane in South Africa, told *Research Europe* he finds it hard to believe that Malawi is a leader in research.

world in brief

G20 vows to close farming gap

The G20 summit that took place in Canada on 26 and 27 June ended with members calling

on each other to "accelerate R&D to close agricultural productivity gaps" in poor countries. It saw the G20 countries commit to exploring new mechanisms for harnessing the private sector in improving global food security.

AstraZeneca partners with malaria venture

Pharmaceuticals giant AstraZeneca and the Medicines for Malaria Venture, a public-private partnership based in Switzerland, have agreed to cooperate on finding drugs for the killer disease. The agreement will give MMV access to AstraZeneca's library of compounds. Promising compounds identified through a screening process will be forwarded to AstraZeneca's R&D facility in Bangalore, India, to identify candidates for clinical testing.

Japanese stem cell researcher wins Kyoto Prize

The 26th annual Kyoto Prize in advanced technology, which for 2010 focuses on biotechnology and medical technology, has been awarded to Shinya Yamanaka for his work in developing the technology to generate pluripotent stem cells without using human embryos. Yamanaka is a senior investigator at the Gladstone Institute of Cardiovascular Disease in San Francisco

and the director of CiRA, Kyoto University's Center for iPS Cell Research and Application. He will receive the 50-million-yen (460,000-euro) award on 10 November.

IPCC chooses contributors for fifth report

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change announced on 23 June a final list of 831 coordinating lead authors, lead authors and review editors for its fifth assessment report, due in 2013. This round attracted more nominations than the last, and will have greater participation from developing countries and a higher proportion of female experts than earlier ones.

India and Canada join on nuclear research

India and Canada agreed on 27 June to cooperate on research in the fields of nuclear energy, higher education, mining and culture. The India-Canada agreement for cooperation in peaceful uses of nuclear energy provides for collaboration in areas such as design, supply of uranium, projects in third countries, and development and use of nuclear energy applications in various fields.

Water information service opens Asia office

Global Water Intelligence, an information service for the water industry, has announced that it will open an Asia office in Singapore. The office will be at the national water agency's WaterHub, also the R&D home of other global research institutes.

usa

Defence research hammered by influential secret advisory group

Important aspects of basic research within the Department of Defense are “broken”, a report commissioned by the Director of Defense Research and Engineering has found.

The report, *S&T for National Security*, added that these are so broken that “neither throwing more money at these problems nor simple changes in procedures and definitions will fix them”.

The lengthy report, from summer 2008, was carried out by the JASON Program office—a long-term but low-profile group of advisory scientists to the DoD—and only released upon a Freedom of Information Act request by the Federation of American Scientists. The report was intended for official use only.

The study found that defence spending on science and technology had declined steadily as a proportion of the department’s total budget, and that the low spend meant low visibility and neglect from management. There are also problems coordinating the different service branches where research funding is concentrated, it said.

The report was also critical of the shift away from

by Elizabeth Gibney

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long-term basic research towards shorter-term “deliverable-based” research and recommended this shift be reversed. Reporting and reviewing the portfolio of basic research rarely happens, it added.

The report’s authors were also troubled by the organisational structures in DoD labs and that the department’s present research programme is more focused on funding the best projects than the best people.

“DoD does not generally focus [basic research] funding on research of the highest calibre carried out by individuals with the potential to provide new paradigms for science and technology. DoD is getting what it asks for in tightly managed and focused research programmes, but is reducing the potential for true breakthroughs,” it reads.

The report recommends that the department establish a Research Corps in each branch of the military and that it increase its role in developing science and technology skills in education.

usa in brief

US and China create joint scientific ethics committee

The American Association for the Advancement of Science and the China Association for Science and Technology have established a joint steering committee to coordinate efforts to ensure ethics in science. The committee will encourage collaborations between policymakers, scientists, educators, and students to be “used in both countries to advance and apply knowledge on ethical issues associated with the conduct and application of scientific research”.

Representatives favour budget increase for NSF

The National Science Foundation would receive a budget increase of more than 7 per cent to more than \$7 billion (5.6bn euros) under the version of the fiscal year 2011 budget bill being drafted in the House of Representatives. The subcommittee in charge of science funding rejected a Republican amendment to freeze funding at the previous year’s level and recommended providing the amount President Obama requested for the agency.

Broun fears oil-spill commission bias

The ranking member of the House Science and Technology Committee’s Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight has accused administration officials of using science selectively to secure a moratorium on offshore drilling. Republican Paul Broun, from Georgia, suggested the bipartisan National Commission

on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, established by President Obama on 21 May, may be biased. “I fear that, as currently constructed, the commission will serve little purpose other than rubber-stamping your administration’s predetermined policy goals without fully investigating the facts and circumstances concerning the root causes of the incident,” he wrote, requesting that further members be added.

Obama solidifies space vision into policy

Commercial space flight, Mars by 2030 and an asteroid landing by 2025 were all revealed as part of the Obama administration’s National Space Policy, published on 28 June. Following its budget request for NASA in February, the administration had faced criticism for a proposed change of direction for the agency, which it has now formalised. The administration has pledged to increase international cooperation in space, in recognition that the US is no longer racing against an adversary, and to use commercial space products and services.

NRC launches research university review panel

The National Research Council has launched the Committee on Research Universities. The committee has been given the task of assessing what could be done on a federal, state and institutional scale to maintain excellence. Chaired by former DuPont chief executive Charles Holliday, the 21-member group is expected to issue a consensus report by May 2011.

Patents not essential for innovation, says report

america at large

A report by the Berkeley Centre for Law and Technology has found that patents may not be as important in the creation and development of technologies they are popularly thought to be. The

group's survey of 1,300 hi-tech entrepreneurs found that start-up businesses from all industries said patents were only a weak to moderate incentive to create, develop and commercialise technology.

However, there were differences between fields. Biotechnology and medical device start ups said patents were important to gaining competitive advantages from their innovations, but software companies often avoided the system altogether. Across all industries, the survey found the most common deterrent to seeking patents was the cost.

Academics urge more collaboration with Indonesia

The presidents and chancellors from 137 research universities in the United States have written to President Obama urging him to further expand research and education collaborations between universities in the US and Indonesia. They wrote to the White House following an announcement made during the G20 Summit in Toronto that the two countries have already agreed to spend \$160 million (128m euros) on encouraging educational exchanges and joint programmes.

Funding for geriatric research centre denied

A request by Minot State University in North Dakota for a \$500,000 (399,000-euro) Centres-of-Excellence grant to fund a geriatric research centre was rejected by the state government on 22 June because the initiative duplicates other programmes already underway in the state. The research centre would have focused on studies examining the best ways to care for elderly people. The university's grant request was defeated when the North Dakota Legislature's interim budget section committee deadlocked 19 votes to 19 on whether it should be awarded.

DoE pumps \$24m into biofuels research

The Department of Energy has announced plans to invest \$24 million (19m euros) to address the research barriers that are preventing the development of biofuels from algae. The three-year awards will go to three consortia of academic, national laboratory and industrial labs in Arizona, California and Hawaii. The department hopes the research will accelerate the development of algal biofuels into commercial products.

Letter from Washington re: stem cell lawsuit

A federal lawsuit against the National Institutes of Health that seeks to overturn its embryonic stem cell research guidelines has been revived on appeal. If successful, this could leave the agency vulnerable to legal challenges from researchers who disagree with its policies.

The 25 June ruling by a Washington DC appeals court reverses a federal district court's decision in October to dismiss the lawsuit. The plaintiffs argue that the guidelines, issued last July, are not valid because they were not adopted properly and they violate Congress' ban on federal funding of embryo destruction.

The appeals court has now ruled that two of the plaintiffs who work with adult stem cells—James Sherley, formerly of MIT and now a senior scientist at the Boston Biomedical Research Institute, and Theresa Deisher, the founder and R&D director of AVM Biotechnology in Seattle—have “competitive standing” to sue.

“There can be no doubt the guidelines will elicit an increase in the number of grant applications involving [embryonic cells],” according to the three-judge panel's decision. “Because the guidelines have intensified the competition for a share in a fixed amount of money, the plaintiffs will have to invest more time and resources to craft a successful grant application.”

The court also says the researchers will suffer whenever an embryonic stem cell project gets NIH funding that, before the guidelines were changed, could have gone to fund one of their projects.

“Although no one can say exactly how likely the doctors are to lose funding to projects involving embryonic stem cells, having been put into competition with those projects, the doctors face a substantial enough probability to deem the injury to them imminent,” the decision reads.

The NIH argues it wants to support all types of human stem cell research because it's not known what kind of stem cell will ultimately prove most useful for disease treatment and other purposes. NIH does not designate funding for specific categories of stem cell research, and grant award decisions are based on considerations of scientific merit and relevance to its mission and priorities.

The case appears headed back to the district court, which will consider the merits of the injunction request, but is unlikely to change course. The judge who made the October ruling declared that the NIH guidelines do not prevent or hinder the researchers' ability to compete for funding. After all, scientists are not entitled to federal funding—they must earn it.

Mark Frankel, director of the Scientific Freedom, Responsibility and Law Program at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, warns that should the suit be successful, it would “throw the research funding system into turmoil”.

Rebecca Trager

inside out

TO FUSE OR NOT TO FUSE Iter, the France-based fusion power project, announced last week with no small amount of pride that it would launch a French website. Seems logical, given its location. Strangely, though, Iter says its intention is to “move away from the language of Shakespeare”. We were not aware that ye olde Englyshe was still used in fusion physics, but let’s give it a try. “Is this a tokamak which I see before me?” Or, in case of project failure: “I’ll break my test tubes, I’ll burn my textbook!” Or, how about at the end of the European Science Open Forum: “When shall we scientists meet again, in London, Paris or Turin?”

DAMP RECEPTION During the Euroscience Open Forum opening ceremony, the city of Turin paid its respects to Rita Levi-Montalcini, a neurologist and Nobel laureate, who was born there. Her niece was to receive a bouquet of pink roses on her behalf, but after a lengthy speech no roses had materialised. The moderator panicked and improvised. He pulled some flowers used as table decorations out of the soggy sponge they’d been stuck into, dripping with green water. “I cannot touch this,” exclaimed the Nobel laureate’s niece as she stepped back in disgust, much to the embarrassment of the assembled city council. Thankfully, just at that moment a proper bunch of roses, nicely wrapped, appeared and was presented them to Levi-Montalcini. The moderator,

red-faced, wiped his hands on his shirt, where they left a slimy stain.

BAILOUT BLUES The financial crisis and its impact were the underlying current of many discussions at ESOF. But Carlo Rizzuto, the head of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures, came up with a great idea to combat funding shortages. “We now have a common fund for banks, so there should also be a common fund for research,” he quipped. The laughter from the German participants was muted.

MIDDLE MAN Lars Nyre, a media researcher from Bergen University in Norway, has advised researchers to keep journalists at “arm’s length”. He says that speaking to journalists means ceding control over what gets communicated, and more direct communication can be achieved through blogs, talks, chronicles and public reports. Let’s hope this doesn’t catch on, or your correspondent will soon be out of a job.

EXCLUSIVE CLUB The International Conference on High Energy Physics certainly has a high opinion of the kind of people it will attract to Paris later this month. On the registration form, the only options for the delegate’s title are “Professor” or “Doctor”. Mere Mesdames and Messieurs, it seems, need not apply.



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