



Brussels News Update

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Lack of Progress on Lisbon Education Objectives

A Commission review of progress towards the EU's Lisbon strategy targets for education and training show that most member states must try harder. Only one of the targets has so far been met – that for mathematics, science and technology (MST) graduates.

The report charts progress since 2000 in the light of key indicators and focuses on five education benchmarks agreed by the member states. The EU has succeeded in meeting the target for mathematics, science, and technology graduates. If present trends continue, over 1 million students will graduate in MST in the EU in 2010, compared to the present (2005) level of 860 000 graduates per year. These levels already exceed the benchmark. The best-performing countries in terms of MST graduates per 1 000 young people (20-29) are: Ireland (24.5), France (22.5), and Lithuania (18.9).

However, progress was only moderate for the other benchmarks including those for literacy, secondary level graduates, and participation in lifelong learning.

Source

Commission press release:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1431&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&quiLanguage=en>

Link

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/education/member-states-trailing-lisbon-education-objectives/article-167347>

EU Productivity Growth Outstrips US

EU productivity growth surpassed the US in 2006 leading the Commission to suggest that the Lisbon Agenda for growth and jobs is finally beginning to pay off. With growth rates at 3% and worker productivity growing at 1.5% in 2006 compared to 1.4% in the US, the Commission's annual competitiveness report highlighted the EU's best economic performance since 2000.

Commission Vice-President Günter Verheugen, responsible for enterprise and industry policy, said: "These are very encouraging results, which tell us that the reforms under the revised Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs are starting to bear fruit. European industries have managed to maintain their positions on global markets, contrary to American and Japanese producers. Now the challenge is to push forward our reform agenda. I'm still concerned about the spending on research and development, particularly in the private sector. There is a clear need to step it up."

The report's focus is on productivity, as the key driver of competitiveness and welfare in the long term. The main source of the gap between EU member states and the US is total factor productivity, i.e. productivity growth generated by intangible factors such as technical progress or organisational innovation. Therefore, it makes sense for the EU to prioritise the microeconomic reforms known to contribute most to productivity growth including increased investment in R&D, in ICT, education and training.

One of the major findings of the Competitiveness Report is that coordination at EU level when carrying out these reforms reinforces their effectiveness because of positive cross-border knowledge spill-over effects and synergies among complementary policies.

Sources

Commission press release:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1645&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&quiLanguage=en>

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/innovation/eu-overtakes-us-productivity-growth/article-168129>

Energy Proposals Delayed

Disagreements between member states have forced the Commission to delay publication of its energy and climate change proposals until January.

The climate and energy package was originally scheduled for publication on 5 December to coincide with the UN conference on climate change taking place in Bali. The package of measures is planned to include individual targets for each member state's contribution to binding EU targets on renewables and GHG emissions.

The delay could also mean that proposals for emissions limits for CO₂ from cars and increasing the share of biofuels in transport, which were planned to be released at the same time, may also be held up.

Source

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/climate-change/eu-climate-energy-proposals-delayed/article-167816>

Link

Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/energy/energy_policy/index_en.htm

Sustainability of Biofuels

The sustainability of biofuel production is likely to be a key part of the work of a new UN think tank on resource efficiency. The Commission expects the new International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management to provide much needed independent scientific assessment of the environmental impacts of using renewable and non-renewable resources.

Meanwhile, the EU looks likely to cut back biofuel production subsidies introduced in 2004 after land dedicated to biofuels crop production grew rapidly to significantly exceed the target set.

Sources

UNEP press release:

<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=521&ArticleID=5700&l=en>

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/sustainability/un-panel-address-sustainability-biofuels/article-168293>

Commission press release – Biofuels subsidies:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1528&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Links

Energy Policy Blog: <http://www.energypolicyblog.com/?p=81>

Commission press release - biofuel subsidies:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1528&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Commission Voices Support for Nuclear Power

High level Commission figures have recently been increasingly bold in calling for member states to consider the importance of nuclear power in reducing carbon emissions, especially as the Commission believes that CCS will be, at least initially, expensive.

Speaking at a conference in Madrid, Commission President Barroso said "Member states cannot avoid the question of nuclear energy". He was supported by Competition Commissioner Nellie Kroes who expressed her support for nuclear power and Energy Commissioner, Andris Piebalgs, who said that member states must debate the issue.

Meanwhile Matthias Ruete, Director General of the Commission's Transport and Energy directorate, speaking to Euractiv.com, warned that renewable energies alone will not be sufficient to deliver the ambitious CO2 reduction targets agreed by EU leaders for 2020. Rather, nuclear power and 'clean' fossil fuels using CCS will be needed if Europe is to make up for the shortfall, he said.

Reute also suggested that the high costs of CCS means that it may not make an early contribution to reducing CO2 emissions, and that further measures to improve financing would be necessary.

Finally, on 12 October, Commissioner Piebalgs launched the first meeting of a new High Level Group on nuclear safety and waste management which it hopes will create common EU standards and encourage investments in new plants.

Sources

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/energy/commission-backs-nuclear-energy-revolution/article-167308>

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/energy/nuclear-co2-storage-key-future-eu-energy-mix/article-167389>

EU Economy 'Not Sustainable'

The Commission has published its first Progress Report on the EU's renewed Sustainable Development Strategy, adopted in June 2006. It concludes that the EU and its member states are shifting policies towards long-term sustainability but action to turn around persistent unsustainable trends must be significantly stepped up. In particular, the Report confirms that Europe must implement markedly increase the use of alternative energy and take bolder steps towards environmentally friendly transport.

The renewed SDS identifies seven key challenges:

- Climate change and clean energy;
- sustainable transport;
- sustainable consumption and production;
- conservation and management of natural resources;
- public health;
- social inclusion, demography and migration; and;
- global poverty and global sustainable development challenges.

Key challenges include decoupling GDP growth and energy consumption increases in the transport sector and improving the sustainability of the way in which products are made and consumed. The Commission is scheduled to release an action plan on sustainable production and consumption and one on sustainable industrial policy before the end of 2007

Source

Commission press release:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1576&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

EQF Approved by Parliament

The European Parliament has adopted the recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), proposed by the Commission in September 2006. The EQF will act as a translation device between member states' qualifications systems in order to help employers and individuals compare and better understand citizens' qualifications and thus support mobility and lifelong learning.

The EQF is a translation grid for qualifications around Europe. It has two principal purposes: (1) to promote mobility between countries, and (2) to facilitate lifelong learning. At the core of the EQF are its eight reference levels, covering basic to most advanced qualifications. These describe what a learner knows, understands and is able to do, regardless of the system in which the learner's qualification was acquired. The EQF therefore shifts the focus away from learning inputs (such as the length of a learning experience, or the type of institution), to learning outcomes.

Under the recommendation approved by the European Parliament, member states relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010, and that individual certificates or diplomas should bear an EQF reference by 2012.

Source

Commission press release:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1601&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Commission Support for Fuel Cells and Hydrogen JTI

The European Commission has released its proposal for a Fuel Cells and Hydrogen Joint Technology Initiative (JTI). The Commission hopes that the new public-private partnership will boost the development of hydrogen technologies to the point of commercial take-off between 2010 and 2020.

The Commission will contribute up to €470 million to the project over the next six years, and this amount will have to be matched by private investments. The Fuel Cells and Hydrogen JTI is the fifth such initiative to be proposed by the Commission. The EU's research ministers discussed four other JTIs at their recent Council meeting, and a final decision on these is expected in November.

Source

http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=21&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1195114775608&RCN=28495

Link

http://ec.europa.eu/research/energy/index_en.htm

Researcher Visa

The European Commission has warned that infringement proceedings could follow after only six EU member states transposed legislation on the researchers' visa, a key element of the ERA, into national legislation.

The Directive is intended to allow third country nationals into the EU in order to conduct scientific research and applies to Schengen countries plus Ireland. The Schengen agreement provides for the abolition of systematic border controls.

Friday 12 October was the deadline for making the 2005 Directive national law. By that date, only Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Portugal and Romania had complied fully. A further four member states (France, Latvia, Lithuania and the Slovak Republic) had notified the Commission of partial implementation.

Science and Research Commissioner Janez Potocnik urged the member states to 'honour their commitment to create a system for scientists from outside the EU who want to carry out their research here. If Europe is to be a world leader in science, then it must be open to the world,' he said.

Source

Cordis News:

http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=19&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1195114775608&RCN=28520

Tightening Pollution Controls

The Commission is considering proposals to revise the directive on Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC), possibly through the establishment of binding EU standards instead of guidelines.

The 1996 Directive on IPPC introduces a permit system to prevent and limit pollution from large-scale industrial installations. Sectors covered include everything from metals, chemicals and paper to processed food, oil refineries and large-scale pig and poultry farms.

The Commission is expected to present its proposal for a revised IPPC Directive on 17 December.

Sources

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/sustainability/commission-seeks-tighten-pollution-controls/article-168090>

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/sustainability/eu-economy-sustainable-finds-commission-report/article-167903>

Pesticides: Parliament Extends Banned List

The European Parliament has approved an expanded list of banned substances for pesticide production, but earlier proposals to tighten use of pesticides around public areas were voted down.

The Commission published a package of measures on pesticides in July 2006 to update the 1991 directive on the market authorisation of plant protection products (pesticides), and a directive that covers the day-to-day use of pesticides. The Commission now hopes to secure final approval of the proposals at the Agriculture Council at the end of November.

The Commission originally proposed that substances with carcinogenic, genotoxic and endocrine-disrupting effects, and those that could harm reproductive health should not be used in producing pesticides. The Parliament's decision adds potentially immunotoxic and neurotoxic substances to that list.

Source

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/environment/pesticides-parliament-tough-substances-lenient-use/article-167839>

Links

Commission - Sustainable Use of Pesticides: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ppps/home.htm>

NoEs Call for Additional EU Support

A group of 56 EU-funded Networks of Excellence (NoEs), representing more than 13,000 researchers, has drafted an opinion paper calling for action from the European Commission to secure the long-term future of the most successful integrated networks.

The signatories believe that NoEs face an uncertain future, and urge the Commission to take four actions to ensure their long-term sustainability. The proposed actions address the Commission's commitment to NoEs, funding, a review of NoEs and further exploitation of the networks.

The Commission has responded by saying that it is looking to re-examine how NoEs can be used 'as an instrument to take a real step forward in the European Research Area'.

Source

http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=15&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1195114775608&RCN=28555

Link

<http://www.supportresearchnoes.eu/>

Chemicals in Medical Devices - Phthalates

An EU scientific committee has concluded that phthalates in medical devices could harm patients' health. This follows the 2005 EU ban on phthalates in toys.

The scientific committee on emerging health risks (SCENIHR) looked at the safety of PVC-made medical devices softened with DEHP and concluded that high exposure of patients to phthalates during medical treatment is a cause for concern.

Source

Euractiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/health/concerns-raised-use-chemicals-medical-devices/article-167647>

Link

SCENIHR report on the safety of medical devices containing DEHP:
http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_risk/committees/04_scenihr/docs/scenihr_o_008.pdf

New EUR1.2 billion Accelerator Facility

Representatives of 15 countries signed on 7 November in Darmstadt, Germany, a joint communiqué giving the go-ahead for the construction of the Facility for Antiproton and Ion Research (FAIR). With the help of the €1.2 billion facility, researchers will try to answer some fundamental questions of physics.

FAIR is an important element of the ongoing implementation of the European Research Area and will offer scientists from Europe and all over the world an extraordinary opportunity to do research on the structure of matter and the universe,' the joint communiqué states, welcoming the European Commission's support of new research infrastructures under the Sixth and Seventh Framework Programmes (FP6 and FP7).

Source

Cordis News:

http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=4&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=1195114775608&RCN=28653

Link

FAIR: http://www.gsi.de/fair/overview/info/index_e.html



Produced for EuCheMS by Glenn Vaughan, EuCheMS European Policy Consultant

tel. +32 473 96.44.68 email. Glenn@GVCBrussels.eu

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