

Recommendations of the CPU on the Marie Curie and Erasmus Mundus programmes April 2011

Interactions of the Marie Curie programme with other programmes of the DG EAC, in particular with, for example, the Erasmus Mundus programme, will become increasingly significant. However, the significance of the Marie Curie programme rests within its research training aspect: the very unique character of universities that aim to strive equally in the fields of research and training as they do in innovation ; these three missions are inseparable, and French universities strongly oppose a vision of some universities focussed on research and others on teaching. Every university combines these two pillars by having its own research orientation, which is all the more important as we advance within the context of smart specialisation.

1 - Erasmus Mundus

Proposal 1 : towards harmonisation of Erasmus Mundus and ITN. As regards framework conditions, salaries paid in Erasmus Mundus actions must approach those in ITN. In fact, even if Erasmus Mundus actions are funded with another budget than that of the framework programme, we need to move towards a more significant simplification that would require the implementation of common rules with Marie Curie actions ; all the more so since they are managed by the same Directorate General of the European Commission (DG EAC). It would be possible, for example, to incorporate the rule of correction coefficients depending on the country of destination, according to the same rules as those of the ITN.

Proposal 2 : Erasmus Mundus shall finance only mobility (and no longer funding of theses, which would allow a larger number of beneficiaries and reinforce complementarity with the ITN, whose beneficiaries could, at the end of their programme, fund their mobility via Erasmus Mundus) If only mobility is funded, then that would facilitate sustainability.

Links: Erasmus Mundus actions / Industry

Proposal 3 : within the content of the actions and in order to more readily identify their specific characteristics, it is not desirable to reinforce links with the industry within the context of Erasmus Mundus actions, since those are already the subject of Marie Curie actions which are endowed with a substantial budget, as are the ITNs and the IAPP. Moreover, Erasmus Mundus, whose aim is to introduce joint qualifications, lends itself less readily to this exercise.

- We should reduce industry partnerships in Erasmus Mundus programmes.
- We should dedicate the Erasmus Mundus programme to mobility and not the salaries of candidates pursuing PhD research within the frame of networks of institutions, to differentiate it from the Marie Curie programme. A compromise could be proposed with a mixed system where two types of Mundus networks could coexist: mobility funding and thesis funding.

2 - Marie Curie Actions

In the knowledge triangle, training, which constitutes one of its three areas, is specifically the responsibility of universities. That is why the universities must take a clear position on mobility.

The EC hopes for the greatest management homogeneity amongst different programmes henceforth managed by the DG EAC (Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Comenius, Marie Curie). The coming together of the programmes relating to research and higher education is an opportunity to share the experiences of the DG EAC and the DG RTD.

Proposal 4 : the transfer of Marie Curie actions to the DG EAC must not be accompanied by a decrease in means over long term, nor with a drop in the quality of management of these research actions. In the context of greater synergy, participation rules should converge towards simplification;

Proposal 5 : the ITNs of Marie Curie actions, precursors to the university/industry relationships, must serve as models for the issue of the employability of the PhDs;

Proposal 6 : obstacles to mobility between Member States must be removed (welfare cover, pension contributions, etc.)

Proposal 7 : Marie Curie programmes could be simplified by actions designated to target audiences (a programme for PhD candidates, young researchers, experienced researchers...). The number of individual grants would benefit from an increase rather than a decrease in favour of cofund programs, which could be redesigned on the scale of smaller-sized establishments (e.g. a small university).

3 - Links: Marie Curie actions / Industry

Reminder: French universities maintain solid and numerous relationships with the industry (major groupings, SMEs, start-ups) at various levels (training, apprenticeship, procurement, research...). This applies to all universities whatever their size.

Industrial PHD

As a reminder, there exist two Marie Curie actions in which companies can participate, and are strongly engaged in doing so: IAPP and ITN. The DG EAC would like to introduce an "industrial PhD", a programme of co funding of doctoral theses by companies and universities with a mandatory European dimension.

Proposal 8 : this initiative could be trialled within ITN actions. Yet, given the large number of industrial PhDs that are fulfilled without any financial incentive (e.g. in technical subjects in Germany and France), the instrument must be carefully conceived so as to avoid the emergence of knock-on free riding effects. It could be imaginable that these theses could be co-funded by companies, but it must be stipulated that the PhD candidate spend 50% of his/her working time in a company.

Industry chairs

Proposal 9 : it would be conceivable to introduce some industry chairs at European level. These chairs for industry would allow someone of a senior profile from the industry to be, for example, accommodated in a university for 6 months, where he/she would lead teaching modules and research activities. The budget will be taken from that of the IAPP. Such an initiative would help ensure a balance between two different and complementary approaches: an approach with a mass effect and a more individual approach, both serving the same purpose.

In the case of such chairs, it would suffice to receive industry researchers and vice versa (academics working in industry, as that is already required in the IAPP).

Proposal 10 : other instruments can be envisaged such as industry chairs in the form of individual grants but reserved for “host institutions” which are from the private sector (as existed in the FP5).

ITN programmes

The universities also insist on strengthening the part of training in ITN projects: this could form part of the assessment criteria and be favourably highlighted in the guides for applicants. The universities are indeed convinced that research is inseparable from training.

Proposal 11 : French universities emphasise the importance of including new operators: museums or other structures that can accommodate a PhD student for a number of months, and who are likely to benefit from the work of ITN networks; the importance of the role of civil society organised in the form of NGOs. They recommend specifying more clearly in the work program and the “Guides for Applicants” the fact that a more proportionate participation of socio-economic, and not only industrial, operators is desirable as far as possible.

These new instruments must remain consistent with existing national policies, such as, for example, Doctoral Schools in France. They must not substitute or change the current mode of operation.

Budget assigned to industry-oriented Marie Curie actions

Proposal 12 : whether it concerns the ITN, IAPP, or new instruments to come (industrial PhD), the aim is that the budget dedicated to Marie Curie actions that help tighten links with the industry, would be a maximum budget of 50% of Marie Curie actions.

This significant amount demonstrates the importance given to links between the industry and universities / research institutions, while also helping protect the diversity of missions of researcher mobility and the research fields and laboratories concerned. The latter point is fundamental, for the un-directed, non-subject-specific nature of the People programme is widely considered in the scientific research community as its strong point, allowing the development of a diversity of innovative themes in all research fields independently of their immediate potential for industrial application. This is about a fair balance between research objectives and also reinforcing the training dimension in certain actions, as we shall see later.

Industry / university links: development instrument

A new instrument could be proposed to improve interaction in the field of research development. Many laboratories have staffing needs for technology transfer or project development.

Proposal 13 : to introduce a sub-programme specifically for the exchange of resource persons: networks of laboratories, supported by development structures, possibly including the private sector, could be conceived. Amongst the instruments, mobility funding of resource persons (positions of development engineers/researchers) would be useful, with a European dimension:

- For sharing best practice, prerequisite for introducing European structures
- At the level of individual grants on specific projects “an IAPP that deals with research development or project development
- Project development
- Balanced relationships concerning intellectual property (university as joint-owner or owner)

4 - Cofund

Proposal 14 : Cofund should also be open for application by an establishment the size of a small university; this would be an instrument or service of a specific strategy. The work programme should specify that application is possible even for a small budget; this would help increase the impact of Cofund by ensuring better competition between projects, and by allowing the funding of projects of a more varied nature, in greater numbers, through smaller individual sums.

5 - Careers

More generally, it should be specified what kinds of mobility are desired, and for what career opportunities. The definition of a research strategy with a (for example 10-year) vision on the place of research in the ERA requires more depth. This question is an addition to the work on the partnership for researchers.

- The issue of individual mobility cannot be disconnected from organisational strategy (a university is not able to “let go” of some researchers during key periods in their career):
- The mobility question cannot be treated in the same way in universities and in organisations and companies, due to teaching/research links. Mobility projects for lecturer-researchers are often limited (mainly in duration) by teaching issues. Fragmentation of visits or their duration are crucial issues. Shared teaching departments between several universities at European-scale could be envisaged.

It must also be possible to take mobility into account in the careers of the researchers at the time of assessment, which is not always the case at present.

6 – Other

Support for an innovative doctoral programme

- Cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary support;
- Openness to other operators (not only the industry)
- must be carried out by universities, but this new possibility must not disturb the national landscape of doctoral schools.

Bottom-up / top-down approach

French universities reiterate the importance that these actions be exclusively sanctioned with a bottom-up approach.