

NORTH SEA COMMISSION – EDUCATION AND RESEARCH GROUP

WORK PROGRAMME 2005-2006

This provisional Work Programme has been produced by the Working Group of the Education & Research Group (ERG) in advance of the next full meeting of the ERG due to be held on 31 March 2005, when it will be reviewed and subsequently published for approval at the NSC General Assembly in June 2005.

Introduction

The ERG is currently re-addressing its aims and objectives as a result of recent significant developments in European strategies which relate to this thematic area. These developments are indicated in the following:

- Lisbon Strategy (2000)
- Wim Kok report (November 2004)
- Maastricht Communiqué (December 2004)
- Education and Training 2010
- Europe 2010: A partnership for European Renewal
- Working together for Growth and Jobs – a new start for the Lisbon Strategy (February 2005)

European funding programmes from 2007 will reflect the emphasis on “growth and jobs”, which has now become a strategic priority for the EU.

In addition, the North Sea Commission is reviewing its purpose and ways of working. The ERG is also taking into account the document to be considered by the NSC Executive Committee (currently in draft form):

- Discussion of the future structure of the NSC

The aims and objectives of the ERG

The emphasis on knowledge and innovation will influence the direction for the ERG and other thematic groups. The ERG recognises the need for further opportunities to learn about these developments, and suggests an event in October 2005 in conjunction with the other thematic groups on “Competence and innovation for 2010”.

The ERG aims and objectives of January 2004 are currently under review, and it is planned to make some rapid progress during the next weeks towards a newer structure, way of working and a work programme for the group, to reflect the context of the changes which will inevitably arise from these developments. This process began at the ERG’s first conference in Aalborg in September 2004, focusing on the Lifelong Learning aspects of the Lisbon strategy, and Education and Training 2010.

On 31 March the ERG will consider the proposals for revisions to the way it carries out its work. The new work programme will be reviewed and subsequently published for consideration at the NSC General Assembly in June 2005.

Structure

Political focus

The ERG has planned the first meeting of its political chair and vice-chairs, which will take place on 22 March. By the time of this meeting the ERG should have a second vice-chair.

This meeting will consider the potential for a more active role for politicians in the context of Education and Research, and how to engage with current and future political issues which will have an impact on the work of the group. The NSC discussion on "The future structure of the North Sea Commission" will provide the starting point for the meeting. Common interests will be identified and the possible role of each politician within the ERG will be addressed.

It will also consider the strategies which the group should adopt after the discussions of the NSC Thematic meeting and Executive Committee meeting on 28 February and 1 March.

Working Group

For the first time, the ERG has proposed a small working group to take forward the planning of the work of the group and to make recommendations to the ERG members. The first meeting of this group is on 17 February 2005.

Sub-groups

These are proposed for specific focus work or specific tasks, possibly working with other groups of the NSC. The focus for these sub-groups will be identified from an initial set of proposals, which are likely to include:

- Specific aspects of the Lifelong Learning agenda including skills development
- Support for SMEs to innovate and develop – a number of colleges are actively engaged in supporting SMEs, and these wish to build on their combined expertise to drive this work forwards.
- A schools network, to link with the Economic Development Group's Renewables group, specifically to look at renewable energy and sustainability. This schools' group would work alongside local authorities with an interest in building energy-efficient and sustainable schools.

Funding group

A small group has been proposed to do some specific work to identify sources of funding, pre and post 2007, for the range of activities in which the ERG is likely to engage.

Areas of interest for the ERG

The following areas were identified at the last meeting of the ERG in December 2004:

- Common challenges in lifelong learning around the North Sea
- Support for innovation and development in SMEs
- Private and public sector networking
- Developing knowledge and encouraging innovation
- Working with non-traditional learners
- Employability
- Knowledge transfer between education and business/industry
- Work experience and work-shadowing – guidelines and initiatives

What is replacing traditional industries and what skills are needed

Reacting to and learning from change

Working with other NSC thematic groups

Working with very small SMEs, looking at the specific difficulties they face

Innovation in food and drink

These broad areas are to be developed in the work plan of the ERG.

Joint work with other thematic groups

The ERG is increasingly working alongside other thematic groups, for example in culinary heritage, with the EDG and the C&T groups.

The ERG actively encourages work with the other groups and this aspect is likely to grow in the context of the Lisbon aims.