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NSC Education & Research Group Annual Report 2006

Introduction

This report summarises the work of the Education & Research Group (ERG) since the Annual General Meeting of the NSC in June 2005 and introduces the ERG work programme for 2006. The report ends with a re-iteration of the statements of the ERG Politicians Group and the ERG in response to the recommendations of the NSC Executive Committee for the re-structuring of the NSC.

Chair, Vice Chairs and Co-ordinator

Chair Councillor Alexander Thomson, Fife Council, Scotland
Vice-chair Councillor Bernard Cailliau, Regional Councillor, Nord Pas de Calais, France
Vice-chair Councillor Christian Bach Iversen, North Jutland, Denmark, who was elected at the NSC Executive Committee meeting of 15 June 2005.
Co-ordinator Ann Brown (North Sea Commission)

Meetings of the ERG

The Political Group of the ERG comprising the Chair and Vice Chairs, their officers and the ERG Co-ordinators met on 27 October 2005 in Trollhättan and on 13 March 2006 in Leslie, Fife.

These meetings enabled the Chair and Vice Chairs to review the work of the ERG, to discuss the proposed workplan of the ERG and to agree the areas of focus for the group.

The ERG met on 28 October 2005 in Trollhättan and on 14 March 2006 in Leslie, Fife.

The outcomes of the NSC seminar in Trollhättan provided a new starting point for the development of the ERG Workplan 2006.

The ERG Co-ordinator attended the following meetings:

Meetings to plan the Lisbon seminar in Trollhättan

Meeting to plan the General Assembly 2006

Meetings to plan the forthcoming Food Event on 31 August to 1 September 2006.

Meeting of the Environment Group 27 January 2006

Meeting with the Economic Development Co-ordinator on 24 April 2006 to discuss matters common to the work plans of the ERG and EDG.

Conferences involving ERG members

The ERG has played a substantial part both in organising, and by providing inputs for, two major NSC events:

- The Lisbon-Gothenburg Seminar which took place in Trollhättan in October 2005. (The ERG also proposed this seminar and defined the rationale for the NSC in holding this seminar.)
- The forthcoming Food Event to be held in Dundee on 31 August to 1 September 2006



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New work of the ERG since the General Assembly 2005

During 2005 and 2006 there has been a change in the capacity of the ERG to engage in the full range of actions which were originally proposed in the ERG Work Plan, due to the lack of a Co-ordinator provided by a NSC county or region. Since organising the Trollhättan Seminar, the work of the ERG Co-ordinator has been restricted to planning the ERG components of the NSC General Assembly and, together with the C&T and EDG Co-ordinators, organising the forthcoming NSC Food Event.

As a result some actions in the original work plan have been restricted or dropped entirely.

- The work on developing an up to date database of ERG members and potential members has been abandoned because of poor responses from NSC member regions, restrictions on the activities of the Co-ordinator, and lack of time for other ERG officer members to engage fully in this work.
- Further action to research the direction of the Lisbon agenda and to propose the way forward for the ERG. Related actions to research appropriate funding sources to realise further actions.
- The Small Working Group of the ERG has been discontinued.

The following actions depend substantially on the efforts of a range of ERG group members.

1 The NSC Food Event – 31 August to 1 September 2006

The Co-ordinator has taken a major role in organising this event. The conference sessions will take place at Dundee College, which has had long representation on the ERG.

The Networking Study Tours and Evening Dinners on 1 September, following the conference, are to be hosted by Angus, Dundee City, Fife and Perth & Kinross Councils. Perth & Kinross will also host the Conference Dinner on 31 August.

2 Promoting and encouraging the professional and social inclusion of young people

This work was identified as a result of the Trollhättan Seminar and is being led by the region Nord Pas de Calais. It is seen by the ERG as a significant contribution to the Trollhättan aims. The example of the system of “Missions Locale” in Nord Pas de Calais was explained at the Trollhättan workshop on “Building the Knowledge Society and Tackling Equality”.

Nord Pas de Calais is now leading the work on a comparison which is being undertaken by the ERG of how the member regions tackle problems of professional and social inclusion of young people. When all of the results have been collected and assembled, work will begin on planning the dissemination of best practice and experience as a result of this comparison. The aim is to follow this up with exchanges of professionals in this field.

In addition it is hoped to encourage mobility in young people for work experience, training and work.

Funding sources for taking this work forward in the 2007-2013 programming period might include Grundtvig and Leonardo da Vinci sections of the EC Integrated Education funding programme.

3 Promoting Lifelong Learning

This action strand originates from the ERG Aalborg conference of 2004, “Lifelong Learning – from Strategy to Reality”. A focus on mobility has been chosen because of its increased emphasis within EC Education funding programmes, and as an outcome of the recent work of Fife Council.

Fife Council has identified a lack of statistics and data on workers’ mobility, and has put forward a proposal which will be re-submitted to the DG Education and Culture during the autumn of 2006.



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The ERG will need to re-assess what actions can be taken forward as a result of this bid when the outcome is known.

Actions on mobility are also of interest to the Economic Development Group

4 Investigating the effect of demographic change on inclusion, employability and opportunities for lifelong learning

This action results from initial investigations which have been undertaken by the Educational Centres Association of the UK, which is represented on the ERG. Some of this work can be incorporated into the work being planned under 1 and 2 above, but there may also be a potential for funded actions, through Interreg and other sources.

5 North Sea Schools Environment and Sustainability Network

A proposal originating in Suffolk is in the early stages of forming a North Sea Schools Network, which will focus on the environment and sustainability. This proposal has been discussed at a meeting in January 2006 with the NSC Environment Group's Project Working Group. It is planned to begin the work through a Comenius-funded project which will enable schools to form a partnership for sharing ideas and good practice in this field. A proposal is being developed which is to be circulated to interested schools in the North Sea Region.

A Preparatory Meeting of schools is in the early stages of planning for the Autumn term 2006, at which an initial partnership of primary and secondary schools will be established. A bid for funding is proposed to be submitted by the end of January 2007, and, if successful, work on the project would begin in September 2007, lasting for 3 years.

An additional aim is to form a more substantial network, including local and provincial authorities, which could be initiated during the course of this project.

Matters arising from the March 2006 meeting of the ERG Politicians' Group and the meeting of the ERG – concerning the future of the ERG

These meetings took place after the NSC Executive meeting in Ipswich, at which proposals for the future structure of the NSC was discussed. These proposals have a profound effect on the future of the ERG, the youngest of the NSC Thematic Groups.

Statements were produced at these meetings which were subsequently sent to the NSC Secretariat for discussion at the NSC Strategic Group meeting in April 2006.

Statement from the Political Group of the ERG:

"The Chair and Vice Chairs of the Education and Research Group accept that, due primarily to resource constraints, there is likely to be a re-structuring of the North Sea Commission's working arrangements during 2007. However, we are mandated to carry out a programme for the calendar year 2006, agreed and endorsed by the Executive Committee. Our programme must therefore be resourced to carry on beyond the June 2006 General Assembly until the end of the year.

We would therefore reassert our overall agreed political and strategic objectives deriving from the Lisbon and Gothenburg Agendas in the context of Education and Research. Having determined that there are no further resources that can be deployed from within the administrations of the political group, we remit it to the Executive to resolve any resource issues that may arise both during the second half of 2006 and during 2007.

It is important to decide on the NSC objectives and then follow this with a structure which will achieve these objectives. We would therefore advise the Executive that the future structure of the organisation should follow from the objectives of the NSC including those set out in the Trollhättan Declaration."



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Statement from the ERG:

“The ERG agreed that there was a need for review of the structure of the NSC.

There was unanimous agreement that the process of change was going too fast. There appeared to have been no analysis of the situation. It was neither known which thematic groups were functioning effectively, nor whether joint initiatives across the groups had produced useful outcomes.

The ERG recommends that:

The process for change should include a full discussion of the aims of the NSC for the future. It is important to decide on aims and objectives as the first step.

Having established this, the next step is to work out proposals for reorganisation of the NSC structure which would best fulfil these aims.”

Ann Brown
ERG Co-ordinator
May 2006