



Strengthen the link between research and innovation

BACKGROUND

The future of EU competitiveness depends on its innovation capacity, given the increasingly global competition for higher added-value activities. European policy-makers recognised this in December 2006 with the launch of a broad-based innovation strategy which seeks to promote more innovation-friendly markets. New initiatives have also been taken to develop the supporting European Research Area (ERA). These include a new governance process to strengthen the coordination between all relevant stakeholders (the “Ljubljana Process”).

Achieving the outcomes sought by Europe’s leaders depends upon improving Europe’s attractiveness across a wide range of policy areas. Aggregate R&D spending in Europe lags significantly, in relative terms, behind levels in the US, Japan and other new competitors such as South Korea. This bears on its capacity to develop and absorb new technologies. The link between research, education and innovation is still insufficiently encouraged and developed, leading to missed opportunities for growth and job creation. Knowledge has to be brought to the market, helping to deliver new products, new services and new solutions in a world of limited resources. Europe needs to become more competitive with regard to research and innovation activities. Promoting this objective must remain a key EU priority for the foreseeable future. Otherwise, the region will be unable to sustain the high-productivity jobs required in today’s global environment, finance social systems in an ageing society or become a world leader in clean technologies and energy efficiency.

Strengthen industry / university links

Improving the EU's research and innovation capacity depends greatly on achieving better cooperation between universities and industry, and increasing knowledge exchange. It is important to foster a greater number of temporary staff exchanges between public and private R&D laboratories. Initiatives such as 'Responsible Partnering', aimed at promoting better practices for collaborative research and knowledge transfer show the way forward and need to be promoted. BUSINESSEUROPE also encourages policy-makers to recognise that Europe benefits from many public and private research and technology organisations with long experience of technology transfer to industry. There is potential to strengthen these institutions and enhance the contribution of applied research and technology services through better regulation and adequate financial schemes.

Furthermore, Europe needs to fully grasp the benefits offered by initiatives such as the European Technology Platforms (ETPs), the Joint Technology Initiatives (JTIs) and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), all of which are examples of public-private partnerships with high potential.

Improve education and training systems

Education and training are fundamental prerequisites for innovativeness and the ability to create useful new knowledge. In order to ensure an adequate supply of a sufficiently-skilled workforce, attention needs to be given to the capacity of education systems to impart the skills required for innovation, entrepreneurship and research. General levels of education, primary and secondary, have a crucial role to play in ensuring the supply of these skills. It must be easier for foreign students to more easily have the opportunity to study and envisage attractive career paths in the EU. Failure to attract, motivate and retain talented young people, and to pay sufficient attention to lifelong learning will hamper the EU's capacity to perform activities which support innovation and research, damaging competitiveness in the long run.

Develop technological solutions to global problems

Research and innovation have key roles to play in meeting the many challenges which European society faces, including climate change and energy security, effective healthcare, the adoption of nanotechnologies and the pervasive use of information and communication technologies. In addressing these challenges, the EU must adopt an integrated approach, providing coherent regulation, incentives and public procedures that enable the market to produce new technologies.

Coordinate policy actions at all levels

Many aspects of research, education and innovation, and many of the global challenges that Europe faces have moved on since the 2000 Lisbon European Council. Changes will continue to occur in the future and Europe's capacity to adapt will depend on its ability to identify the evolving challenges it has to face and develop dynamic policy responses.

More effort must be made to improve policy coordination between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council, as well as between the European, national and regional levels. European policies in the fields of research, education and innovation are too fragmented. Europe urgently needs to adopt a truly integrated approach to research, education and innovation. Furthermore, it is counterproductive to adopt a risk-averse attitude when deciding on research financing. BUSINESSEUROPE fully supports the Commission's recent call to Council and Parliament for a more trust-based approach and risk-tolerant rules.