

Fostering collaborative research projects between academia and industry in Europe

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The active involvement of commercial enterprises in research activities is a key factor in Europe's development as the most competitive knowledge-driven and innovation-based society of the world, as specified in the Lisbon agenda.

Therefore, the European Commission aims to increase the participation of enterprises in Framework Programme activities, and particularly of SMEs.

The Marie Curie Actions (FP7 People Programme) aim to provide mobility opportunities by funding human resources in all fields of research and technology. Various support measures are available. Typically these extend from individual postdoc fellowships through to excellent researchers or institutional training networks for less experienced researchers. Whereas these actions are well known and popular with researchers, they lack similar visibility in the commercial sector.

The Marie Curie Industry-Academia Partnerships and Pathways scheme (IAPP) is a newly-created action. IAPPs aim to enhance long-term scientific collaboration between commercial enterprises and non-commercial organisations based on common research projects.

The secondment of staff between the commercial and non-commercial sectors serves to transfer knowledge and know-how and so to break down real or perceived barriers which currently restrict mobility between universities and the private sector, and unnecessarily narrow the career perspectives for researchers.

To be eligible for funding, an IAPP project must involve at least one partner from each sector, i.e. one commercial enterprise (including SMEs) and one non-commercial institution (typically a university or research centre). The partners must be located in two different EU or asso-

Dear Reader,

Studies of recent years have shown that cooperation between industry and academia works well when both sides are able to profit equally. The Industry-Academia Partnerships and Pathways (IAPP) scheme in the Specific Programme "People" (Marie Curie Actions) of the 7th EU Framework Programme (FP7) builds on an element that has been able to prove itself in creating a new win-win situation: inter-sectoral staff exchange. Young researchers are able to gain experience in fields of applied science and can use the infrastructure provided by industry, while the company's staff become acquainted with a scientific environment and are able to acquire additional skills and knowledge in their specific field.

IAPP measures to finance staff exchange combine these advantages with the opportunity to make new international contacts. Success rates in excess of 30%, the small minimum size for the cooperation, and the extensive organisational freedom make a proposal all the more attractive.

This edition of the KoWi-Forschungsbrief introduces the instrument in an article by the European Commission and will also explain what participants from academia and industry as well as our European partners think of it. KoWi, the European Liaison Office of the German Research Organisations, will be pleased to provide information and advice on the IAPP measures.

Best regards,
 Dr. Jens-Peter Gaul
 Director of KoWi

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ciated countries. Commercial partners are companies or institutes which earn a majority of their revenue from operating in commercial markets.

Once these minimum requirements have been fulfilled, any additional participant(s) from any sector and from anywhere in the world can take part in the consortium. For example, a consortium may consist of one French and two German partners, opening up the option of paid secondments in Germany, as long as these are between partners from different sectors.

There is no typical size of a partnership, but in 2007 the "average" project included three to four participants; many projects only had two partners and there were a few projects with more than 10 institutions in the consortium.

Funding staff secondment

The IAPP scheme funds the secondment of staff at any career stage from PhD candidates to senior researchers, as well as technicians or management staff directly involved in the project. It is also possible to recruit experienced researchers (typically postdocs) from within the consortium. However, the recruitment must not outweigh the secondment, which is the main vehicle for collaboration in the IAPP scheme. The action recognises the fact that it is not always possible to second staff for long periods, especially from small companies. Therefore, secondments may be for as little as two months and up to a maximum of two years. Moreover the secondment periods may be split into several visits of shorter duration and spread over the lifetime of the project.

German participation

So far, two calls for proposals have been held, one in 2007 and another in 2008. The first call (year 2007) had a budget of

38.5 million euros and received 102 applications. These proposals included 55 German institutions, including 21 SMEs. 40 proposals were negotiated for funding and 16 of these involved at least one German participant. 140 proposals were submitted in 2008 in the second call with a budget of 45 million euros. 70 of them included German institutions. It is likely that 45 to 50 proposals will be funded and, of those currently in negotiation, 14 will involve German institutions.

Grant Agreements are typically awarded for a period of four years. Compared to FP6, great efforts have been made to simplify the reporting obligations. Under FP7 the first report is due after the first two project years have been completed and coincides with a mid-term review by the EC services. The only other report is due at the end of the project.

Call for proposals in April 2009

A call for proposals will be launched in April 2009 with a deadline of 27 July. The budget will amount to 65 million euros, representing a significant increase in funds compared to 2007 and 2008.

In summary, the IAPP scheme aims to be as flexible as possible. Consortia vary widely in size, may involve the full spread of researcher experience, may be from any field of research, and have a lean administrative commitment. The budgets for projects funded so far range from 250,000 euros to almost 3 million euros. With a likely success rate of 35% in 2009, IAPP is an attractive funding scheme for those working at the interface between research activities and potential commercial applications.

Marie Curie IAPP

IAPP projects finance cooperation between industry and academia through the mutual exchange of staff and knowledge carried out within the scope of smaller research consortia. The scheme is particularly suited for "FP beginners".

IAPP offers funding, not only covering the salaries of researchers, but also conference, coordination and management costs.

Knowledge transfer and the financial situation of the mobile scientists are secured by the following condition: It has to be guaranteed that the scientist will be employed for at least one more year at the sending institution.

Eligible proposals have to be made up of at least two persons from different sectors (industry and academia) and with their registered offices located in different EU Member or Associated States. It is possible to integrate players from non-EU countries.

The **funding period** runs for between three and four years. Proposals are submitted via the 'Electronic Proposal Submission System' (EPSS), in accordance with the deadlines specified in the call for proposals.

Dates: Next Call for Proposals:

24 April, 2009

Submission deadline: 27 July, 2009

KoWi offers preparatory workshops on how to apply:

Information meeting organised by KoWi, together with the National Contact Points for Mobility and SMEs, in Bonn:
22 April, 2009

KoWi Applicant Workshop on IAPP in Brussels: 1 July, 2009

For further information, see:
www.kowi.de

Particularly valuable for young researchers

Three questions for Prof. Dr. Hans-Georg Sahl
Institute of Medical Microbiology, Immunology and Parasitology (IMMIP)

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Professor Dr. Hans-Georg Sahl

From your experience, who is the main beneficiary of the IAPP funding scheme?

Both sides benefit equally, and all our project partners generally have a very positive opinion.

It is advantageous for basic research to know what industry's specific features and ways of thinking are. While industry, for its part, needs complementary interaction with research institutes. And especially so, because smaller companies and enterprises are by no means able to work by themselves on all the aspects that are of relevance to them.

However, the individuals taking part in the exchange actually benefit more than the scientists active in the research and industry working groups. For young researchers, in particular, who come from the field of academia, the experience and contacts acquired through the interaction with industry are of great value to their career.

Was it difficult for you to tailor your research to the particularities of the IAPP-scheme?

In terms of topic, we did not have to tailor our research to the IAPP scheme. In organisational terms, however, we did have to make a number of compromises. Difficulties arose from the fact that the staff are employed under temporary contracts and for defined projects, which are carried out within a tight schedule. A change of location is likely to interrupt ongoing projects at universities, such as PhD dissertations. The industrial partners are often unable to delegate strategically important staff as planned to the exchange. However, all the partners were prepared and willing to find good and flexible solutions on a case-by-case basis.

Please tell us about the experiences and feedback of the staff that you seconded to industry.

So far, we have only seconded one doctoral student to an industrial partner and have, for our part, not yet received any exchange staff. The doctoral student is enthusiastic about the opportunities that it provides, but is less pleased that she had to interrupt her work on the dissertation. Actually, it would also be advantageous if the exchange were not only allowed to take place between industrial and academic partners. The recruitment of external staff should be extended. In addition, more consumables should be made available.

An important vehicle for efficient networking

Interview with Dr. Ann Vinckier,
Networking Manager Corporate Research,
QIAGEN GmbH

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Dr. Ann Vinckier

Why did you choose to apply for the IAPP programme?

At QIAGEN I'm responsible for the acquisition and project management of funded projects. I look for funding opportunities for innovative projects and support the scientists in writing the proposal. In this respect, I'm more or less the "internal national contact point". As I see it, the People programme is especially appealing for research projects that rely on an extensive exchange of complementary knowledge, skills and expertise.

How did you find the academic partners for the project?

QIAGEN is actively involved in numerous collaborative projects with universities and research institutes, but mostly at national level. We also organise scientific seminars in which we invite speakers from various universities and institutes so we can learn more about their research. So, partners had already been identified and a preliminary contact with our IAPP

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**An important vehicle
for efficient networking**

partner was already in place; but no direct research collaboration was being done. Since I already had a personal contact, it wasn't that difficult to convince our partner. Furthermore, the bottom up approach for the research project /programme offered us an opportunity to really design our "own" project.

What value added has the IAPP project generated for your company?

The project has just started. We hope it will meet our expectations. It really needs to be seen in the light of close cooperation in which research and development go hand in hand. Corresponding skills and complementary facilities, infrastructure and expertise are all available at our IAPP partner. In the long term, we hope to enter a new market field and to further enhance our global position. On the other hand, I have already noticed that our involvement in an EU project serves as an important vehicle for efficient networking and for getting to know other groups.

A perfect scheme for fostering intersectoral collaboration

**Interview with Dr. Dagmar M. Meyer
Irish Universities Association,
National Contact Point (NCP) Ireland**

© Foto Irish Universities Association



Dr. Dagmar M. Meyer

What makes IAPP attractive for participants? What common misperceptions are there about IAPP?

The IAPP is a very simple scheme, making it ideal for small players without much FP experience.

The rules allow for any size of consortia, long and short secondments, and even exchanges within the same country.

Specific expertise can be tapped by recruiting external researchers. IAPP is the perfect scheme for fostering intersectoral collaboration, allowing companies to benefit from the state-of-the-art research at the academic partner, while the academic researchers get the opportunity to better understand the different needs and priorities of the industry players.

A common misperception is that 'Brussels is complicated by definition', and that the scheme is not suitable for small businesses. However, I really don't think this is true. The IAPP scheme is quite straightforward. The Guide for Applicants has greatly improved since the first call, and,

in case of doubt, applicants can always contact the national consulting agencies or the EC for advice.

What major challenges do industrial and academic partners face?

There are a number of challenges for companies (especially SMEs) wishing to take part in the programme. The commitment to reintegrate seconded researchers for at least one year after the final exchange can be difficult for very small companies, as well as for academic partners that employ researchers on short-term contracts. Intellectual Property (IP) issues require a good consortium agreement. The problem for multinationals is often that decisions are not made here in Europe, but at the mother company in, say, the US, where other priorities may prevail than for the researchers here on the ground.

What makes a good IAPP project?

Applicants should always bear in mind that the Marie Curie programme is different to other FP activities, such as the Cooperation programme. The researcher is at the centre of the 'People' programme, which funds researchers rather than research costs. The IAPP scheme is all about knowledge transfer, about bridging the cultural gap between the two sectors, etc. This is not the focus in most other schemes. Writing an IAPP proposal with the same mindset as a proposal for the FP7 Cooperation programme will not work.

Publisher
European Liaison Office of the
German Research Organisations
www.kowi.de

Editorial Office
Trio MedienService,
Uschi Heidel
www.trio-medien.de

Layout
www.axeptdesign.de