

The European Administrative School takes off

The idea of a European Administrative School (EAS) has been spoken about in some shape or form for around five years. After much detailed planning since October 2002 by an inter-institutional working group, the EAS has now formally been set up as of January 2005. David Walker, a former head of the Commission's training unit and Resource Director in SGIC who has been appointed the school's Director, spoke to Commission en direct about how it will operate.

What is the EAS and what will it do?

The EAS is an inter-institutional school mandated to train staff from all the institutions in three fields: induction training for new staff, management training and 'certification' training to prepare colleagues to transfer from the AST to the AD function-group. These are all key areas of career development where staff from the different institutions have the same basic training needs. I want to emphasise that the EAS is an inter-institutional project with a mission to provide products of interest to all the institutions.

Why do we need an EAS?

When the idea was first raised, some (including myself) were a bit sceptical because the school's precise nature was somewhat vague. But now we have a clear mandate in fields where the school can add value. On the

one hand, it is more coherent for the institutions to pool their resources and work together in these fields instead of running separate courses. On the other, it brings participants into contact with colleagues from other institutions whom they would otherwise usually only deal with in a formal context and often in adversarial roles. This, for me, is a meaningful way to increase mutual understanding and open up doors that would probably otherwise remain closed.

Where is the school and who works there?

The EAS is small: I have 18 staff, 15 based in Brussels and 3 in Luxembourg. About half of them will have begun work by 1st April. In Brussels we will be housed in Rue de Luxembourg 46, which is well located and has training facilities, while the Luxembourg antenna should be in the European Parliament's premises – we are awaiting confirmation. Apart from a logistical team I will have a training team that I hope to staff with training specialists from a broad range of cultural backgrounds and from several institutions.

How does the EAS fit into the existing training set up?

We are jointly financed by the participating institutions who have transferred some resources to the EAS since we are taking over



David Walker, Director of the European Administrative School.
— (Photo JMT)

some of their previous work. The essential thing is that the EAS works in a complementary way with the training units of the different institutions, not in competition with them, and without duplicating their work.

Certification is the only field where the school is exclusively in charge: in the other two areas, institutions are free to organise training specific to their needs in addition to what the School does. Our priority is to get the certification training up and running while ensuring

continuity of supply in induction and management training. In the shared fields, we will initially take over the Commission's Management Training Programme (MTP) and the four-day induction course called "Starting Together", which is already run inter-institutionally since June 2004.

Of course our remit to offer "management training" potentially covers a very broad scope, so later in the year we will look at how to develop the school's own management training course and other products of particular interest to the smaller institutions who would not necessarily have the means to start up their own courses.

What is the biggest job you face?

Certification training poses a big challenge since we are starting from scratch. The first certification candidates should come on stream in October 2005, so we need to have the training in place from November onwards.

There will be a total of 180 – 200 staff doing 300 – 320 hours of training each year. How to timetable this is one of the issues we face. In my view, it should ideally be organised in blocks of about two weeks at a time, firstly because I think this is easier for managers to deal with than frequent staff absences, secondly because it allows participants to get fully into training mode, and thirdly since it is the only viable solution for those working outside Brussels and Luxembourg. That said, this may cause problems for some since various factors present obvious difficulties, such as Strasbourg week, so we will probably need to take a flexible approach. Participant numbers will vary from module to module but some will have small groups of about 15 – 20, so there will be several courses running in parallel.

We also still need to define the precise content of the training. A common core (about 70%) will be skills and competences based, in modules of 2 – 3 days at a time. Then there will be various specific modules, designed to work on people's existing knowledge and to identify what further knowledge they need to work as an Administrator. We are in the process of finalising our list of these based on what the institutions need. And as we do not yet know the exact profiles of the people we shall be training, it is important that the institutions use broadly similar criteria for the selection process, otherwise the population of the courses will be too diverse for the training to be effective.

Why does the training last so long?

Clearly there are a number of abilities and a degree of knowledge that one needs as an Administrator that are not required of an Assistant, and while professional experience can make up for some of this it cannot supply it all. Moreover, anybody who works as an Administrator should be recognised as a "fully fledged" one. So it is important that candidates pass a thorough phase of training and testing to give their appointment credibility and, in operational terms, help them to be fully functional from day one.

> Giles Hall

> Daniel Glanville

Connecting brains

"While in biology synapses connect brain cells, Sinapse aims to connect brains." With these words, our RTD colleague Yves Dumont, announced the launch of the Commission's new e-network tool Sinapse – Scientific Information for Policy Support in Europe.

Sinapse aims to create the "largest possible reservoir of scientific expertise" which policy makers at both European and national levels will be able to consult. Not only will it be a

library of scientific opinion and advice, but it will also act as an early warning system for any Europe-wide problem such as an animal health issue.

The potential beneficiaries of Sinapse are numerous. The Health Council of the Netherlands has already announced that it will use the system while it conducts a study into food safety. For Arthur Mettinger, head of UNICA, an umbrella organisation of forty universities based in European capital cities, Sinapse is particularly exciting since it will be

accessible to the general public as well. Whether the public will want to access it, he admits "is a different matter".

The solution to this wider problem was the subject of the conference during which Sinapse was launched, the Science in Society Forum 2005, organised by DG Research. The Forum was an opportunity to gauge the views of those across Europe closely involved with bringing science and society closer together.

In his speech to the conference, Commissioner Potočnik declared himself "overwhelmed by the number of groups and individuals represented here from across the continent" and promised to "maintain the momentum we have generated as we begin to move into the era of the 7th Framework Programme".

Commissioner Potočnik also used the conference to announce the launch of a European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, both aimed at making research a more attractive career by giving researchers the same rights and obligations wherever they work in the EU. These policies may go some way to addressing the real problem which most delegates perceived to be at the heart of the Science in Society issue – encouraging young people to study science at school.



More of the same please: young scientists at work. — (Photo JMT)