

Recommendation regarding the future of the Research Studios Austria

Since 2002 the Ministry for Economic Affairs and Labour (BMWA) has funded the pilot project Research Studios Austria (RSA) for applied research in the field of information and communications technologies (ICT). Small, flexible research units (studios) were set up for selected thematic areas. Working closely with university institutes they pick up knowledge generated in academic research and then develop it further until it can be brought to market. In the emerging thematic area of ICT these small-scale research units collaborate closely in an Austria-wide network and in addition to applied research (scientifically induced due to the close links with university institutes) also carry out research projects in cooperation with companies (market and application-oriented).

The evaluation of the RSA carried out by the Rheinisch-Westfälische Institut für Wirtschaftsfor- schung (RWI Essen) on behalf of the BMWA in May 2006 provides an overview of the Studios' activities. The Research Studios Austria are a subject of fierce debate in the Austrian scientific community, especially the question if and to what extent the RSA creates benefits for the system.

Restructuring

The Austrian Council recommends a restructuring of the Research Studios Austria, which goes beyond spinning off controlling duties. The RSA should be designed as an independent programme under the RTD guidelines. The RSA division in the Austrian Research Centers (ARC) should be closed. The name Research Studios Austria should be retained as the basis for the programme, with the FFG carrying out development and implementation in operational terms under the overall responsibility of the BMWA. The twofold aim is to achieve competition between the studio applications, which will be managed by the FFG in the form of invitations to submit bids, and to ensure the transparent application of the regulations governing state aid required by the research framework of the EU, in particular for market-oriented activities. This includes, inter alia, laying down clear, transparent and objectives rules for the establishment, continuation and closure of the individual studios (indicators) as well as

periodically assessing studios which have been approved with a view to their continuation.

This programme should be developed on the basis of the criteria for programmatic activities demanded by the Austrian Council before September 2007 and subjected to an ex ante evaluation. The programme will be finalised on the basis of the results of this evaluation and submitted to the Austrian Council for recommendation.

Timeframe

The FFG should draw up the programme documents and performance catalogues for an RSA programme 2008-2010 by the end of September 2007 so that an ex ante evaluation can be carried out before the end of 2007. The questions for the evaluation will be drawn up jointly by the BMWA, the FFG and the Austrian Council under the lead management of the BMWA. Based on the results of this evaluation the responsible ministry should complete the formal processes by the middle of December and submit the final programme concept to the Austrian Council for a recommendation.

Following an invitation to submit proposals from February to the end of March, the restructuring can be implemented from April 2008 onward. Until the new programme is actually implemented, interim financing should be provided for the existing studios which should roughly correspond to the amounts made available in 2006. Only existing commitments, i.e. current studios and contracts which have already been concluded for EU projects should be funded; new studios and EU projects which are on the waiting list should only be realised once the final programme concept has been submitted to and approved by the Austrian Council. If the programme does not receive a recommendation from the Austrian Council, it should be phased out in 2008.