The European Optranet Project

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Abstract: Presentation of an IST- European project, involving France, Germany, Great Britain, Poland and Sweden. Its objective is to heighten awareness in optics and photonics, work together to inject life into training for a career in optics, participate in its growth and invite young people to join in. Its website is www.optra.net.

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The two-year Optranet project is part of the European IST (Information Society Technologies) programme and involves five partners: Great Britain (Oxford Innovation), Germany (Optonet, IENA region), Sweden (ACREO, Stockholm region), Poland (Warsaw University) and France (Opticsvalley, Paris region). Opticsvalley is the project's European coordinator.

Its aim is to heighten awareness and to train people throughout Europe in optics, photonics and optoelectronics, to work together to inject life into training for a career in optics, to participate in its growth and invite young people to join in.

The actions are:

- To conduct a survey into the number of training systems in optics and photonics for the three qualification levels (operator, technician and engineer) in each country (more than 100 qualification prospectuses)

- To measure how well the courses match up the job requirements in the different countries by surveying:
  - companies (more than 200 companies have replied)
  - training establishments (more than 300 schools, universities and apprentice schools have been listed)

- To create awareness kits to stimulate interest in optics among the young, take them on trips to teaching establishments and exhibitions, to list and distribute the kits already produced (five "opranet" kits have been designed for young people from 14 to 16 years old and are touring the teaching establishments and being presented at job fairs and exhibitions; Polish and English kits are also being demonstrated and are available for the same purpose).

- To create a European Observatoire (observation centre) to act as the an interface between the companies and the world of education. This observation centre will be used to create a genuine network of competences so that qualifications are improved and, over the long term, the training provided matches what the companies in the industry require.

- To promote the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) which measures and compares the courses taken by students and ensures that there are sufficient points of similarity between the establishments using it, so that the various countries of the European Community can cooperate. This should increase the number of establishments that use it.

- To participate in national (5) and international conferences (4), to organize working groups on specific subjects (biophotonics, lasers) and to publish four newsletters.

The project communicates mainly via the optra.net website which contains the training course references, the results of the surveys, information on the promotional kits and on the ECTS methodology, and the work of the national committees focusing on optics and photonics.

This portal was first opened on April 1, 2003, and is to be updated throughout the project.