

# The European Information Association

**Abstract:** This article by Paul Clarke (Chairman) and Eric Davies (Administrator) explains the history and current aims and activities of the EIA, which provides vital networking opportunities, for all information professionals working within the European information environment.

**Keywords:** professional organisations; information profession; European Union

## Introduction

Never a huge organisation, the European Information Association (EIA) has always had within its ranks many of the most knowledgeable people about the EU, not only in the UK, but across the Union and as far afield as the United States. Its senior members, including President Ian Thompson and its most experienced trainers Ian Mayfield (Portsmouth EDC) and Grace Hudson (Bradford EDC), have spoken at seminars and conferences around the world. So what exactly is the EIA? As it says on our website ([www.eia.org.uk](http://www.eia.org.uk)), “the Association has no corporate view on whether the EU is a Good Thing or a Bad Thing. We do, however, believe that ignorance about the Union and how it works is detrimental to sensible discussion about EU issues.”

The EIA offers a meeting place therefore for people whose work, study or interests bring them into contact with the wealth of material published or made available on a daily basis by the various institutions that service the Union and its legislative processes. While conceding that these processes are sometimes complicated, the EIA has always believed that they can be presented to people in a coherent and structured fashion.

Its training courses, including “What’s in a Directive?” and “Europe on the Web.” have been popular with librarians, lawyers and information officers since 1970, when the Association was formed. Casting the net a little wider, the last couple of years have seen the EIA involved in a contract with the London Representation of the European Commission to deliver training to European information networks across the UK on topics ranging from accessing EU funding to the use of statistics. The provision of in-house courses is also proving popular and often proves a cost-effective way for organisations to offer training which carries the CILIP Seal of Recognition in acknowledgement of the EIA’s range of continuing professional development (CPD) activities relevant to the library and information science community.

## What the EIA stands for

Its constitution spells out the Association’s *raison d’être*:

- To provide a forum for the exchange of experience, the development of ideas and the dissemination of information at a regional, national and European level
- To represent the views of EU and related information providers to the institutions of the EU and other appropriate organisations
- To promote the efficient administration and exploitation of European Union and related information services through, in particular, the provision of an education and training programme
- To promote improved bibliographic standards and to encourage bibliographical study and research relating to the documents and publications of the European Union and related organisations
- To support the activities of, and cooperate with, organisations wherever situated having similar objectives; and
- To develop knowledge and expertise in the bibliography of the European Union, other European organisations and the nations of Europe.

## The website

Much of the work of the Association is done through its recently revamped website which now offers both public and member’s only areas, with a Forum for anyone who wants to contribute to ongoing debates about training and EU information policy, to offer reviews of good publications or to share information about useful websites. There is helpful background information for the casual visitor with regard to the basics (what the EU is and does) and a growing amount of material for members ranging from *Finding out about competition law sources* to *How to*



trace EC case law. Highlights from the various EU news sites (see below) will keep the site's visitors up-to-date with the latest developments and, to make sure nothing is missed, a new (free) RSS facility has been added which means that updated information from the EIA site feed is automatically downloaded to the subscriber's computer.

Members also have access to a new feature, *Ask Eric*. Its only paid employee, Eric Davies, is the EIA's part-time administrator and, knowledgeable as he is, we do not expect him to field every question that comes his way (he has enough to do organising training courses and writing material for the website), so this service works through him to allow members to access the corporate knowledge of the Association. This could be a newly appointed Europe officer needing a helping hand or an EDC librarian with many years' experience needing a rare publication – *Ask Eric* is rarely stumped! We might have to point out to student members occasionally that Eric will not write essays for you – although he will indicate some useful sources of information. Similarly, with some corporate members, we have to make it clear that the Association cannot undertake hours of research under the *Ask Eric* banner (although it is always happy to agree to do so for a fee).

## Funding

Whilst running its courses for the European Commission, the Association realised that there is a large demand for information about funding and grant schemes available through the various bodies and agencies. Recognising that there was also a lack of information websites that brought details together, it was decided to

devote part of the EIA website to highlighting the latest calls for proposals. The Official Journal is checked every day and any new funding opportunities are added, usually by 9.00am. To complement this information, the site also highlights new adopted and proposed legislation if it concerns funding programmes.

## Who joins?

Currently, the EIA's worldwide membership includes:

- Public, academic and government libraries
- Information units of professional and voluntary groups
- European Documentation Centres
- Enterprise Europe Network members
- Europe Direct centres
- Local authority European Officers
- Law firms
- Publishers and
- Other companies from a variety of industries.

This year, the Committee decided to try to encourage an increase in personal and student memberships with fees (£25 and £15 respectively) hopefully set low enough to attract more individuals to join its ranks. With discounts on training courses and access to special members' only publications, they should find enough benefits to make it worthwhile, even in these cash-strapped times.