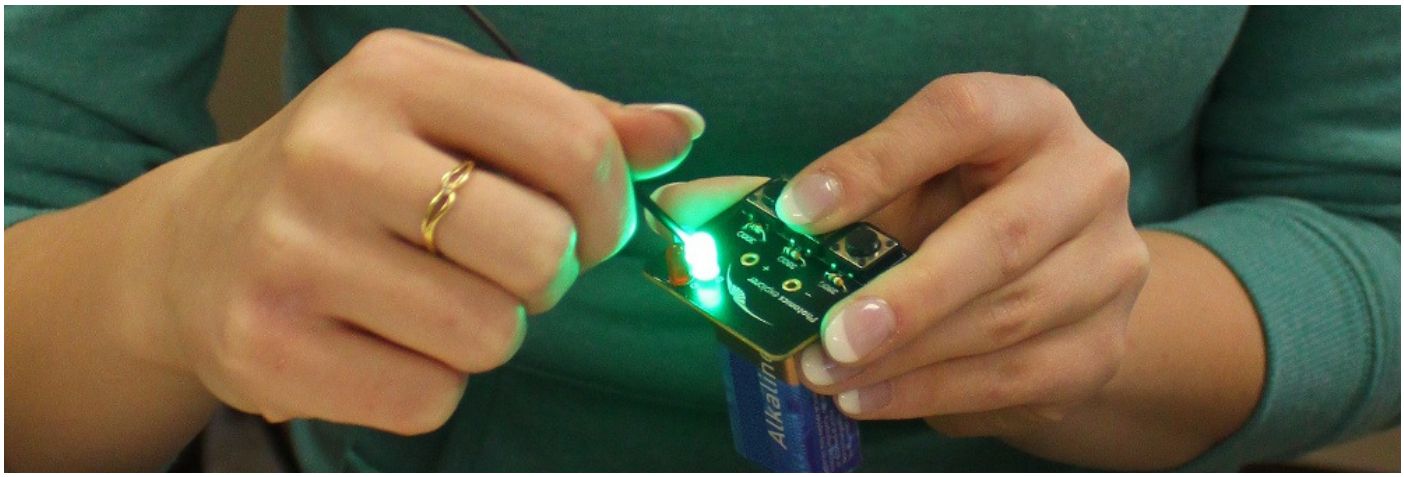
1. Publishable Summary



Photonics Explorer – Developing a photonics educational kit for Europe's secondary schools

There is a commonly observed **declining interest of young people in science and technology, across Europe**. Especially in the rapidly growing field of photonics, this shortage of human resources might soon become the **primary growth limiting factor**. To avert this effect, **coherent and pan-European measures are needed to improve the image of photonics among young people** – particularly at secondary schools, where students first encounter natural sciences and later make career choices.

The European Commission, as part of its 7th Framework Program, granted over 500,000 Euros in funding to a project called **Photonics Explorer – Developing a photonics educational kit for Europe's secondary schools (EXPEKT). The aim of this project is to develop an intra-curricular photonics kit to engage, excite and educate students about working with light. Further, it is to equip secondary school science teachers across Europe with this material free of charge in conjunction with teacher training courses.**

The EXPEKT project officially kicked off on 1st March 2010 with a consortium consisting of 2 partners; Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Leibniz-Institut für die Pädagogik der Naturwissenschaften und Mathematik an der Universität Kiel- IPN Germany. The EXPEKT Educational Advisory Panel (EAP) consists of 35 teachers and science education professors from 11 European countries and the Strategic Advisory Board (SAB) comprises 10 members from the main stakeholders in European photonics. The project is also actively supported by over 15 companies, universities and organisations, Europe wide.

The Photonics Explorer kit has been extensively and successfully tested with over 1500 students in 7 EU countries. The didactic material is available in 7 European languages. A Belgium based non-profit organization EYESTvzw [Excite Youth for Engineering Science and Technology] has been established to manage the mass distribution of the Photonics Explorer kits beyond the EXPEKT project. The goal of EYESTvzw is to distribute 10000 kits by 2015. Over 300 kits have already been distributed through EYESTvzw and currently the organization is working with potential sponsors worldwide to promote photonics and bring the fascination of science to all classrooms across Europe.

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