

27th March 2008

Response of the European Platform of Women Scientists to the Public Consultation on the “*Proposal of Selection Criteria for EIT Governing Board Members*” published by the European Institute for Innovation and Technology (EIT)

The European Platform of Women Scientists (henceforth EPWS) welcomes the proposed selection criteria for EIT Governing Board members and appreciates the opportunity to comment on this proposal.

While EPWS finds the proposed selection criteria generally well-balanced and inclusive, the Platform feels it is important to both expand on the importance of finding a gender balance for the Governing Board as referred to under the heading “Representation” and to comment on the notion of excellence as referred under the heading “Expertise”.

1. Under the heading “Representation” the second bullet point refers to the need to balance membership in terms of gender balance. While EPWS agrees with this assertion, it feels a greater emphasis could be placed on this need, especially if one considers the importance of women in boosting innovation in Europe. A recent study published by the London Business School showed that teams of workers come up with the most innovative ideas if they are made up of even proportions of men and women. It found that professional teams with an equal gender split were much more likely to experiment, share knowledge and fulfill tasks, regardless of whether the team leader was a man or a woman. As the EIT strives to “*to become a flagship for excellence in European innovation in order to face the challenges of globalisation*”, EPWS suggests it can do so by being innovative in its approach from the outset and highlighting the need for gender diversity on its Board to a greater extent.

To this end EPWS proposes the following modification to the afore-identified bullet point

- *The composition of the Governing Board should be collectively balanced, including representatives from innovation, research, business and academia. Balance of membership should also be taken into account in terms of geographic balance and **special attention should be paid to achieving a gender balance and minimising all potential biases that could mitigate this aim.***

2. The second comment EPWS would like to make with regard to the proposed selection criteria relates closely to the first comment in that it strives for better clarity in terms of ensuring minimal discrimination against key participants and therefore aims to maximise inclusiveness in the EIT’s task of boosting growth and innovation in Europe.

With regard to the ninth bullet point under the heading “Expertise”, which says that members from the scientific community need to have a proven track record in scientific excellence, EPWS suggests that further explanation of the term excellence would be beneficial. Moreover EPWS suggests that such an explanation of the term excellence should show that the EIT is both aware of the prejudicial effects a narrow definition of excellence can have on the careers of female scientists or any scientists with less traditional career paths, and of the advantages a more open view of this term could have for innovation.

Excellence is considered to be the most important measure for a researcher’s work. The understanding of how to measure excellence, however, varies widely. The current system of performance assessment with its understanding of excellence centring on the researcher’s track

record of publications and with a specific set of criteria seems to be to the advantage an already established group of researchers. This established group is, furthermore a group to which women scientists, highly innovative researchers, researchers from certain disciplines or the margins of disciplines, of diverse ethnic backgrounds or smaller research institutions rarely belong. However, gender and diversity researchers in particular argue that no universal and/or neutral system of measuring excellence exists since excellence is always socially constructed and any definition of excellence is based on meritocratic principles related to specific socio-cultural contexts.

While at no time wishing to compromise on excellence EPWS suggests that a broader, more inclusive conception of excellence, which takes into account the diversity of research backgrounds and scientific careers would not only be more just but would also be of great benefit to research and innovation in Europe. A new understanding would recognise the limits the current notion can impose on women researchers and would accept that a less traditional definition could encourage more women to stay in research, would advance the call for greater diversity of thought in science and would therefore go a long way towards helping the EIT fulfil its goals.

To this end EPWS proposes the following modification to the afore-identified bullet point

- *Members from the scientific community need to be current or recent research practitioners, with a proven track record in scientific excellence as well as research geared towards innovation. **In measuring excellence, the EIT will take the social process of establishing 'excellence' into account and strive to minimize potential biases at all stages of the decision making process. Scientific excellence as defined by the EIT, will moreover take into account differences in the development of individual researchers' careers and the innovative character of their research.** Members need to demonstrate extensive experience in international level research management and organisation, and be up to date in current R&D management trends at the EU and global level, with special emphasis on EU goals and objectives.*

The EIT aspires to stimulate and encourage innovative thinking, processes and products amongst Europe's researchers and the business community but in doing so it too needs to think innovatively in terms of creating a structure that from the out-set, from the top-down acts in an original, even pioneering way. By proactively advocating the strong participation of women in the EIT and the elimination of barriers that have traditionally acted not only against the involvement of women scientists but all scientists with a less orthodox career path, the EIT will prove it genuinely does seek to attract all creative and innovative minds to be a part of its great new endeavour.