



European Platform of Women Scientists | Rue d'Arlon 38 | B-1000 Bruxelles

The Members of the ERC
Scientific Council Identification Committee
European Research Council
Place Madou 1
MADO 06/64,
BE-1049 Brussels

European Platform of
Women Scientists AISBL

Rue d'Arlon 38
B-1000 Bruxelles

Tel.: +32-2-234 37 50
Fax: +32-2-234 37 59

info@epws.org

Date: 07.11.2008

ERC Identification Committee - Consultation Announcement 13.10.2008

Dear Members of the ERC Scientific Council Identification Committee,

As Secretary General of the European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS I am contacting you with regard to the ERC Identification Committee's Consultation of the research community, announced on 13 October 2008.

The European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS is an umbrella organisation bringing together networks of women scientists and organisations committed to gender equality in research in all disciplines in Europe 27 and the countries associated to the European Union's Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development. The Platform welcomes researchers working in any discipline and working in science in its widest sense, ranging from natural to social sciences, including, but not restricted to, science, engineering and technology. EPWS currently counts more than 90 member organisations, together representing more than 11.000 women researchers all over Europe working in academia and in industrial research.

Since its creation, EPWS has supported the European Research Council in its endeavours and has enjoyed good relations with the ERC Scientific Council. They range from sending official EPWS Position Papers identifying how to encourage more women scientists to apply for ERC grants and how to create more gender-aware evaluation systems, to Secretary-General Prof. Ernst-Ludwig Winnacker recently writing a special article for the EPWS newsletter in spring 2008. EPWS has also regularly invited members of the ERC Scientific Council as keynote speakers to EPWS events.

On the occasion of the Identification Committee's Consultation, EPWS takes the opportunity to both help outline how a methodology for future renewal of the Scientific Council can strive for a better gender balance and in the document attached to hand-in the names and profiles of some highly-qualified women scientists suggested by members of the EPWS Board of Administration as candidates for the current vacant seats on the Scientific Council.

Out of the current twenty two members of the Scientific Council, only five are women. Furthermore in the first round of both the Starting Independent Grants and the Advanced

Grants, participation of women scientists and selection of women scientists as recipients of these grants have been perturbingly low, especially in the case Advanced Grants. This situation has moreover been recognized by President of the Scientific Council Fotis Kafatos *"We are aware that the relatively low proportion of women applicants is a general problem in European research, especially in the target group of established researchers. This is a concern which the ERC will continue to address at every level."*¹

The Report "Gender and Excellence"² calls for awareness among all scientists, male and female, for the extent and the consequences of gender bias in measuring excellence. The Report points out that recognition of the need and the method to reduce gender bias involves all participants in the process, both men and women. EPWS would therefore like to stress the importance of pursuing an approach that strives for a gender balance in all ERC panels and review procedures at every decision-making step, leading through good example with a better gender balance on the Scientific Council itself. Increasing the number of high profile women scientists on the ERC Scientific Council would visibly illustrate that the ERC is addressing the situation. It would also send a powerful signal, widely recognized by the scientific community, and would highlight the contribution of women in science and encourage women scientists to follow their example and promote their own scientific career by applying for the ERC's prestigious grant schemes.

While at no time wishing to compromise on scientific excellence EPWS also suggests that when outlining a new methodology for the renewal of the ERC Scientific Council 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 the research and innovation supported by the ERC. 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 ERC fulfil its aspiration to fund groundbreaking, innovative research.

EPWS does therefore strongly recommend that the ERC Scientific Council Identification Committee strive for gender balance when selecting members for the Scientific Council and that it favourably takes into account the gender expertise of men and women candidates for the Council, both on this occasion and for future renewal of the Scientific Council.

Sincerely



Dr. Maren Jochimsen
Secretary General

Enclosure

¹ Science Business "ERC makes advanced grant announcements", 4th September 2008, <http://bulletin.sciencebusiness.net/ebulletins/showissue.php3?page=/548/art/11511>

² Report "Gender and Excellence in the Making", European Commission, Directorate General Research, 2004: http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/pdf/bias_brochure_final_en.pdf