



**EPWS Position Paper  
Third Stakeholders' Meeting on the European Institute of Technology  
7 September 2006, European Commission**

The European Platform of Women Scientists (EPWS) highly welcomes the Commission's efforts to boost research in Europe. This holds especially for the Commission's intention to raise the number of female researchers among the 700.000 additional researchers needed to achieve scientific and technological excellence, in order to reach the Lisbon goal of becoming the world's most competitive knowledge-based economy. The Platform also acknowledges that to reach the Lisbon goals the best brains are needed and, therefore, supports the Commission's emphasis on excellence and innovation. The Platform affirms however, that if these goals are to materialise, the strategic instruments being created to that purpose be successful and no available talents be wasted, the unintended biases of current notions of 'excellence' need to be reflected upon. A gender sensitive notion of excellence is the basis and precondition for a successful notion of innovation and hence the achievement of the Lisbon goals.

In view of this fact, the European Platform of Women Scientists encourages to strive for the best possible system by minimising potential biases on all stages of the social process in which scientific excellence is established. The goal would be to achieve a revised, gender sensitive notion of 'excellence' to ensure an inclusive approach of all intelligent minds in the EU and avoid the waste of talent of various groups including highly qualified women who make up more than 50% of EU students but on average only get to 15% of senior academic positions. This percentage is much lower in some countries and in some disciplines. As in industry, also in science and research innovation might be linked to diversity. Mixed teams (research teams, panels, evaluation committees etc.) on all stages very likely will outperform homogeneous teams. EPWS, therefore, encourages to open the debate on 'excellence' and 'innovation' and ensure that all stakeholders be heard in the process. A diverse composition of research groups as well as gender awareness could be made a precondition to excellence.

**Problems of Gender, Excellence and Innovation**

Excellence cannot be measured directly and unambiguously. No universal and/or neutral system of measuring excellence exists as the definition of excellence is always based on meritocratic principles related to very specific socio-cultural contexts. Who is 'excellent' and what is 'excellence' in science is established through a social (decision) process of various stages – through visible indicators of "quality" (such as publications, social network, behaviour), criteria (such as research agenda, bibliometrics) and procedures (such as gatekeepers, transparency, accountability) - and hence influenced by and dependent on a specific social context. On each of these stages evaluations and decisions take place and different kinds of biases occur, gender bias being one of the most often affecting women researchers. Excellence is a result of the context in which it is evaluated and has to be understood accordingly. As a result, not always the best ideas or the best researchers will succeed in open competition.

In consequence, the success of the individual researcher tends to depend on their successful placement in networks, language abilities and non-transparent selection procedures as much as on scientific quality and achievements, possibly contradicting the spirit of creating innovation by excellence. Excellence is thus the result of judgments by individuals, gate keepers, with varying transparency and accountability.

## **The European Institute of Technology: Proposals for minimising Gender Bias**

The European Institute of Technology (EIT) is projected as one important agent in the European Commission's strategy to increase innovation and research in Europe by promoting scientific excellence. For the work of the EIT, its review mechanisms and consequently the way it understands excellence, gender mainstreaming and gender balance are important. As such, EPWS sees it as the challenge of the EIT to coordinate with the universities and communicate to the research community a revised, gender sensitive notion of excellence as a guideline for future reference – even if this may mean to leave traditional tracks. Finding fair, objective and stimulating measures for excellence is in the interest of all researchers, research organisations, universities and industries as well as of society as a whole, because they are the only way to create, identify and maintain excellence throughout Europe. Gender Action Plans can help change evaluation practices and their consequences in science and research.<sup>1</sup> Against this background, EPWS proposes to include the following points into the Commission proposal on the EIT:

- ***The EIT acknowledges that excellence has to be understood in the context in which it is evaluated and is aware of the hidden biases encountering women scientists in the scientific profession.***
- ***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.***
- ***The evaluation of criteria of excellence shall be undertaken by a forum consisting of an equal number of female researchers, young researchers, established researchers, researchers outside traditional research institutions and representatives of innovative research in industry.***
- ***The EIT acknowledges that recognition of the need and the method to reduce gender bias involves all participants in the process, both men and women.***
- ***Careful consideration of balanced participation and encouragement for participation of women scientists is to be taken at all stages. Chairs and evaluators – female as well as male – have to be trained in horizontal issues such as gender awareness.***
- ***Gender experts / gender expertise are/ is to be included in the panels and in the support personnel of the programmes. Decisions should become accountable.***
- ***The EIT will take into account differences in the development of individual researchers' careers and the innovative character of their research.***

The European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS is a non profit association with an international aim. The Platform seeks to promote women scientists by networking their networks and engage women scientists in the research policy debate. The overall objective of the Platform is to act as a structural link between women scientists and policy makers.

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<sup>1</sup> Clear recommendations already exist in the Commission Staff Working Document, Women and Science; Excellence and Innovation – gender equality in science" (2005), the "Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers" (Commission Recommendation of 11 March 2005 on the European Charter for Researchers and on a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers) and the Report on "Gender and Excellence" (European Commission, Directorate General Research, 2004: Gender and Excellence in the Making).