



16th August 2007

**EPWS Position Paper
Public Consultation on the Green Paper “European Research Area: New
Perspectives”**

EPWS welcomes the invitation of the European Commission to comment on the next steps to be taken in order to make the European Research Area a reality. Apart from answering the questionnaire, EPWS seeks to make a number of particular remarks. These remarks are based on the response of women scientists from various European member states, following a call for input from EPWS members and supporting individuals. In the capacity of representing these women scientists via their network organisations, EPWS as one of the few associations focusing on the researchers' perspective communicates the needs of those individual researchers whose efforts are most needed to make the ERA a successful endeavour.

The following comments will use the same headings as those employed by the Questionnaire. This is done for the sake of simplification and also as at times the headings did not allow for further comment or expansion on the answers to be made.

Researchers

EPWS welcomes the fact that under this heading the issue of researchers' mobility is broadly treated. It is important to note however that obstacles for mobility are especially high for women in research as they often carry the major part of caring responsibilities. They are also more likely than men to forfeit their own career prospects for the mobility of their partner. Mobility therefore can force some researchers to choose between career and private life. This obstacle should be addressed amongst the initiatives to be proposed. Incentives such as employers seeking career opportunities for the partners of researchers (especially also for academic couples) or overall packages including child care facilities and other measures to help maintain a family or relationship could be set. Large enterprises have established activities in this regard and could serve as best-practice examples.

Another obstacle to mobility that needs to be looked at is that while English has become the major language of publication in many disciplines, teaching and administrative duties still largely requires oral and written skills in the respective country's native language, which results in disadvantages for non-native researchers willing to be mobile when applying for posts. There is also serious discussion and concern regarding the tendency for worthy scientific contributions to be overlooked if they are not published in English.

Research Infrastructures

To the benefit of research, the understanding of the term “Research Infrastructures” should be broader than currently defined within the Questionnaire looking at more than just technical facilities and scientific equipment. The research infrastructure of an institution aims to facilitate researchers to conduct the most excellent research possible. In order to be truly effective research infrastructures should therefore also aim to support the work/life balance of researchers. As a result the definition should include the existence of childcare facilities or guaranteed access to them, the possibility to work part-time on research projects with the guarantee that the work will remain manageable within this time, special baby sitting

allowances for working parents as well as a consideration of childcare schedules when setting research meetings or seminars. In this way a less narrow definition would be to the benefit of all researchers, male and female, and to research alike.

In keeping with The European Charter for Researchers, a definition of research infrastructures should also refer to the importance of research networks in creating a stimulating, supportive research environment¹.

Research Institutions

With regard to questions RIN5 and RIN6 and the suggestion that there is a need for shared principles and mechanisms at European level for the management and assessment of research institutions, the management and assessment of gender policies of institutions should also be included. As treated in The European Charter for Researchers *“Employers and/or funders should aim for a representative gender balance at all levels of staff, including at supervisory and managerial level....To ensure equal treatment, selection and evaluation committees should have an adequate gender balance”*.² If this not immediately possible, there should at least be a monitoring, management and assessment of the work being done to achieve this aim and the progress being made in its pursuit.

Knowledge Sharing

EPWS fully supports the European Commission’s vision to see *“how science decision-making can better take into account societal concerns”* (Question KSH12). EPWS would like to add that in order to fully achieve these goals, the consideration of gender is essential. Gender diversity in research and research leadership renders research more creative, and will therefore ultimately result in a higher likeliness of innovation. Due to the structural obstacles which women experience when working in science, as outlined in the Commission Publication *“Gender and Excellence in the Making”* (2004)³, the measures introduced within the scope of the European Research Area may have a different impact on men and women. In order to avoid this effect, the Commission should take into account the need to introduce gender mainstreaming to a greater degree. This is especially important with regard to the definition of the notions of “excellence” and “innovation”, because the selection of who is deemed excellent and who is deemed innovative is not free of subjective, often gendered, perspectives and favourable contexts and therefore needs careful examination. The European Commission should also introduce accompanying research on this matter in order to obtain sound data on the causal relations of factors that keep women out of science.

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¹ The European Charter for Researchers. The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. Annex, Section “General Principles and Requirements applicable to Employers and Funders” p.16

² As above p.18

³ This publication summarizes and adds to a large body of research on the subject