

Editorial

Under the auspices of the Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE), ELSO will chair a working group to look into the structures for academic research careers in Europe.

Over the past several months, ELSO has been calling for a debate about the career structures for independent investigators in Europe's academic institutions – the equivalent of assistant, associate and full professors in the North American systems (see past issues of *the ELSO newsletter*). This is an issue that affects researchers in all fields of enquiry, so it is fitting that a working group should form within the ISE, an association of European research organizations covering all disciplines.

Harmonising Europe's career structures

At the moment, almost as many different career structures exist in Europe as there are individual member states, making it difficult for academics to move from one country to another within the continent. This has the knock-on effect that the job market remains mostly national, confusing and impenetrable, not only for those within Europe but also for scientists from outside who are thinking of moving here to pursue their careers.

None of the existing systems in Europe offers a satisfactory model for a Europe-wide academic career structure. Some offer tenure too early – before an individual has had chance to prove their abilities. Others keep their researchers dependent on the departmental 'Professor' well after the point when they should be

at their most productive as independent investigators. Other systems suffer from a lack of transparency in their appointments, with nepotism blocking the promotion of the most able.

ELSO believes that Europe needs a harmonised career structure for its academics that will open up the job market across national boundaries, grant independence when researchers are at their most innovative and productive, and reward success with a reasonable guarantee of job security and promotion to higher ranks. Such a system would also provide a 'pipeline of excellence' for the emergence of the next generation of leaders for our scientific institutions.

This Spring, Tony Hyman of the Max Planck Institute for Cell Biology and Genetics in Dresden, will put together a working group, on behalf of ELSO and under the aegis of the ISE, to look at ways of bringing this issue into the main arenas for discussion of science policy in Europe. Several participating organizations in the ISE have already volunteered to provide members of the working group. If you would like more information, please contact Tony Hyman directly.

Tony Hyman: hyman@mpi-cbg.de

ISE: <http://www.initiative-science-europe.org>

The ELSO newsletter: <http://www.elseo.org>

www.elseo.org

Call for BioClips

Rather like music videos for the life sciences, BioClips are entertaining and informative multimedia documents presenting a biological research project or educational project in an original and creative manner. As in previous years, at ELSO 2007 Christian Sardet will be organizing a competition for the best BioClips of the year, and showing them at a special session, Cinema of the Cell: a festival of BioClips.

Look out for the call for BioClip submissions, which will go out to ELSO members by e-mail very soon. You can see prize-winning examples and learn more from the BioClips website where there is also a link to an interesting site for people who want to convert their PowerPoint BioClips into more a web-friendly Flash format.

BioClips: <http://www.bioclips.com>



Marius, BioClips' friendly virus

Update your info

ELSO is updating its mailing list. If you want to keep receiving free copies of *the ELSO newsletter* and *Lab Times* as well as information about the ELSO meetings and other ELSO activities, please take a few minutes to check your details on our web site (below) and update where necessary.

ELSO: <http://www.elseo.org>

Have an idea for an article?

Whether in *Lab Times* or in *the ELSO newsletter*. Let us know about the issues close to your heart: newsletter@elseo.org

ISE meeting

■ The Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE), in which ELSO participates, met in January at the Universidade Nova in Lisbon (Portugal) to elect a new President as well as to discuss the European Commission's European Institute of Technology initiative and how to develop a vision of European science for the coming decade. Carol Featherstone attended the meeting as the representative of ELSO.

■ New President

Federico Mayor Zaragoza, former head of UNESCO (1987–1999) and former Chair of the High-level Group that looked at the idea of a European Research Council, was duly elected the new President of the ISE, replacing Julio Celis who has been acting



Federico Mayor Zaragoza

President since Jose Mariano Gago stood down in 2005 when he took his current post of Minister of Science in the Portuguese government. Barcelona-born Mayor, 72-years old, was a professor of biochemistry at Granada and Madrid in the 1960s and 70s and he co-founded the Severo Ochoa Centre of Molecular Biology at the Universidad Autónoma of Madrid in

1974. Since then, he has held many political and advisory posts in Spain and Europe. Mayor should be well placed, Celis believes, to network with Europe's science policy makers on behalf of the ISE.

■ EIT

The meeting heard that EC President José Manuel Barroso's project to create a European Institute of Technology has evolved from the initial idea of a Massachusetts Institute of Technology-like structure into something more decentralised involving six 'Knowledge and Innovation Communities' each employing around 1000 academic research and support staff as well as another 1000 students. The proposed budget of around €2.4 billion over seven years would be an order of magnitude smaller than similar organizations worldwide. The financial basis of the institution remains shaky, however, with only €300 million allocated so far, the rest to be sought from industrial partners. The project will be discussed at the April meeting of Europe's Council of Ministers.

■ Vision

Tony Meyer (EuroScience and the European Science Foundation) presented the meeting with a discussion document around which the ISE might build 'a scientist's view of what the European Research Area should look like in 2020'. There followed a long discussion about what might be included in this vision, which, everyone agreed, would have to be condensed into a document of around only 10 pages that politicians would be prepared to read. Although the focus of the project remained rather fuzzy at the end of the day, a draft document outlining the ISE's vision should be prepared by the end of April when the ISE will hold a meeting with Commissioner Potocnik – the EC's head of research policy. As part of this vision exercise, ELSO, proposes to chair a working group of ISE participants interested in examining the career structure for academic researchers in Europe (see Editorial in this issue).



The European Bioinformatics Institute, Cambridge, UK

Europe's research infrastructures

■ After more than four years of debate and consultation, the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) published its 'roadmap' for the future of Europe's scientific infrastructures in October 2006. But the consultation process that produced the document has come under fire from life scientists who feel that their needs have not been taken sufficiently into consideration.

The ESFRI roadmap is the first attempt in Europe to develop coherent policy on infrastructure; the 84-page report aims to describe the needs for research infrastructures for the next 10–20 years in domains of science ranging from the social sciences and humanities, through environment and energy, biomedical and life sciences to materials science, astronomy and physics.

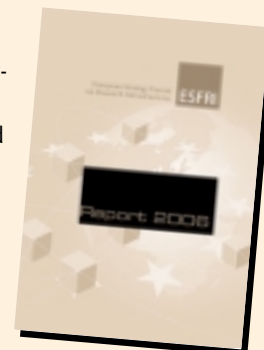
Although the report is very broad in its scope, the initial ESFRI consultation process was criticised for being too focused on large installations and equipment like synchrotrons and telescopes and not giving sufficient attention to infrastructures like databases, biobanks, etc. To counterbalance this apparent bias, the European Life Science Forum (ELSF; of which ELSO is a member) held a conference in Vienna (Austria) in May 2006 on infrastructure needs in the life sciences. Subsequently, also in October 2006, the ELSF produced its own document *Research Infrastructures for the European Life Sciences*. Iain Mattaj, Director General of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory, an important player in the ELSF, commented that "the fact that we [the ELSF] have been discussing the infrastructure question has had a significant impact on the final shape of the ESFRI roadmap."

Members of the ELSF met with EC Research Commissioner Potocnik in early January. They reported at a meeting of the ELSF in Lisbon (15 January), that although the Commissioner is very satisfied with the ESFRI roadmap, he is willing to listen to the opinions of the ELSF and other life science groups before the planned annual updating of the document. The EC will consider the input of selected scientists and will accept nominations for these advisors from the ELSF and from the ISE.

In the meantime, the ELSF is planning another conference on infrastructures this time in collaboration with the European Science Foundation. This joint conference should take place around the end of April at the European Parliament in Brussels. It will precede the EC's 4th European Conference on Research Structures planned for Hamburg in May.

ESFRI: <http://cordis.europa.eu/esfri>

ELSF: <http://www.elsf.org>



Women in science

■ Training seminars

The Center of Excellence Women and Science (CEWS) is offering training seminars for women scientists who want to improve their presentation and interview skills before they apply for professorships in Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, and the Czech Republic.

The seminars are targeted at women scientists in all disciplines who do not yet hold a tenured position as a professor but who are qualified for such an appointment. Women scientists from any country participating in the EU's Framework Programme 7 are eligible; they must have held a PhD or equivalent degree for between four and six years, they must speak fluently both English and the national language of the country in which they wish to work, and they must have an understanding of the general landscape of academia in that country.

A total of 16 seminars, each with 14 participants, will take place in Brussels between April 2007 and January 2008. The seminars will be conducted in English or German, depending on the participants' preferences. A fee of €250 will be charged to cover the training, accommodation, etc.

Applications may be made at any time before the end of June. For more information and for the application forms, see the CEWS web site or contact Anke Lipinsky (anke.lipinsky@cews.org).

CEWS: <http://www.cews.org>



■ European Platform of Women Scientists

From its location in Brussels, the European Platform of Women Scientists (EPWS) seeks to support the work of existing national, European and international networks of women scientists by 'networking the networks'. At the same time, the EPWS aims to make women scientists more aware of the role they can play in research policy debate and of how to benefit more fully from these opportunities by combining their powers and forces.

The EPWS, which was launched in February 2005, is financed by the European Commission and run by the CEWS (see above). Its Founding Board of high-ranking women scientists includes Flavia Zucco, a biologist at the *Istituto Nazionale di Ricerca per gli Alimenti e la Nutrizione* in Rome (Italy) and president of the Italian scientist network *Donne e Scienza*. The 'seed money' of €2 million is envisaged to cover costs during a formative phase until mid-2007 when the Platform should have a permanent and sustainable structure.

The EPWS produces a monthly newsletter, which you can receive for free by e-mail by registering on the EPWS web site.

EPWS: <http://www.epws.org>

■ SET-Routes conference

Another EU-funded project, SET-Routes, is organizing a conference entitled *Women in Science: The Way Forward* in Heidelberg (Germany), from 9–11 May 2007.

A joint initiative between the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO), the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) and the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), the conference will look to the future of women in science. By bringing together scientists, politicians and other decision-makers, the meeting aims to inspire participants to take actions that will help attract women into science and keep them there. The meeting will also feature an exhibition area where successful initiatives can be presented.

For more information and for online registration for the meeting, see the SET-Routes web site.

SET-Routes International Women in Science Conference:

<http://www.set-routes.org/conference>

Biobank questionnaire

■ Although Europe has well-organized biobanks and health databases of high quality, no common European strategy exists to draw maximum value from these resources. To address this problem, the European Commission has approved a project entitled 'EUROCAN PLUS' that will make recommendations for improving collaboration in cancer research in the European Union and for strengthening its international competitiveness. As part of this effort, the project has approached ELSO to help solicit the opinions of biobank providers and users through an online questionnaire.

Based on an overview of current cancer research activities in Europe, the EUROCAN PLUS project aims to identify fields and infrastructures, such as biobanks, where lack of coordination is particularly detrimental for the progress of research and the quality of care. To gather the opinions of biobank providers and users at large, Julio Celis, the project's co-ordinator, is inviting translational cancer researchers, pathologists, clinicians and coordinators of biobanks to complete a questionnaire online (see below).

The recommendations of the project should influence future political and legislative measures at the European national and regional levels. By participating in the survey, you will ensure that your opinion will be taken into account.

EUROCAN PLUS questionnaire:

<http://proteomics.cancer.dk/EurocanNovo6.php>

Career events at ELSO 2007

ELSO's Career Development Committee is organizing several events at its next meeting in Dresden to help promote young researchers' careers. These events provide a rare opportunity to learn about jobs outside the academic sector and sources of funding, to get face-to-face advice on career issues from experienced mentors, as well as to discuss some of the wider issues related to your career as a life scientist in Europe. Here's a summary of what's on the programme:

■ ELSO Early Career Award and Lecture (Sun, 2 September, 12:30)

Before every ELSO meeting, the Career Development Committee selects an outstanding researcher to receive the ELSO Early Career Award – an independent scientist who received his or her PhD less than ten years ago and who has made an exceptional contribution to their field. Come along to the award ceremony to applaud a brilliant career and hear this year's laureate talk about her or his winning work.

■ Careers Outside Academia Session (Sun, 2 September, 13:00)

Four scientists who have made their careers in professions outside academia – in biotech, patent law, genetic counseling, publishing or grant administration, for example – give some insights into the whats, whys and wherefores of their jobs.

■ Open Floor Debate (Sun, 2 September, 19:00)

Why is the USA so much more attractive than Europe for young scientists? Maybe one important reason is that the academic career path in North America – from Assistant Professor, through Associate Professor to Full Professor with tenure – is much more clearly defined than in Europe. Should Europe harmonise its academic career structures across all countries? Should it introduce a common tenure-track system? How would this affect your future career choices? Come along on Sunday evening to hear the arguments and give us your opinions!



■ Career Mentoring Lunch (Mon, 3 September, 12:00)

Take ten young researchers, add two mentors, one table and some sandwiches, multiply by ten and you have a perfect informal occasion to ask questions and get good advice about things that are bothering you in your career.

■ Funding Sources Showcase (Mon, 3 September, 13:00)

2007 is a year of change in European science funding with a new EU Framework Programme and – crucially – the start of the

European Research Council, which ELSO and others have worked so hard for. Come along to this session to learn from the horse's mouth about the new ERC Starting Independent Researcher Grants as well as what's new in the Marie Curie Programme and the EC funds for networking.



■ Meet a Mentor (Tue, 4 September, 13:00)

Our scientific heroes – those who have founded a new field, won a Nobel prize or made a great discovery – we admire them from afar, we imagine that their careers have progressed without a hiccup, the smallest wrong turn or toss of the dice. Not like our own careers How wrong we can be! Come along and talk to one of those heroes. Get the truth about the ups, downs and turn-arounds of one illustrious career!

ELSO: <http://www.else.org>

ELSO 2008 Programme Committee

■ Anne Ridley and Ivan Dikic, the Chairs of the ELSO 2008 Programme Committee, have already put together their team to draw up the scientific programme for the meeting in Nice (30 August–2 September, 2008), as follows:

Richard Marais, UK, *Cancer biology*
Erich Nigg, Germany, *Cell cycle*
Pascale Cossart, France, *Cellular microbiology*
Erwin Wagner, Austria, *Developmental biology*
María Blasco, Spain, *Genome biology*
Francisco Sanchez-Madrid, Spain, *Immunology*
Antonella De Matteis, Italy, *Membrane biology*
Peter Carmeliet, Belgium, *Molecular medicine*
Rüdiger Klein, Germany, *Neurobiology*
Dirk Inze, Belgium, *Plant biology*
Boudawijn Burgering, Netherlands, *Signalling*
Katrin Rittinger, UK, *Structural biology*
Robert White, UK, *Transcription and gene regulation*
Joachim Bugert, UK, *Virology (ELSO's Career Development Committee representative)*

Anne Ridley: anne@ludwig.ucl.ac.uk

Ivan Dikic: ivan.dikic@biochem2.de

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