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Networks of Excellence:
Past, present, future

The Report of the Expert Group on the Future of NoEs

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Outline

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- **Tasks and mandate, working method**
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- **Networks of Excellence in FP6**
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- **Suggested next steps**
- **Joint Research Initiatives (JRIs)**
- **The spectrum of ERA instruments**
- **Recommendations**

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Networks of Excellence: A reminder 1

FP6 decision:

*“The purpose of Networks of Excellence is to strengthen and **develop Community scientific and technological excellence by means of the integration**, at European level, of research capacities currently existing or emerging at both national and regional level.*

*... A joint programme of activities could aim at the creation of **a self-standing virtual centre of excellence** that may result in developing the necessary means for achieving a durable integration of the research capacities.”*

Networks of Excellence: A reminder 2

FP6 Provisions for implementing NOE

*“Networks of Excellence are designed to strengthen scientific and technological excellence on a particular research topic by integrating at European level the critical mass of resources and expertise needed to provide European leadership and to be a world force in that topic. This expertise will be networked around a joint programme of activities aimed principally at creating a **progressive and durable integration of the research capacities of the network partners**, while at the same time advancing knowledge on the topic.”*

Tasks and mandate of the Expert Group

- Are the FP6 NoEs a **true-to-type materialisation** of what they were intended to be?
- Effective **contribution to any durable integration** of research resources and capacities and thus bringing ERA to its full potential?
- **Role of NoEs in the new context** of the ERA Green Paper, in consideration of other initiatives also designed to structure the ERA?
- How could the **objectives for NoEs** and the modalities of their **funding** through FP be adapted?
- More **sustained support** for successful projects?

Working method of the Expert Group

- **Informal start Dec 2007, formal start Feb 2008**
- **4 one day meetings, one two days meeting**
- **Analysis of existing evidence**
- **In-depth interviews (19) during meetings**
- **Questionnaire survey of research councils and research organisations (14/59)**
- **Group discussions and individual written contributions**
- **Final Report by end of September 2008**

‘Integration’ of research activities

- ERA and ‘integration’ of research in Europe
 - ‘Critical’ mass, ‘fragmentation’, ‘integration’
 - **‘Critical mass’** ...
 - **‘Fragmentation’** ...
 - **‘Integration’** at different levels ...
 - Within an institution
 - Moving beyond the local level
 - **Why going European?**
 - Complementarity, equipment, data bases, training, ...
- **From deficits to opportunities ...**

Networks of Excellence in FP6 1

- **‘Collaborative research’ in FP6 in total:**
59.626 participations in 5.003 contracts
- **FP6 NoEs:**
5.153 participations in 171 NoEs
- **Types of organisations involved in NoEs:**
 - 56% universities
 - 29% research centres
 - 7,6% industry
- **Themes:** 35% ICT, 22% Life Sci, 13% NMP, 11% SustDev, 8% SocSci, 7% Food, 2% Aeronautics
- **Variations of involvement between Member States**

Networks of Excellence in FP6 2

Activities and 'products' of NoEs - A Joint Programme of Activities (JPA)

- Research agenda
- Pooling scientific equipment, joint use of data
- A favourable environment for young researchers
- Transnational education and training activities
- Science/policy interface, public awareness
- Supporting European & international visibility
- Different priorities and combinations of activities
- Durable integrated organisational structures???

Networks of Excellence in FP6 3

Results of the NoE scheme in FP6:

- **A great variety of NoEs ...**
 - NoEs that developed comprehensive JPA and are advanced or achieved 'durable integration'
 - NoE that moved towards integration but time was too short
 - NoE that developed some scientific and other services
 - NoE that implemented an 'outsourced' research programme with some degree of partial coordination
 - NoE that supported small collaborative research projects with little or no coordination

Networks of Excellence in FP6 4

Difficulties:

- From the start, NoE concept defined ambiguously
- Large numbers of partners
- Time needed for 'sustainable integration'
- 'Integration' - NoEs as legal entities...
- Involvement & commitment of parent institutions
- Ambitious requirements and little money
- Industry reluctant to participate
- Management of organisational change

Key lessons learned

- NoEs have shown the importance of **intermediate collective research goods**
- Safeguard **achievements** of NoEs!
- Refine the **objectives** and **funding** modalities
 - Allow different options for organisational integration
 - Provide funding based on real cost of activities
- Need for clear **indicators for integration**
- **Utilize portfolio of sources** for sustained support
- **No general change** of EU funding philosophy
- Design a **new concept** utilizing the NoE experience

Suggested next steps

- **Launch a specific call for NoEs that are very advanced towards integration**
- **Launch call for Coordination/Support/ Actions providing an opportunity for safeguarding useful NoE activities**
- **No call for new NoEs**
- **Consider a refined new concept: Joint Research Initiatives (JRIs)**

Joint Research Initiatives (JRIs) 1

Ideas to stimulate the discussion

- **Science-led initiatives of slender alliances of universities and research organisations oriented towards long-term academic research – transnational ‘virtual institutes’**
 - Research areas: Mainly ‘bottom up’ – some ‘strategic’ JRIs
 - Requiring ambitious research groups and committed parent institutions striving for virtual integration
 - Size: 3 to 7 partners, Duration: 7 to 9 years
 - Spectrum of joint activities: research – infrastructure – training
 - Funding for integration, research, res. infrastructure, mobility, training, communication, eventually management advice
 - Combination of funding options to be considered

Joint Research Initiatives (JRIs) 2

Ideas to stimulate the discussion

- **Obligatory spectrum of JRI activities**
 - Joint Programme for research and integration
 - Sharing of equipment and joint new equipment
 - Joint production and processing of data sets
 - Career development of a ‘new breed’ of researchers
 - Joint international education & training programmes
 - International cooperation, attracting researchers
 - Outreach to stakeholders and the general public

➤ **A trans-national working environment**

JRIs – Supporting measures

- **Consultation between Commission and member states, funding organisations, universities and research organisations**
- **A common understanding of the concept!**
- **Briefing of evaluators**
- **Hearings of JRI candidates before selection**
- **‘Coaching for integration’:**
 - Governance structure, joint programme of activities, advanced communication instruments

The spectrum of ERA instruments

- Collaborative projects and CSAs
 - MC Fellowships & networks and a conducive framework for researchers and mobility
 - ERC starting and advanced grants
 - **Science-led Joint Research Initiatives**
 - Industry-led Joint Technology Initiatives
 - European research infrastructures & capacities
 - ERA-Nets, ERA-NET Plus, Joint Programmes
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- Synergies between FP, CIP, Structural Funds
 - An ERA of effective knowledge sharing
 - An ERA open to and attractive for the world
 - An ERA continuously learning and developing

Summary of recommendations

- 1. Launch a call for successful FP6 NoEs**
- 2. Provide CSAs for successful NoE activities**
- 3. Refrain from calls for new NoEs**
- 4. Launch 'Joint Research Initiative' scheme**
- 5. Engage in 'concertation' with member states and stakeholders on JRI concept**
- 6. Utilize NoE experience for the new concept**
- 7. Monitor development of ERA instruments**

Thank you for your attention!

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