

Letter to MEPs

Date

TO: ELSO Members
FROM: ELSO's Career Development Committee
RE: EC Career Development Awards

1. ACTION NEEDED

Write to your national members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who sit on the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy that decides on the content of the sixth Framework Programme. Urge them to include a Career Development Award for senior postdoctoral researchers in the next funding programme.

2. BACKGROUND

If you attended the first open meeting of ELSO's Career Development Committee (CDC) at ELSO 2000 in Geneva you will already know that one of the first goals of the CDC is to improve the opportunities for senior postdocs to start their own labs in European countries.

ELSO wants to persuade the European Commission that they should pursue their highly successful Marie Curie postdoctoral fellowship programme to its next logical step by creating Career Development Awards in the next Framework Programme, which is to be ratified in the summer of 2002.

As we envisage it, the Career Development Awards would be aimed at accomplished senior postdocs who want to return to their home country or move to another European country to set up an independent research team. Each award would provide, for a minimum of five years, the salary of the new group leader as well as the salaries of support staff (a technician, a PhD student and a postdoc, for example) and an annual consumables budget of Euros 70,000–100,000.

If we are to see this idea become a reality we must communicate it forcefully to our representatives in Brussels who are drawing up the content of the Sixth Framework Programme at the moment. It is imperative that we press our point home now!

For this reason, the CDC has prepared an example of a letter to those MEPs who are deciding on the content of the sixth Framework Programme. A copy is appended below. We want you to print out and sign this letter, or a similar one that you compose yourself, and post it to:

****Give the names and postal addresses of the MEPs****

ELSO's President, Kai Simons, will send a similar letter to Philippe Busquin, the European Commissioner for Research. ELSO will also inform the press about our campaign.

Your participation in this action is extremely important. It will show the strength we have as a community and will make our request heard in the right place at the right time. Please take the time to put your voice behind this campaign.

With thanks and best wishes

****CDC member's name****
On behalf of ELSO's Career Development Committee

PS. If you want to learn more about ELSO's ideas for a Career Development Award, you should read:

Merdes, A. (2001) Getting a foot on the ladder of success: European Career Development fellowships (<http://www.the-else-gazette.org/magazines/issue3/features/features2.asp>) Issue 3 (January 2001)

Editorial (2000) Making a reality of the European Research Area: Time to be realistic about what makes good research (<http://www.the-else-gazette.org/magazines/issue2/editorial/editorial>) Issue 2 (November 2000)

Those of you who want to know more about the CDC should see our web page (<http://www.else.org/content.php3?Career+Development>) and also read the resume of the open meeting in Geneva:

Lane, N. (2000) Talking of jobs..... (<http://www.the-else-gazette.org/magazines/issue2/features/features1.asp>) Issue 2 (November 2000).

Please contact us through the CDC web page (as above) if you have any ideas to add.

EXAMPLE LETTER

****To be translated into the national language by the CDC member****

Dear ****name of national MEP serving on the appropriate Committee****,

I am writing to you as a member of the European Life Scientist Organization (ELSO) to support ELSO's request for the inclusion in the sixth Framework Programme of a Career Development Award scheme.

The EC has already created an excellent scheme, the Marie Curie Fellowships, for postdoctoral scientists to spend time in a laboratory in another European country where they can gain experience and training.

After such postdoctoral training, researchers reach a crucial point in their careers when they must either find a position that allows them to develop an independent research team of their own or look elsewhere for a job. In most European countries there are not enough of these positions. Consequently, many talented young researchers are lost – often in the 'brain drain' to the USA.

Certain national career development schemes like the Wellcome Senior Fellowships in the UK and the Swiss National Science Foundation's START programme have demonstrated how helpful it is to provide a springboard to independence for talented postdoctoral scientists. These schemes allow the individuals to prove themselves and to develop an interesting independent line of work that very often then leads to a tenured position. And the presence of these young and dynamic people has an invigorating effect on research institutions.

It is a logical step for the EC now to extend the success of its Marie Curie Fellowship scheme for postdoctoral scientists to help our best young researchers onto the next rung of the career ladder. And it is essential to nurture these talented and trained people if Europe is to compete globally in research and the technologies that spring from it.

ELSO proposes that Career Development Awards, as outlined on the following page, should be incorporated into the next Framework Programme.

Members of ELSO's Career Development Committee are willing to act as consultants to the EC to flesh-out the details of such a scheme for inclusion in the sixth Framework Programme. The CDC member for ****country**** is

****name of CDC member and their e-mail address/phone number****

I urge you to consider seriously ELSO's proposal before the next Framework Programme is finalised.

Sincerely,

Name
Institution
Country

ELSO's proposal for
Career Development Awards
in the sixth Framework Programme

EC Career Development Awards would be aimed at accomplished senior postdoctoral scientists who want to return to their home country or move to another European country to set up an independent research team.

Each award would provide, for a minimum of five years, the salary of the new group leader as well as the salaries of support staff (a technician, a PhD student and a postdoctoral fellow, for example) and an annual consumables budget of Euros 70,000–100,000.

Following on the postdoctoral scheme, the awards would be made through an open competition judged on the merit of the individual and the quality of the host institution. Candidates would obtain the agreement of their host institution to provide laboratory space before they file their application. Ideally, the host country or institution should agree to continue supporting the successful team at the end of the EC award.