European University Association

EUA STATEMENT ON THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE IDEA OF ESTABLISHING A EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (EIT)

The present statement reflects views expressed through an open consultation with the EUA membership (34 National Rectors' Conferences, and over 700 individual universities in 46 countries) and discussions at the EUA Council meeting held at the University of Uppsala, Sweden on 20th October 2005. It takes account also of statements issued by individual National Rectors' Conferences and hence provides a composite viewpoint on behalf of the EUA membership. For this reason, it has been issued as a statement rather than through the completion of the EIT public consultation questionnaire.

The European University Association (EUA) welcomes the public consultation on the European Commission's new proposal for an EIT and the EUA wishes to place its views in the context of the overall debate on future European RTD policy and expenditure, in particular the Seventh Research Framework Programme, FP7, (2007-2013), on which EUA has been actively involved as a "stakeholder" on behalf of the university sector.

The EUA has publicly stated its strong support for the European Commission's proposed FP7 and budget, and this viewpoint was further endorsed at the recent Uppsala Conference on "Research in Europe's Universities: Strategies and Funding" in a dialogue with prominent contributors from the European Commission, European Parliament, national research funding agencies and private foundations. The EUA wishes to state clearly its view, therefore, that any future development of the case for the establishment of an EIT must be built upon the following two core conditions:

1) The establishment of a European Research Council, with an annual budget of about €1.5 billion as proposed in the European Commission's FP7 plans, must be the first priority, particularly given the substantial investment of time, energy and expertise being put into its development from many quarters, and the broad consensus achieved on its goals and objectives in creating the ERA as a globally competitive research and innovation environment.
2) The potential future creation of an EIT must be built, therefore, with "fresh money", preferably with matching contributions from public and private funding sources.

On the assumption that the above two conditions were met, the introduction of an EIT into the European RTD landscape could have a positive growth effect rather than that of negative substitution. Furthermore, maximum added-value could be achieved through establishing an EIT as a competitive "programme-driven" initiative operating through collaborating institutions to whom an EIT "excellence/quality label" would be awarded on the basis of clearly defined and independently developed criteria. An EIT initiative should allow, therefore, for the involvement of a large number of universities on a competitive basis. Excellence can be best reached through such competition, followed by outcome-based evaluations of these EIT programme investments. The adoption of the US model of establishing an EIT as a single institution would not be appropriate in the European context where many world class RTD institutions already exist across EU member states.

Such EIT “programme-driven” collaborations should integrate teaching, research and knowledge transfer functions. The term “knowledge transfer” rather than “technology transfer” (the latter term is used in the EIT public consultation questionnaire) is emphasised here because an innovative EIT should encompass the diversity of research expertise that is needed to strengthen European competitiveness across the full range of business/economic activities in a knowledge society. The specific mission of EIT collaborating institutions (universities, research institutions and businesses) should be to offer new dynamic environments for young researchers at doctoral and postdoctoral level to work within major project teams to both open new career opportunities and provide needed expert skills in competitive labour markets.

There are still many important details relating to the EIT that will need to be clearly articulated before progressing further. In its future elaboration of the case for a European Institute of Technology, the European Commission will need to explain the relationship and added-value of an EIT not only with the new European Research Council, but also with other relevant instruments of FP7, most particularly European Technology Platforms/Initiatives, and to demonstrate how the new “simplification” procedures within the FP7 rules of participation would be applied. It would also be both important and valuable to define clearly how the EIT initiative would relate to the future activities of the Joint Research Centres (JRCs) and the scope for synergy between them. In addition, the issue of the potential linkage between an EIT initiative and the new Innovation and Competitiveness Programme remains to be addressed.

Finally, the EUA would wish to reiterate a common observation that the idea of launching a European Institute of Technology is not proving to be a European issue on which any true consensus can be found in the present climate of considerable uncertainty over European Union level commitments to RTD investment. The European Commission needs to be aware of the risk of raising high expectations through introducing new ideas which may be promising and attractive to EU Member States and then have such ideas flounder through inadequate funding. In particular, New Member States**,** with their reservoirs of young talented researchers**,** see the potential of an EIT initiative to act as a catalyst to strengthen their RTD capacity.

Brussels, 15 November 2005