

EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOR HIGH ABILITY

Throughout Europe there is a growing awareness of the needs of our most able individuals; in recent years increasing interest in this area of child development has generated new forms of practice in education, numerous research programmes and studies, a growth in the number of societies for parents of highly able children and, indeed, a growth in concern for highly able people of all ages.

ECHA has been generated by an overwhelming demand for coordination from most European countries, both West and East. The major goal of ECHA is to act as a communications network to promote the exchange of information among people interested in high ability – educators, researchers, psychologists, parents and the highly able themselves. As the ECHA network grows, provision for highly able people improves and these improvements are beneficial to all members of society.

The basis for this specifically European Council comes from a belief in our common cultural heritage which is distinct from that of other parts of the world. Although Europe is made up of different countries with many languages, we share the traditions and outlooks of societies in which education has been widely available for centuries. We also share the same kinds of problems, and it makes sense to work towards their solution together.

The European Council for High Ability aims to advance the study and development of potential excellence in people. This enterprise calls for easy access to communication so that new discoveries whether scientific or the fruits of experience, can be readily shared between members of ECHA and others who are concerned about high ability.

ECHA enjoys consultative status as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) with the Council of Europe.

ECHA Journal “High Ability Studies” is included in Social Sciences Citation Index, which makes it one of the most important journals in Gifted Education.

High Ability Studies provides a forum for scholars in a variety of disciplines associated with the development of human abilities to their highest level. It is a medium for the promotion of high ability, whether through the communication of scientific research, theory, or the exchange of practical experience and ideas.

The contents of this journal are unique in reflecting concerns and recent developments in this area from childhood and across the whole life span in a variety of contexts. Far from being restricted to the traditional focus on high-level cognitive development, it also presents investigations into all other areas of human endeavour, including sport, technology, the arts, business, management and social relations.

The journal is concerned with aspects of development, personality, cognition, social behaviour and cross-cultural issues in relation to high ability. Theoretical modelling and measurement techniques, as well as instructional strategies and curriculum issues, are of interest. Consequently, the journal presents material which is relevant to researchers in the field, to managers who have highly able individuals employed, to policy makers who need to find frameworks by which to make the best use of high ability in society, to mentors, coaches, teachers, counsellors and parents of highly able children. Furthermore, the contents are not restricted to the study of manifest high level achievement, but include the identification and nurturance of unexercised potential.

Development of a European Talent Support Network

Adopted by the General Assembly of the European Council for High Ability (ECHA)

1. Background and proposal to establish a European Talent Support Network

ECHA was established more than 25 years ago “to promote research, development and education in the field of high ability” (Article 2.1.). In this, ECHA has been highly successful, notably in its local and biannual international conferences, and has become a valuable influence across Europe for the benefit of the most able. At recent ECHA Conferences ideas emerged that highly able young people in Europe could be helped by ECHA in a varied, intensive and continuing program designed for them and led by ECHA.

In fact, the promotion of talent support is an important part of the constitutional aims of ECHA. This support includes cross-regional and cross-national exchange of best practices, application of high-level research results, as well as the development of policies, curricula and programs of formal and informal learning methods. Over the past few years, increasingly more sophisticated methods of communication and cooperation across Europe have provided the means to set up a new, ECHA-guided framework for leading effectiveness in support of the most able.

As the endpoint of a year- long discussions with increasingly larger and larger rounds of ECHA members, the General Assembly of ECHA agreed that ECHA supports, regulates and guides the formation of a European Talent Support Network (abbreviated as Network in the following text). This Network would never replace any of the current functions of ECHA. Rather, it would be a dynamic Network of continuously developing cooperative contacts between organizations involved in the field of high ability – supported, regulated and guided by ECHA. ECHA agrees that the school system is a primary focus of talent identification and support. The Network will not compete by the school system, will not form an ‘alternative’ system, but will help the school system in its efforts to identify and help talented young people.

In fact, ECHA expects that the Network will have many nurseries, schools, universities and other institutions of the school system as its nodes. **The Network would**

1. increase the identification and help of highly able young people in Europe;
2. boost research activity in the field of high ability and help transfer findings to practice;
3. extend the current sharing of best practices in the field of high ability;
4. help the increase of ECHA membership further by increasing the number of people knowing and acknowledging ECHA’s activities in theory, research and practice, and
5. would demonstrate that people involved in the field of high ability have reached a “critical mass” at the European level which needs to be taken into account when discussing EU and national policies in Europe (such as in education, research, innovation, social affairs, public health, etc.) related to high ability.

The Network would do all these activities avoiding bureaucratic, over-controlling, hierarchical measures, and concentrating on indirect and direct helps of the highly able. Sharing and giving, reciprocity and transparency would be the major values of the Network. The Network would be open but not overwhelming, informal and personal helping motivation and building trust. The network would be civil in the sense that sees the individual at all different ages and their context irrespective of socio-economic status with interconnections at pre-school, school and university level.

The idea of forming the European Talent Support Network has already found acceptance from many ECHA members and organizations in the field of high ability in various countries across Europe. Both the European Parliament and the European Commission have expressed interest and support to help this Network both politically and financially (the latter in the frame of the renewed Erasmus+ program; by inclusion to Research & Innovation support, like Horizon2020, as well as to the social innovation programs of the European Social Fund). However, ECHA itself will not be a coordinator of such grant applications, and will enter such applications as a participant after careful considerations.

The European Talent Support Network would consist of two types of participants.

- **European Talent Centers** would organize activities in the field of high ability in a region or a whole country (meaning that there might be more than one European Talent Center per European country). European Talent Centers would be registered by the Accreditation Committee of the European Council of High Ability (ECHA) elected by the General Assembly from ECHA members having a strong reputation and long-term (minimum ten years) expertise in the field of high ability. The General Committee of ECHA will be represented in the Accreditation Committee.

- **European Talent Points** would organize local activities in the field of high ability. These could be organizations focusing on talent support (e.g. educational institutions), and/or of highly able young people, and/or their parents, teachers, mentors, etc. (see a more detailed list of potential participants below). European Talent Points would be registered by European Talent Centers. In the following sections, selection criteria for both European Talent Centers and European Talent Points will be proposed. However, it is important to emphasize that the selection criteria for European Talent Points would be formulated by individual European Talent Centers and so they would differ from each other taking into account the cultural differences in Europe.

Thus, the proposal below for the selection criteria of European Talent Points is a general guideline, which would be specialised for the particular country or region of the respective European Talent Centre.

2. European Talent Centers

European Talent Centers would be registered by the Accreditation Committee of the European Council for High Ability elected by the General Assembly of ECHA. A European Talent Centre should be an organization, or a distinct part of a larger organization established for this role. European Talent Centers may receive support from the EU grants of the Erasmus+ program and possibly other programs in the future.

Proposed selection criteria for a European Talent Center

A European Talent Centre

- most importantly: has a well established expertise, activity and efficiency in coordinating talent support activity of a region or a country in Europe;
- has a paid or volunteer work devoted to talent support-related activities equivalent to at least 2 full time employees;
- volunteers or staff members of the Centre have a proven expertise in research and/or practice of talent support;

- has the support of at least 10 potential European Talent Points (see description later) representing at least 5 geographically distinct locations;
- has at least 5 internationally well-known experts in the field of high ability in form of an International Advisory Board;
- able to provide high quality information on theoretical and practical issues of gifted education and talent support guiding the work of its European Talent Points, participating in discussions with other European Talent Centers and helping the formulation of proposals and joint actions at the European level;
- is willing and able to coordinate joint actions and other help of highly able young people (including e.g. regional, national, international events, like Talent Days, young musicians' competitions, young scientists competitions, Olympics of the Mind, etc.; development of qualifying curricula e.g. European Master Degree and research projects e.g. European Graduate School; education and training activities e.g. that of teachers, parents of highly able etc.);
- is able to keep records on the talent support activity of its region including the registration, help and coordination of European Talent Points and making this information available on the web (e.g. in form of a Talent Support Map of the region)²;
- is willing to cooperate with other European Talent Centers and with ECHA e.g.: in setting up joint actions, submitting joint proposals and grant applications, discussing joint policies and guidelines in the field of high ability, etc.;
- is open to be visited by representatives, experts, talented young people of other European Talent Centers;
- is willing to help and influence decisions on regional, national and/or European policies in the field of high ability (e.g. by public relations activities, media influence, lobbying etc.).

The Accreditation Committee should evaluate applications for registration by treating the above list of selection criteria as a whole and ensuring a high quality of all criteria together and not each of them separately. Proven past activity and its efficiency would be of key importance in this judgment.

European Talent Centers would be first registered in 2015. Existing European Talent Centers would be re-evaluated every other year (i.e. in 2017, 2019 etc.) by the Accreditation Committee of ECHA as to whether they still fulfill the selection criteria. If the selection criteria are no longer fulfilled, the title of European Talent Centre may be suspended or withdrawn by the Committee. Decisions of the Committee have to be supported by written reasoning. In extreme cases (such as a logical contradiction between the selection criteria and the written reasoning) Committee decisions can be appealed to the ECHA General Assembly with detailed written reasoning why the Committee decision was not acceptable.

2. Obviously, such records must be collected and kept only in accordance with the involved European countries' traditions and legislation. Records of highly able persons – if collected at all, which is not a mandatory function of a European Talent Centre – should be especially handled and treated with extreme cautiousness and care ensuring confidentiality. Proper data handling policies should be worked out by the European Talent Centres involved in such activities.

3. European Talent Points

European Talent Points will be registered by the European Talent Centres³. The status of being a European Talent Point would extend cooperation options to the involved organizations in the field of high ability. European Talent Centres may also be able to support their European Talent Points financially (however, this will certainly differ from Centre to Centre and from country to country).

A European Talent Point may have the properties one or more of the following organizational types:

- organizations/institutions focusing mainly on talent support: research, identification, development of highly able young people (e. g: schools, university departments, talent centres, excellence centres, art, sport organizations focusing to talent development, NGOs, etc.);
- talent-related policy makers on national or international level (ministries, local authorities);
- business corporation with talent management programmes (talent identification, corporate responsibility programs, creative climate);
- organizations of young people participating in talent support programs;
- organizations of parents of highly able children;
- or an umbrella organization (network) of the organizational types above.

The above types of organizations were only listed as examples. European Talent Centres may extend this list, but the organizations involved have to be related to the support of highly able young people.

Proposed guidelines of selection criteria for a European Talent Point

A European Talent Point

- has a strategy/action plan connected to talent (e.g. identification, various forms of support including complex programs, enrichment, competitions, etc., research, education, training, curriculum development, carrier planning, etc.) and a practice of this plan for minimum one year;
- is willing to share information on its talent support practices and other talent-related matters with other European Talent Points and European Talent Centres (by e.g. sharing programs, the strategy/action plan, data supporting its minimum one year of practice, best practices/research results on the web, organizing/attending joint conferences, organizing/attending joint Talent Days, etc.);
- is willing to cooperate with other European Talent Points including participation in joint programs, being open to be visited by representatives, experts, and/or talented young people of other European Talent Points.

Selection criteria would be accepted by European Talent Centres first during 2015. Existing European Talent Points would be re-evaluated every other year (i.e. in 2017, 2019 etc.) by their registering European Talent Centre, as to whether they still fulfill the selection criteria. Rules and procedures of this re-evaluation should be worked out, and should be accepted by European Talent Centres. European Talent Centres would not have „mandatory regions” belonging only to a single Centre. Though registration of a European Talent Point would be

performed by one of the European Centres, European Talent Points are highly encouraged establish contacts with more than one European Talent Centres. Among others ECHA Conferences provide an excellent forum for doing most of these activities.

4. The involvement of ECHA in the formation of the European Talent Support Network

ECHA would provide the following help to establish and maintain the European Talent Support Network:

- the General Assembly of ECHA approved this document and is responsible for any of its modifications;
- the General Assembly of ECHA elects the Accreditation Committee of European Talent Centres; the Accreditation Committee which consists of 5 ECHA members having a strong reputation and long-term (minimum ten years) expertise in the field of high ability, each being a resident of a different European country; the term of Accreditation Committee membership would be 4 years with the initial rule that 2 out of the five persons elected in 2014 having received the least votes have a mandate of 2 years only; the General Assembly first elects the president of the Accreditation Committee and then the remaining 4 members by secret ballot. The president and the members are nominated by the General Committee, but nominations can also be submitted by ECHA members at the General Assembly. Election of the Accreditation Committee must ensure an overlap of at least one person between the Accreditation Committee and the General Committee. The Accreditation Committee will elect a secretary from its members on its first meeting. Other rules and procedures of the Accreditation Committee will be formed by the Committee itself, to be included in the report of the Accreditation Committee to the General Assembly;
- the General Assembly of ECHA will regularly place on its meeting agenda a report on the Accreditation Committee's work, as well as will re-evaluate the selection criteria, if necessary;
- application(s) will be submitted for the EU and other funds supporting the organization of the European Talent Support Network (including the work of the Accreditation Committee and support of the European Talent Centres; with the note said before on the role of ECHA in these applications);
- ECHA will organize regular meetings of European Talent Centre and European Talent Point representatives to discuss their experiences and to learn best practices from each other using and extending the current options of the biannual ECHA Conferences;
- in connection of its role to represent its members and the field of high ability at the European level, ECHA will extend its representation including the European Talent Support Network in the European Parliament, European Commission and in European countries.

5. Closing remarks

Besides the contact structure of European Talent Centres and their European Talent Points, the European Talent Support Network should have a very dense horizontal contact structure. In their horizontal contacts, similar European Talent Points from the same or different European countries will be encouraged to find similar points in their activity and organize meetings, student-, teacher-, mentor-, expert-exchanges and more regular contacts along these similarities.

The above summary on the establishment and development of a European Talent Support Network is – obviously – very much incomplete, since it cannot take into account all possible situations, conflicts, problems and last but not least – creative solutions to overcome the unexpected difficulties during this process. It will be the task of the General Committee of ECHA to oversee and help this process. The President and the Secretary of the General Committee will regularly include a section dealing with the matters of the European Talent Support Network in their report to the General Assembly of ECHA.

The European Talent Support Network helps sharing of information and knowledge, gives and makes accessible additional resources, connects partners, who worked separately before, extends and multiply trustful, motivating environments, and does all this by a flexible, sustainable, no bureaucratic, not over-controlling, non-hierarchical manner, concentrating on indirect and direct help of the highly able.

ECHA Accreditation Committee completed its work and accredited the first European Talent Centres. The Committee received 28 high quality applications from 19 countries. Successful applications needed a score higher than the threshold of 70% of the maximum score. Scores were defined as shown in the scoring sheet published at the time of the call.

In the current first round the following 14 applicants from 13 countries have been accredited as European Talent Centres:

Austria: the Austrian Research and Support Centre for the Gifted and Talented and the Institute TIBI

Belgium: the Exentra Centre

Czech Republic Talent Centre of National Institute for Further Education

Germany: International Centre for the Study of Giftedness (ICBF) of the Universities of Muenster Osnabrueck and Nijmegen

Hungary: the European Talent Centre Budapest (www.tehetseg.hu)

Ireland: the CTY Ireland

Italy: the Italian Association for Gifted and Talented Students

Lithuania: the National Student Academy

the Netherlands: the Talent Centre for the Netherlands

Slovakia: LEAF

Slovenia: The Centre for Research and Promotion of Giftedness at Faculty of Education University of Ljubljana

Switzerland: University of Education and Teacher Training, North-western Switzerland

Turkey: EPTS Centre - Centre for Research and Practice on Gifted Education at Anadolu University.

Reference:

<http://www.echa.info/>