

Account on the EMBO-sponsored Roundtable Discussion on Talent Recruitment and Public Awareness

Szilárd KUI,
Network of Youth Excellence

Abstract. This Article will give a brief overview of the Roundtable Discussion summarizing the most important and relevant comments and ideas raised during the discussion, mainly focusing on the ways and means how the aims and efforts of talent recruitment can be presented to the media and politicians.

Keywords. Talent recruitment, young scientists, media, policy makers

Introduction

The Roundtable Discussion, sponsored by the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO), took place at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences on 19 October, 2006 under the auspices of the Network of Youth Excellence (hereinafter: NYEX). As a satellite discussion to the 3rd NATO-UNESCO Advanced Research Workshop on Talent Recruitment and Public Understanding the aim of the meeting was to exchange ideas how talent recruitment and gifted education should be presented to the media and to politicians in order to catch their attention and awareness. Fourteen experts, politicians and young scientists were participating in the discussion including Norbert Kroó, Vice-President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; Gilbert Fayl, representative of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts; Peggy Connolly, President of the NYEX; Korado Korlevic and Myoung Hwan Kim, Vice-Presidents of the NYEX; Shlomit Rachmel from the Department of Gifted Education of the Israeli Ministry of Education; Péter Csermely, President of the Hungarian Research Student Foundation; Sokol Axhemi, former Albanian Deputy Minister of Education; Péter Gresiczki, secretary of the Hungarian Commission of UNESCO; János Daru, President of the Hungarian Research Student Association; Szilárd Kui, Secretary of the NYEX and Lilla Barabás, Coordinator of the NYEX.

During the discussion several exciting and interrelated issues have been raised such as: What message should be delivered to the media and the politicians? How to convey the message itself? Whom to communicate? When to communicate? Which is the most effective way to deliver the message? As the discussion developed, it became clearer and clearer that only the first and the second questions could be deeply examined due to lack of time, thus all the participants agreed that additional Roundtables shall be devoted to the other issues in the near future. Consequently, in this short report I would like to summarize

¹ Corresponding Author: Szilárd Kui, Hungarian Research Student Association, H-1146 Budapest, Ajtosi-Durer sor 19-21. Hungary; E-mail: kuiszilard@kutdiak.hu

all the ideas and suggestions that were raised concerning the content of the message and the delivery thereof.

1. What the message should be?

1.1 Keen on young talents

It is well established by now that there is an increasing social and economical need of discovering talented and gifted young people in every western society as cutting-edge science and research are the key elements to preserve the competitiveness in the global economy. Furthermore, it is quite self-evident from an economic point of view that the earlier talents are discovered, the more the society may profit from them in the long run. From the perspective of science it is also beneficial, if the society invests resources in talents at an earlier stage well before they reach university. It has been concluded during the discussion that a considerable investment shall be made while talents are teenagers.

The teenager segment is one of the most important periods in human development: people start questioning the world around them, they experience the joy of discovery, they get involved in a lot of different things and have a huge passion to change the world around them. All these activities are essential parts of scientific work and research as well. More importantly, it is the 14 to 20 years age group, when people get their first experience with science and formulate their life-long attitude towards it. Investing in talents and gifted in this particular age helps youngsters to find the area or field they are interested in and also helps the scientific community to attract, and attach these young people to science and research. Without talent recruitment and talent support programs these teenagers may never find out that they are actually talented, and may never decide to engage themselves with science and research for their entire life. Several examples were given by the participants to support this argument, and everyone stressed that without this investment advance in the field may never happen, while with an appropriate investment an appropriate progress is foreseeable and it will be faster as well.

1.2 Why to invest in talented and gifted young people?

Although this investment certainly rearranges resources from other social needs, it has to be viewed as what it really is: an investment into the future well being of the society. It is apparent from the practice that no one is willing to make this long-term investment, thus it is the responsibility of the state to provide initial resources for these programs encouraging all other players (companies, civil societies, etc.) to contribute. These talent support programs create a professional-, scientific-, social- and fraternity-net around the students, which all might help to overcome the brain-drain as people, who have strong ties with their home scientific community tend to return home after finishing their exchange or post-doctoral program.

Investing at this age gives five-six extra years for the students to start and develop their scientific career as well as for the scientific community to integrate these students and to guide them on to success. Moreover, it helps social mobility offering unmatched opportunity for students originating from lower classes of the society to change their stars

and to explore and run their talent.

Supporting youngsters also results in supporting science and research itself, because young scientists tend to pick up frontier areas as they do want to concentrate on a problem, which was not solved before. They do not devote to much time and energy to those fields labeled as “already discovered” or “deeply researched” since they look for challenge and adventure in science. However, this does not mean that they are selfish or individualists. Just the opposite, they are open to collaboration much more than their older colleagues, since, except for their time, they have nothing to risk in these collaborations. Giving credit and support to these young talented and gifted students opens up new, previously hidden perspectives for them as well as frees up a lot of energy in them, which otherwise would have slumbered.

2. Formulating and Delivering the message

2.1. Some ordinary ways

Formulating the message is the first and easiest step. The second and more difficult step is to deliver it to policy makers in an appropriate way. There is no universally applicable method for this. The message in every scenario should contain three key elements. One or two key elements are often not convincing enough, while five or six are way too much for the time and attention received. Sometimes less is more, as policy makers are not able to devote time to a long and detailed application, therefore the message must be set out in a convincing short form, has to be clear and precise supported by impressive and persuasive evidence. It is also very important to use catchwords, which raise the attention and summarize the essence of the message.

Sometimes informal ways are more effective to deliver the message than formal ways ranging from working dinners to golf tournaments. The appropriate mean has to be carefully chosen on a case-by-case basis taking into account all relevant circumstances. Whichever channel is used for the delivery of the message, it is extremely important to provide a feed-back. After getting support from politicians it is expedient to praise them in the media and in their local electoral community for their support in order to pave the way for a future application. These self-amplifying circles are essential to collect the critical mass of the issue in both the media and political circles.

2.2. Some new ways

As policy makers are tend to follow the public opinion and public needs it might be fruitful to reach them through the media. Making talent recruitment part of the public discussion may stimulate politicians to deal with the issue. It might be very useful from this later perspective as well to create young ‘scientific superheroes’, putting those successful young scientists into the limelight, who already reached great achievements and who may serve as role models for the even younger generation. These young scientific superheroes may also help to deliver the message to the policy makers, since they can offer a first-hand experience and evidence for these politicians, which is always more convincing. The media

also tends to give more coverage to these young people, since they are seen as 'wiz-kids'. Thus talent recruitment itself can be presented to the public as a valuable and desirable societal activity. Furthermore, the expanded media coverage might help to attach prestige to science and research, which is so eagerly needed recently. Young scientific superheroes might also inspire young students to choose science, and make a wish to be a scientist instead of a movie star, footballer or singer.

One of the most important conclusions of the Roundtable Discussion was that collaboration between talent support programs and organizations must be further strengthened in order to exchange successful practices how policy makers can be convinced, to discover new tools and develop new techniques and to identify mistakes that should not have been made. It is for granted that certain opportunities are not opened for single organizations and can only be exploited by a cooperation of many. The mission of the Network of Youth Excellence is to bring about this so much needed cooperation, between different programs and organizations from different countries and continents uniting under the flag of talent recruitment.