INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Introduction to the 2016 Consensus Document on European Brain Research

Monica Di Luca,1 Paul Bolam,2 John Foxe3 and David Nutt4

1Pharmacological and Biomolecular Sciences, University of Milan, Milan, Italy
2MRC Brain Networks Dynamics Unit, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK
3School of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Rochester Medical Center, Rochester, NY, USA
4Division of Brain Sciences, Imperial College London, London, UK

The European Brain Council (EBC), established in 2002, includes all major European organizations involved in brain-related issues ranging from scientific and clinical societies to industry and patient organizations. EBC – together with its member organizations – promotes brain research in Europe, with the final aim to improve the quality of life of those European citizens living with brain-related diseases as well as their carers.

EBC’s goal, to promote brain research in Europe at all levels, will be achieved by promoting the dialogue between scientists of different backgrounds, by encouraging translational research, by the application of new scientific knowledge to develop improved disease treatments and by maintaining dialogue with European funding agencies in supporting basic brain research as well as research on brain-related diseases.

Brain research in Europe is a rapidly evolving field. The complexity of understanding brain function and brain diseases brings responsibilities as well as opportunities for the neuroscience community. Responsibility to develop novel tools and approaches for advancing our knowledge about the nervous system and responsibility to develop opportunities for integrating new insights into the underlying pathogenic mechanisms which will lead to novel therapeutic approaches for the benefit of society.

Two previous versions of the Consensus Document on European Brain Research were published in 2006 and 2011 (J. Neurol. Neurosurg. Psychiatry, 2006; EJN, 2011). They were critically needed to focus the attention on brain research in Europe and to identify it as a priority.

Since 2011, much has been achieved but much remains to be done. In particular, the level of research funding both at European and at national levels still falls short of what is necessary to match the current burden of brain diseases in Europe and the increased impact in the years to come. Addressing these large costs for the European society requires intensified research and the creation of novel solutions. To be able to face what is becoming a societal emergency, we need to strengthen research and develop a strong European platform for both basic and clinical brain researches.

Within this framework, the dynamism of the European brain research scientific community is already leading to tremendous progress in our knowledge of brain function and brain diseases. We have undertaken a revision and update of the Consensus Document reflecting the advances in brain science and the changes in priorities of recent years. It has a new format compared to the previous one. The consensus on major challenges in neuroscience research was arrived at through consultation with both senior scientists as well as representatives from the younger generation, involving the FENS-Kavli Network of Excellence. Multinational and multidisciplinary teams have in this context come together to express their views not only on what needs to be done but also where European brain research can have greatest impact.

We are extremely grateful that so many contributors have recognized the enormous value and potential impact of the revised Consensus Document and have generously given their time and energy to create this new version.

We are all joined in expressing the hope that the document will inspire policymakers and funders throughout Europe to rise to the challenges and support brain research for the health and prosperity of European citizens.

Correspondence: M. Di Luca, as above.
E-mail: monica.diluca@unimi.it

© 2016 Federation of European Neuroscience Societies and John Wiley & Sons Ltd