RESPONSE BY THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATOIRES (AEC) TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION INITIATED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON THE POSSIBLE MISSION, OBJECTIVES, ADDED-VALUE AND STRUCTURE OF AN EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (EIT).

Association Européenne
des Conservatoires,
Académies de Musique
et Musikhochschulen

Question 1: Mission of the EIT

What should be the main objective of the EIT? Should it focus primarily on education (including undergraduate teaching), research and research training, improving the commercial exploitation of research or should it take an integrated approach of teaching, research and technology transfer (the 'knowledge triangle')?

This reply to the consultation may come from an unexpected corner: the field of music education. The European Association of Conservatoires (AEC), representing more than 220 institutions for professional music training in higher education across Europe, is closely following the developments on higher education in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy (of which the EIT-initiative is a direct result) and is concerned by the apparent narrow focus on scientific and technological areas in higher education, and the perceived need to develop scientific excellence to reach the Lisbon objectives. However, the AEC believes it to be vital to also focus on subject areas and types of technology that could be important for the EU economy, but do not usually belong to mainstream scientific research, such as technological research relevant for the creative and cultural industries. The AEC would like to ask attention to this fact because of the following reasons:

- A 2001 study of EUROSTAT shows a considerable (and growing!) contribution of the cultural and creative industries to the EU economy.
- The cultural and creative industries are strongly influenced by new technologies. Take for example the registration and distribution of music: major technological developments have taken place and it is clear these developments will continue. Paradoxically, most of the companies that initiate the development of these technologies are originally based in the US and Japan.
- If one considers global competitiveness, Europe is still a world reference in relation to music and culture in general. Europe should capitalize on this situation by acknowledging this fact and developing initiatives in these areas in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy.

Room should therefore be made in the EIT-initiative to address research in these areas as well. In relation to the primary focus of the EIT, our preference would be to an integrated approach of teaching, research and technology transfer. It is vital to teach our students at both undergraduate and graduate levels how they should use and approach the fast developing technological changes. At the same time, at doctoral and post-doctoral level, research should be done that would not only be relevant to the industries, but also feed the teaching activities at the lower levels of education.

It is our experience that various centres of excellence exist throughout Europe, but that these do not always cooperate well or sometimes even are unaware of each other's existence. Tapping into the potential of combining already existing initiatives of high quality will make it possible to develop enhanced expertise and achieve economies of scale. In relation to the cultural and creative industries, this also assumes a close cooperation between higher education and these industries, which consist mainly of SMEs. We therefore strongly suggest an approach that is based on networking and mobility of students, experts and researchers. This would also make the rationale for the use of European funding more apparent, as the funding would be used to support an initiative on a truly European, multilateral level.

Based on the assumptions made in question 2, we would like to remark the following:

- We do not support the idea of creating one single institution, as we believe this would be too costly and the discussions over where it would be based would be endless; the EIT could then become a hostage of national interests and political struggles at European level. Another endless debate about the size and scope of this institution would also be damaging to this initiative.

- As mentioned in question 2, we are strongly in favour of a network approach, not so much of one single (small or large) network, but of several small and highly specialised networks. The reason for this is the following: if there would be one single small or even large network, this network, in our opinion, would have to cover all the various areas to which technological research is relevant, such as the cultural and creative industries mentioned above. It is clear that it would be almost impossible to establish such a single inclusive network, which would probably result in the exclusion of certain areas beforehand. This, we feel, would be unfortunate and counterproductive. An example could be taken from the ERASMUS Thematic Networks, which have used a successful formula giving vertical disciplines (medicine, history, engineering, music, etc) the possibility to cooperate and develop initiatives on a disciplinary level. The same approach could be used for the EIT with the important difference that these networks would be highly selective (the ERASMUS Thematic Networks have a rather inclusive approach) and rather small (4-6 institutions), in order to achieve the highest level of expertise and specialisation. However, these disciplinary networks, although being highly specialised in their own fields, should be used in the framework of research priorities of a multi-disciplinary nature (see question 4).

- The participation of the industry should also be an important component of this initiative, but this should be based on a clear financial contribution as well: it is a well-known fact that in many other parts of the world, industry heavily invests in scientific research and in relation to the EIT the same attitude should be shown by the industrial partners.

In our opinion, the research priorities should be mainly issue-driven: in this way the EU would profit most from the outcomes of the research conducted by the EIT. As it is clear that certain new technologies can be used in many directions and for various purposes, a very intense coordination between the networks mentioned in question 3 should be established, with the aim to create synergy effects and cross-fertilisation. The networks should therefore be lead by a horizontal agenda, to which all networks would contribute and which would be set by a steering group of experts representing all existing networks, as well as representatives of other stakeholders (employers and industry). In our opinion, it is in this context again vital to include research in disciplines other than the mainstream technological areas, such as the humanities and the arts. Various research findings show a strong potential of cultural aspects in relation to developing social cohesion and transferable skills (creativity!), which might be useful for other disciplines.