

Press Release

Bitter Setback for the European Nanobiotechnology Sector

Following four years of successful work, the funding programme for the European Network of Excellence Nano2Life is to be discontinued.

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The largest European network in nanobiotechnology Nano2Life will be pulling out all the stops again, at the meeting to be held in Brussels on 26.2.2008 for European Commission collaborators, scientists and stakeholders, to present its achievements and to urge for an extension of its successful work.

Nano2Life is made up of 23 leading organisations from different life-science disciplines from the nanobiotechnology sector. Intelligent implants, lab-on-chip systems, bioindicators, cancer treatment and many other 'nanomedical' applications constitute fields of research in which approximately 400 researchers from several European countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Spain, Sweden, UK and others) are engaged. Back in time, the European nanobiotechnology sector was disconnected and divided into separate disciplines, institutes and research groups. Nano2Life was created in 2002 with the help of the European Commission (i) to compete with research associations, for example, in the USA or in Japan, (ii) to overcome fragmentation, (iii) to unite the key players in the European nanobiotechnology sector, and (iv) to meet the challenges of interfacing the 'nano' and 'bio' worlds, together in a collaborative way.

"It was hard work to explain to the scientists that the primary function of Nano2Life is essentially networking and not financing-specific research projects" commented Patrick Boisseau, the Coordinator of the network. This structure was completely new to many researchers, and so was the idea of multidisciplinary fields, seminars, workshops. In many cases, chemists, biologists and physicists had to find first a common language in order to be able to solve a particular problem together. Young scientists were the first to understand, adapt, and take advantage of the opportunities offered by the network, and have eagerly participate in the many new venues and initiatives introduced by the network. In fact, they clearly left their mark on the network, creating the unique 'Nano2Life spirit': a stimulating, almost intimate, work environment which embraces all disciplines and which ensures a particularly open and innovative exchange of information. "Imagine that only two young scientists from different disciplines and different institutes attend a meeting and, a few years later, these two young scientists set up a company together. The products and jobs which could be created in this case would easily recover the investment in Nano2Life" - a summary of the Nano2Life vision proposed by a young Swedish graduate preparing for his graduation. Numerous publications and meetings, 44 new joint research projects as well as the created unique groups overseeing e.g. ethical, gender and human resource issues, testify that the initial N2L aspirations were not set too high.

The EC funding of the programme ends in September 2008 and many members of Nano2Life fear that the unique system of exchange and collaboration established between the 'nano' and 'bio' worlds, the member organisations and countries and between the many research groups will fall apart again. Therefore, it is hoped for the best of the European Nanobiotechnology, that the forthcoming meeting in Brussels will draw attention to these issues and will encourage deliberations on the prospect of continuing the existence of Nano2Life.

The venue of the meeting is the Stanhope Hotel, 9, Rue du Commerce, 1000 Brussels. The meeting will take place from 2.30 pm to 5 pm and end on a lighter note with a get together. A press conference will be held from 1.30 pm to 2.30 pm.

Further information available at www.nano2life.org
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