

Strategic Plan

Approved by the Governing Council
November 23, 2009

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Message from Helmut Kettenmann (FENS President 2008-2010)

The Federation of European Neuroscience Societies has for the first time adopted a Strategic Plan during the meeting of its Governing Council of 23 November 2009. This plan is the result of a year and a half long process that engaged the Executive Committee, the committee chairpersons and the FENS staff. The Governing Council has outlined key challenges for the coming years, challenges consistent with the mission of the Federation.

FENS has launched a number of activities during its 10 years of existence: the FENS/IBRO schools programme, the Network of European Neuroscience Schools, the continuously growing biennial FENS meeting, the FENS Featured Regional Meeting as held for the first time this year in Warsaw, the publication of its journal - the European Journal of Neuroscience, and the distribution of abstract slots for the Society for Neuroscience

meeting. The FENS mission is to serve the neuroscience community. Since 2008, new statutes (Articles of Association and Regulations) have been established that better conform to the FENS structure and mode of activities. The present Strategic Plan now provides FENS with long-term guidelines to further develop its activities. The governing bodies (Governing Council, Executive Committee, Standing Committees) are pursuing long-term visions despite their short-term mandates.

The present Strategic Plan is also intended for the better understanding of FENS activities by the neuroscience community, including individual scientists as well as neuroscience societies. Eight strategic issues have been identified and are accompanied by specific actions to be taken to achieve the desired outcome. The areas include: the European Journal of Neuroscience, strategies for communication and publication, for scientific meetings (FENS Forums and FENS Featured Regional Meetings), for higher education in neuroscience, for training in neuroscience research, for international affairs, for the FENS administrative structure and for financial reserves.

The plan should be considered as a dynamic process: a work in progress which will allow for iterative planning in FENS governance and management, incorporating regular evaluation of the impact and success of initiatives and activities, as well as an assessment of new challenges awaiting the neuroscience community. We at FENS welcome any comments and input from you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Kettenmann', written in a cursive style.

Helmut Kettenmann

November 24, 2009

Overview

Why a Strategic Plan?

As defined in its statutes (Articles of Association, Article 2), the FENS objectives are:

- A) To promote interaction and coordination between its member societies and to develop neuroscience research in their respective countries and disciplines
- B) To facilitate the interaction between neuroscientists and related scientists in Europe and outside Europe by holding scientific meetings and by any other appropriate means
- C) To facilitate the dissemination of scientific information by publications in journals and through other communication channels
- D) To support the education and training of young neuroscience researchers by the provision of information, the set-up of schools and training programmes and the provision of grants to young scientists
- E) To promote understanding and involvement in neuroscience amongst the general public and to advise decision-makers on the results and the implications of neuroscience research.

To fulfill its mission, FENS has launched a series of actions (FENS Forums, training schools, network of neuroscience schools, EJM etc.), which involve long-term planning in terms of both objectives and of financial resources.

Thus, after 10 years of existence, FENS has succeeded in addressing a number of its objectives. However, the diversity of actions, their targets, their nature, their occurrence, make it difficult to have an overall view of FENS activities, both for the members (member societies and their own individual members), and for FENS governing bodies.

At the same time, the FENS governing bodies (Governing Council, Executive Committee, Standing Committees), whose members have a short-term mandate, are constantly changing in their composition, yet there is a need to maintain a long-term policy for each individual action, to evaluate their impact and to meet forthcoming challenges.

A Strategic Plan for a non-profit organization such as FENS is analogous to a business plan for a commercial company. Its purpose is to establish and maintain long-term guidelines, a "radar screen" of issues and challenges to be addressed within the coming years. The terms of the Strategic Plan should be general enough to allow a certain flexibility, but the underlying process should be clearly defined. These strategic issues are to be defined concisely, and detailed actions should be outlined in the associated strategies. The underlying process consists of identifying what needs to be addressed and deciding upon the best way of addressing it.

A Strategic Plan, as part of a policy of communication on FENS objectives and achievements, should be made public and is aimed at:

- Individual neuroscientists, to understand overall activities and evolution of FENS
- Member societies, to follow up ongoing actions and in defining their role and policy with regard to FENS
- FENS governance, to develop and maintain a long-term policy whilst establishing the means to evaluate precisely its impact.

To do so, FENS should analyse a series of objectives to be achieved in the medium-long term (5-10 years).

The Strategic Plan can include the **strategic issue** (i.e. the objectives within the FENS mission) address the **desired outcome** (i.e. what will be accomplished if the issue is addressed successfully), point out the **guiding principles** (i.e. which tactics can be taken in achieving the outcome) and, **summaries the actions** that will be taken (i.e. the details of actions that are being set up in the Guidelines).

The process of developing a Strategic Plan will allow us:

- To distinguish unrealistic from realistic targets (without excluding exploratory actions)
- To establish priorities between and within main issues
- To maintain a global view of FENS activities.

How to implement a Strategic Plan

A Strategic Plan is prepared by the Executive Committee following discussion with the various FENS committees and the Governing Council. It is then submitted to the Governing Council for discussion and approval. The Strategic Plan should serve as long-term guidelines for FENS to carry out its remit, ensuring continuity of action despite the ever-changing composition of its committees.

An essential aspect of a Strategic Plan is to define how to implement each action: most objectives are dealt with by committees (Executive Committee, Standing or *ad hoc* committees) acting alone or in concert. The Strategic Plan should specify which committees are entrusted with particular issues, alone or in collaboration, and under which conditions. The role of the committees is to develop ideas about objectives and propose a plan of action, including the administrative and financial requirements but, as a rule, not to execute it. The scientists composing the committees are involved in many professional tasks that leave little time for any time-consuming executive activity within FENS. To be efficient, therefore, the committees must be supported by the FENS staff who will execute the actions with the obligation to deliver in due time and ensure continuity in long-term planning. Each proposed action, therefore, must include an estimation of support staff needed.

How to assess progress

A fundamental aspect of a Strategic Plan is to allow for iterative planning in FENS governance and management, incorporating regular evaluation of the impact and success of initiatives and activities, as well as an assessment of new challenges.

A Strategic Plan is a dynamic process. For each action, a reviewing procedure must be implemented:

- On a regular basis (i.e. by survey or by progress report)
- Through defined steps (i.e. specific committees => Executive Committee => Governing Council)
- And always lead to a final report.

Reviewing leads to:

- The conclusion of an action when the desired outcome is achieved (i.e. the final report is approved)
- The conclusion of an action because the objective is impossible to achieve (i.e. an action may be exploratory)
- A change in the execution and/or the objectives
- The approval of progress reports.

European Journal of Neuroscience

The European Journal of Neuroscience (EJN) is the official scientific journal of FENS and is provided as a service to its membership and the scientific community. Since December 2005, EJN is co-owned by FENS and the publisher Wiley-Blackwell. The scientific editorial policy and the choice of the Editors-in-Chief is the responsibility of FENS. EJN is also a major source of income for FENS, allowing FENS to promote its other activities.

Objectives

- Simplify the management of EJN
- Amplify the success of the Journal (scientifically and promotionally)
- Anticipate future technological developments in publishing.

Actions

1) EJN Management

As specified in the FENS Regulations, the EJN management within FENS is entrusted to:

- The Executive Committee which holds the responsibility of FENS policy with regard to EJN editorial and management
- The EJN Management Committee, which is a joint committee of FENS and the publisher Wiley-Blackwell, and holds responsibility for the practical implementation of a policy jointly agreed upon by FENS and Wiley-Blackwell.

2) Promote EJN success

The scientific success of EJN depends primarily on the work of the Editorial Board under the leadership of the Editors-in-Chief. It also depends on the quality of submissions, which in turn is a reflection of the perceived quality and impact of EJN.

There are three levels of promotion for EJN:

- Attract good quality submissions. This task is primarily the responsibility of the Editors-in-Chief (e.g. commissioning commentaries for Featured Articles, Reviews and Special Issues; maintaining a fair and competent review process; and the efficient management of submitted manuscripts by the Editorial Office)
- Promote EJN within FENS member societies. This task is primarily the responsibility of the Executive Committee and Governing Council, as taken in close collaboration with the Editors-in-Chief and the Publication and Communication Committee. Specific activities to this effect have already been initiated such as the "Best Publication Award", the "EJN Special

Feature at the FENS Forum", and the participation of Editors-in-Chief at national meetings and FENS Featured Regional Meetings. In addition, the FENS leadership should lead by example and regularly submit their own top quality research articles to EJM
- Promotion of EJM to the outside world: This should be the task of the Communication and Publication Committee.

3) Anticipate future technological developments in publishing:
Innovations in digital information and communication technology, and open access publishing constitute a challenge to the traditional modes of publishing. These issues are closely followed up by FENS in concert with the publisher.

Communication and Publication Committee policy

Objectives

FENS, through several of its committees and its offices, is engaged in the various aspects of a policy of communication (e.g. the website, e-mails, Schools and NENS Committees, FENS Forums), and many activities that are based on a number of publications (electronic or conventional). However, there is a need for FENS to improve its communication strategy and make it more coherent both within FENS (member societies, individual scientists members of societies), and outside FENS (i.e. the public at large, scientific organizations, decision-making bodies), to better serve the FENS membership, create a corporate image, and promote neuroscience research towards the public and the decision-makers.

Guiding principles

- Identify and prioritise targets
- List the various actions to be taken to improve communications on each level
- Establish a coherent policy of publication in interaction with other FENS committees and FENS staff, to avoid redundancy of information and to promote coherence, to ensure regular updates, and develop a corporate image
- Establish a policy of external collaboration whenever a partner is necessary or would be more efficient for communication and/or publication.

Actions

1) Make the Communication and Publication Committee responsible for communication and for the supervision of all publications with a view to achieving better efficiency, in promoting a FENS brand image in cooperation with all FENS committees. The Committee shall advise the Executive Committee on the communication and publication policy of FENS, propose projects and carry out the adopted projects.

2) Define targets for communication:
- FENS constituency (individual society members, member societies and programmes)

- General audience (school children, adult public, patients organizations, decision-makers)
- European and international institutions.

3) Define communication tools:

- Make a survey of existing communication tools to catalogue the types of tools, their graphic chart and content
- Study their impact
- Reconsider FENS graphic chart to improve on the existing and future tools, in view of promoting FENS as a brand name
- Establish a procedure of co-ordination between committees and offices
- Establish a periodic procedure of evaluation of the communication and publication activities
- Establish provisional budget necessary for these actions.

Scientific meeting policy

FENS organizes two series of scientific meetings, the **FENS Forum** and the **FENS Featured Regional Meeting** with the aim to promote neuroscience research both in Europe at large and in the respective countries of its member societies and to facilitate the interaction between scientists in and outside Europe.

The FENS Forum of European Neuroscience is a large international scientific meeting involving all neuroscience society members of FENS and is held every two years on even years.

FENS Featured Regional Meetings are national or regional scientific meetings organized by member societies, alone or in partnership between them, which receive FENS support and branding. They are organized every two years on odd years.

FENS Forum of European Neuroscience

Objectives

The FENS Forum is a large biennial international scientific meeting, intended to promote scientific exchange between researchers worldwide, and scientific excellence in a rapidly evolving body of knowledge in neuroscience. The Forum provides an opportunity to involve European scientists through their respective neuroscience societies and promote collaborations at a European level. The Forum also functions as a showcase of European neuroscience for scientists, decision-makers and funding agencies.

Desired outcomes

- Science: the scientific programme of the Forum determines the scientific quality of the Forum and shall closely reflect the changing body of knowledge

- Management: Improved manageability of logistics to meet the needs of a meeting with several thousand participants
- Expansion: capacity to grow towards 8,000 attendees and 5,000 abstracts in order to better reflect the actual importance of European research
- Funding: Improved cost-effectiveness and means of expanding sponsorships
- Promotion of member societies throughout Europe, by holding successive Forums in different countries.

Actions

1) Science: The composition of the Programme Committee must reflect the different fields of research including new developing areas. It is composed of elected and nominated members, where due regard is given to their fields of scientific expertise and to their geographical distribution, and it selects in an independent manner the symposia and workshops proposed by scientists from all over the world and plenary lectures. The Programme Committee advises FENS on steps necessary to enhance the scientific quality of the Forum and its international recognition.

2) Management: the growing size of the Forum requires specific venues adapted to a large audience. The Forum organization needs to improve FENS efficiency from Forum to Forum. Within the framework of the Strategic Plan, as set by the Governing Council, the management will be under the complete responsibility of FENS through its Executive Committee and its staff.

3) Expansion: FENS shall survey the impact of the present Forum on the international community, improve its communication regarding the Forum, and involve member societies more closely.

4) Funding: cost-effectiveness is necessary to keep the Forum costs within reasonable limits both for FENS and its participants. It is expected that the new management will improve cost-effectiveness in the long-term and to allow FENS to fund its other activities such as in the fields of higher education and research training.

FENS Featured Regional Meetings (FFRM)

Objectives

The FENS Featured Regional Meetings are national or regional scientific meetings, held on odd years, and alternating with the FENS Forum, organized by member societies, alone or in partnership between them. They receive FENS support and branding to increase the visibility of the meeting, promote its scientific excellence, and support neuroscience at a national/regional level.

Desired outcomes

- Science: the scientific programme of the meeting determines its scientific quality. The possibility to invite speakers of international reputation further enhances its scientific

quality and the renown of the organizing societies

- Funding: Additional funding from FENS allows for a better organization and the attribution of travel grants for young scientists coming from abroad
- Promotion of member societies by giving preference to the societies that lack facilities to host a large FENS Forum
- Promotion of FENS among members of the national/regional community.

Actions

Under the responsibility of the FENS Featured Regional Meeting Committee:

1) To pursue the project of FENS Featured Regional Meeting. Depending on the outcome and financial resources from FENS, expansion to more than one FENS Featured Regional Meeting on odd years could be considered.

2) To assess impact:

- on the organizing societies: attendance at meetings, evaluation of quality, identification of any membership increase
- on FENS visibility among members of the organizing societies: scientific proposals submitted to future FENS Forums, attendance at FENS Forums.

Higher education in neuroscience

Objectives

FENS seeks to enhance and support European graduate education in the field of neuroscience, generating synergies to raise the standard of neuroscience education, integrating neuroscientists across Europe and raising the visibility of neuroscience both among young students about to embark on an educational and professional decision for their future careers, and among European citizens in general.

Guiding principles

- Promote state of the art structured PhD or Masters degree programmes in neuroscience that incorporate the objectives of the Bologna agreement
- Foster exchange and mutual support between the graduate programmes in neuroscience across Europe, leading to an improved structured education in neuroscience
- Increase options for young neuroscientists by supporting early stage training, providing information about NENS structured graduate educational programmes, and creating a platform through which young neuroscientists can explore opportunities on their career ladder.

Actions

FENS has already launched a project labeled Network of European Neuroscience Schools (NENS), which includes a broad cross-section of structured graduate educational programmes (or schools) across Europe. The NENS committee is in charge of:

1) The establishment and expansion of this network, which currently has over 150 registered graduate programmes, based in 28 European countries. The network is backed up by electronic tools (a searchable database) to provide key data on all NENS-registered programmes. This should be expanded by tools to provide information about the curricular details of NENS structured graduate educational programmes and make lecture and teaching material available.

2) The organization of annual general meetings to provide a platform for schools coordinators to interact with one another, participate in workshops and hold open-forum discussions about the needs of European structured graduate educational programmes in neuroscience and the development of NENS activities.

3) The allocation of NENS stipends, a FENS-funded instrument, that funds short term (< 3 month) training stays at NENS-registered structured educational programmes for graduates in the very early phases of their neuroscience education (Masters students or PhD students in the first 2 years of training).

4) The promotion of NENS among European neuroscientists, in concert with the Communication and Publication Committee and other FENS committees (NENS symposium at FENS Forums, monthly Newsletter, etc.).

Training in neuroscience

Objectives

The training of young neuroscientists in cutting-edge research constitutes a very efficient approach to further enhance the skills of young scientists, and promote their career development. In a European context, the organization by FENS of training programmes also constitutes a means of tightening collaborations between European research centres, and of creating a European space for neuroscience research open to future professional scientists.

Guiding principles

- Increase the quality of neuroscience research in Europe by providing training programmes of a high international quality.
- Create a network of alumni and teachers capable of enhancing scientific collaboration and the establishment of international research projects within Europe.
- Develop partnerships with other European and non-European agencies involved in training programmes to foster complimentary actions.
- Develop through the training programmes relationship with non-European countries.

Actions

The current activities of FENS regarding training in neuroscience in Europe are under the responsibility of the FENS Schools Committee. Since the 2004 FENS Forum in Lisbon, FENS and IBRO have joined forces by creating a joint committee responsible for the FENS/IBRO Programme of European Neuroscience Schools, to ensure as much penetration as possible in all European countries.

- 1) Ensure the high quality of training schools by international open calls.
- 2) Reinforce the Alumni programme to extend the network of alumni and teachers capable of enhancing scientific collaboration and the establishment of international research projects within Europe.
- 3) As a crucial focus of FENS strategy, pursue and extend the collaboration with IBRO, to include African countries in the Mediterranean basin as well as Asian countries, starting with those wishing to benefit from involvement in training programmes in neuroscience.
- 4) International collaboration is ensured by participation of scientists from all over the world in training schools. It should be extended by formal collaboration with other scientific societies such as the American Society for Neuroscience (SfN) and other such large societies.
- 5) Enhance the promotion of FENS high level training programmes among European neuroscientists, in concert with the Communication and Publication Committee and other FENS committees, notably the NENS committee, to alert scientists from the graduate student to the young faculty level to the research possibilities offered by laboratories in Europe and outside, and increase the visibility of European neuroscience educational programmes and their role in and outside Europe.

International affairs

Objectives

The growth of FENS membership and the impact of FENS on the European and international scene prompts FENS to develop a structured approach to international relationships.

The international strategy of FENS is developed through its collaborative relationships with European, non-European and international partners.

Desired outcomes

- Enhancement of public awareness of Neuroscience related issues
- Enhancement of research capability by greater funding and sound legal requisite
- Increased engagement of European funding agencies in supporting basic brain research and

research on brain related diseases.

Guiding principles

-FENS, as a federation of the national neuroscience societies and a number of European societies, is best suited to represent basic neuroscience research at the European and international levels.

-Given the objectives of most European funding agencies, partnership with other European organizations involved in neuroscience (clinical, patients, industrial organizations) appears essential.

-Neuroscience as a field of research is an international discipline and most challenges faced are international in nature, and require a coordinated action with international partners.

Actions

The Executive Committee, and the Communication and Publication Committee shall define the objectives and the way to achieve them.

1) Increase political and public support for Neuroscience.

FENS shall devote all efforts to foster brain research in Europe. The main goal is to eliminate the discrepancy between the huge impact of brain diseases and the implications of understanding normal brain function on the one hand, and the modest financial and time resources allocated at the European level to brain research, teaching and the care of brain diseases on the other. FENS should act to maintain an active dialogue with the European Union commissions, the European Parliament and the World Health Organization (WHO) as well as other decision-making bodies.

Active measures to achieve this goal will be:

- A close partnership with European clinical organizations, patient organizations as well as industrial partners interested in the development of European brain research, orchestrated through the European Brain Council (EBC). This coordinated activity will have as main outcome the production of dissemination papers, i.e. Consensus Document on Brain Research in Europe, Cost of Brain Diseases in Europe, as well as other dissemination activities both towards the scientific community and major stakeholders

- a bottom up approach, creating a synergistic action between national societies of neuroscience / national brain councils to convey needs and suggestions to the European Commission through FENS/EBC.

2) International exchanges between major societies:

- SfN and IBRO are already FENS partners in promoting public awareness of brain research, education in neurosciences, and professional development. FENS remains committed to working jointly with these key partners in promoting Neuroscience.

- FENS will work in collaboration with these two partners to build a common strategy towards international decision-making bodies. on a number of issues that are better solved by an international approach (i.e. identifying global priorities in neuroscience, the importance of research for brain diseases, animal research, ethics, protection/freedom of scientists, stem cells).

Administrative structure

Objectives

The FENS infrastructure (staff and offices) is essential:

- For the daily activities of FENS, including Internet Technology (administration, contact with committees, with member societies, with individual society members)
- For the execution of actions decided in the context of strategic issues. Strategic actions are defined by committees (Executive Committee, Standing or *ad hoc* committees), whose role it is to develop ideas about objectives, propose a plan of action, including administrative and financial requirements. It is essential that Committees can rely on support staff to prepare and execute their decisions.

Guiding principles

- In view of the constantly changing composition of FENS committees, the FENS staff constitutes the collective memory of FENS, ensuring continuity of actions over the long term.
- A reliable and responsible support staff is essential for executing and delivering in good time the decisions taken by the committees.
- Each strategic issue should contain in its proposal a realistic appraisal of the support staff needed, including the role and level of responsibility of the staff member, the amount of time/person needed, and its costs.

Actions

Committee in charge: Executive Committee

1) Survey

To obtain an appraisal of the necessary support staff, each committee and FENS administration unit will be required to include in its detailed Strategic Plan the staffing needs. The Executive Committee will then be in a position to make a realistic and cost-effective proposal for the needs in permanent staff and its organisation.

2) Structure

- Given the constant changes in committees' composition, the staff should be located in permanent FENS office(s) and work full or part time for different committees
- At the moment, FENS does not have its own personnel and delegates the management of its staff to two member societies (the French and German neuroscience societies). By agreement, these societies are not involved in FENS administration, but the personnel are under their social, financial and legal responsibility. This management has advantages, inconveniences and/or risks. The Executive Committee should therefore re-assess this administrative structure periodically so that responsibilities and charges are defined in a transparent way, and the committee may propose to maintain or change this situation.

Financial policy

Objective

FENS generates income from various sources. The majority of which, i.e. roughly 60% in 2008, results from the revenues of the European Journal of Neuroscience. The remaining 40% is derived from membership fees, direct support for schools (IBRO, Hertie), and other activities (EDAB, Wiley-Blackwell, etc), and any surplus from the FENS Forums. Uncertainties surrounding the future of scientific publishing combined with emerging opportunities for an expanded role in other areas warrant substantial financial reserves.

A sound financial management should allow FENS to face major risks, and to finance its activities and the sustainable administrative structure necessary for these activities.

Desired outcomes

- Within five years, to establish financial reserves adequate to cover 100 percent of the identified risks that could be faced by FENS over a two-year period
- Build up a separate amount of 500.000 EUR within the reserves, to generate income that would be dedicated to supporting new activities of FENS and/or developing sufficient administrative staff.

Guiding principles

- Continue to employ a balanced, realistic financial management strategy that plans for moderate revenue growth and careful control over expenses, consistent with fulfilling the federation's mission and goals
- Consider the total risks faced by FENS in all facets of its operations. Increasing reserves can both protect against the convergence of multiple adverse financial events and provide an opportunity to draw on a portion of the income from those higher reserves in support of the federation's mission
- Investigate diverse sources of income to enable a growth of the revenues without being reliant mainly on the income from EJM

Actions

- 1) Have the Executive Committee adopt a strategic reserve plan containing annual budget planning targets. The financial reserve strategy will be a living, constantly updated and revised document.
- 2) Monitor cash flow and move funds on a regular basis to the investment portfolio, and optimize the cash usage by utilizing deposit accounts in EUR and GBP, the latter for the income from EJM.

3) Have the treasurer work with the Executive Committee and the financial manager to update reserve strategy based on current investment returns, revenue and spending projections and risk assessment.