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## To whom it may concern

This short report is to document my evaluation of the Center of Excellence on the Pathophysiology of Cell Differentiation at the Vita-Salute San Raffaele University.

This Center consists of eight groups working in fields of central importance in biomedicine. The groups of Bianchi, Casari, De Curtis, Marchisio-Biffi, Meldolesi, Pardi, Sitia and Valhotra are all at the cutting edge of their areas and are internationally visible. This is documented by their publications in high-ranking international journals and by their invitations to speak at international meetings around the world. Having been a member of the Telethon grant reviewing body and from my time as head of the Cell Biology Programme at EMBL I have followed the Italian research scene fairly closely. I know how difficult it is to do high level research in Italy due to the poor founding of Italian research in comparison to other European countries. Nevertheless, these eight groups are doing outstanding work not only in the Italian context but also on the international level. The latter is of course what really counts.

Why are they successful? I think one important reason is that these research groups are working together and are complementing each other in their research methodologies and in their scientific interests. Such synergy is essential for success today anywhere in the world. The complexity of the biomedicine means that no single lab can master all the necessary aspects of the biological process that they are studying.

This synergy is enhanced by the excellent PhD programmes that this Center is maintaining. The high quality of the research makes the Center attractive Europe-wide and this is a prerequisite in today's competitive environment. Also the ongoing seminar activities with renowned speakers from abroad promote the profile of the Center.



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All over Europe - not to speak of the rest of the world - there are special governmental funding schemes to promote excellence in research. Italy also started such scheme and it is obviously essential that funding will be continued not only for individual groups but also for Centers of Excellence. How could Italy stay competitive in this important area of contemporary science if the funding mechanisms are not on the level of other major European countries? Like elsewhere, the success of the Centers selected for the first round should be evaluated by competent panels and funding continued of those that deserve this recognition. Those that do not pass the evaluation should preferably be replaced by other Centers that qualify for financial support by competitive assessment.

In conclusion, my contention is that the Center of Excellence at Vita Salute San Raffaele University has done outstanding research on biomedical problems ranging from cancer and immunology to neurobiology. The Center deserves a fair chance to apply for continued funding that will be essential for the survival and continued success of this top rate constellation of scientists.

Yours sincerely,



Kai Simons