Monday, March 28, 2011

Professor Francois Bourguignon
Director, Paris School of Economics

Topic: Nomination to Associate Chairs

Dear François,

Thanks for your email of March 17 regarding the four candidates for a promotion to Associate Chairs at PSE. The Council has no objection to their promotion.

Regarding the process, however, the Council feels that additional progress can be made. There are two recommendations that we would like to emphasize. First, we believe that the current associate chairs should vote separately on each candidate. Such a vote would be quite useful, if only because it would reveal information about the number of associate chairs (if any) who oppose any particular nomination. Needless to say, the vote should be by secret ballot, and its outcome be reported to the Scientific Council as an important part of the file.

Secondly, the Council was pleased to see that our previous recommendations have been followed; in particular, for each candidate a report was provided. However, we found that these reports were of unequal quality. Some, in particular, were surprisingly short and uninformative. In our words, the goal of the report was to 'describe the research accomplishments of the candidates and their international recognition, the importance of their role within PSE, and the relevance of their nomination in the context of the general scientific strategy [of PSE]'. That's quite different from a single, vague paragraph stating that the person is great and should be promoted. We believe that the reports should be much more detailed, describing the main contributions of the candidates (including their major articles) in a precise and explicit way. We certainly understand that such a process has a cost in terms of faculty time. Still, given the importance of the decision, we feel that a precise and well informed discussion of the candidates’ merits is a profitable investment, and that such a discussion can hardly take place without a report of this kind. Moreover, the report can be seen as a signaling device. Should it be impossible to find two current associate chairs willing to pay the cost of writing a detailed report on a particular candidate, the natural conclusion would be that the corresponding application fails to generate, among current associate chairs, the minimum level of enthusiasm that should be required for a promotion to be warranted.
Again, we are pleased to see that our suggestions have been followed, and we are convinced that the adoption of a formal process constitutes a significant progress. It is our belief, however, that further improvements are feasible at a reasonable cost.

Best regards,

Pierre-André Chiappori
Chair, Scientific Council