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### THE ROLE OF EVALUATION IN A PERIOD OF CHANGE

Interview with Persis Drell, CVI outgoing president

The INFN is aware of the importance of unbiased evaluation in order to continue as a centre of excellence and maintain a competitive edge. For this reason, ever since 1997 its research activities have been subject to evaluation by an International Evaluation Committee (Comitato di Valutazione Internazionale – CVI) made up of seven experts from different countries in the fields of economics, industry and research. Each year the CVI produces a report on the INFN's research activities, along with its proposals for ways of improving overall performance. This report is sent to the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research together with the three-year plan. The last meeting of the CVI with the INFN's management was held on 20-22 October at the INFN Southern National Laboratory. It was also the last meeting to be chaired by Persis Drell, an accomplished scientist of international acclaim who has held several leading positions and whose four-year term as Chair of the CVI has come to an end. Persis Drell joined the Physics Department at Cornell University in 1998. In 2000 she became head of the Cornell high-energy group; in 2001 she was named Deputy Director of the Laboratory of Nuclear Studies. In 2002, she accepted a position as Professor and Director of Research at SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory, in the United States. In 2007 she was named Director at SLAC. She is a member of the American Physical Society, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and was elected in 2010 to the National Academy of Sciences. Her current research activities are in particle astrophysics.

At the end of the recent meeting of the CVI, we asked Persis Drell to speak about her experience and give us her views on the evaluation of scientific research.

**You have been Chair of the INFN's International Evaluation Committee for the last four years. What has this experience been like for you?**

I've thoroughly enjoyed it! First because I've learnt a lot. The INFN is heading towards some significant changes and its future is going to be very different from its past. We've seen

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similar transitions in the United States and in situations like this you always learn from one another, sharing and exchanging experiences can be a useful tool when crucial decisions have to be made. Apart from this, having the opportunity to appreciate good science and advanced technology at the laboratories we visit is always a pleasure, and this has been the case for me over these past four years during which I've become familiar with the INFN's research infrastructures and scientific projects. Lastly, on a personal note, this experience has also given me the opportunity to make a lot of valuable friendships.

**What are the main criteria applied by the Committee you chaired in evaluating the INFN's research activities? Based on your experience, have you any suggestions on how to enhance the impact of evaluations?**

On the one hand, one of our main objectives is to check for results worthy of note, that can set new standards of excellence in international science. On the other, we expect the organisation being evaluated to define a clear and realistic long-term strategy for the future: the directions of its scientific activities. How its laboratories are being developed and equipped to serve the national and international scientific community in the coming decades. How they will use their technology to benefit society, in order to justify investments of public resources, which are often substantial. Without overlooking another fundamental aspect: the need for a strong leadership team so that our evaluations can be used in the most effective way possible.

**What is the role of evaluation within the context of a European Research Area.**

The field of research is highly competitive in Europe. The difficulties facing Europe are also affecting research policies, because scientific research is a common and shared asset. The INFN as well needs to understand the criteria being used and then compete and win on the basis of these rules. This culture of science is very different from the one we were used to even just ten years ago. Now we must all learn how to adjust to the changes and these new circumstances. Today we are faced with this difficult but exciting challenge of achieving the delicate balance between international collaboration and competition, an issue for all those involved in high-level scientific research. I wish the INFN every success in this venture! ■