

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY'S REPORT OF ITS REVIEW OF S&T ACTIVITY ACROSS GOVERNMENT

The Government warmly welcomes this report. Its broad thrust is very much in line with the direction this Government is taking through our modernising Government agenda. As the sub-group recognised, this Government attaches great importance to S&T and the way in which it is used in departments. The findings and recommendations of the sub-group provide a most valuable input to our consideration of how we take this agenda forward.

We have already taken some steps in the direction advocated by the CST. For example, in recognition of the importance of S&T to so much of our activity, we have established the Ministerial Science Group to promote a co-ordinated and coherent approach to science and technology across Government. There is also a Minister in each Department with specific responsibility for the use of scientific advice in policy making.

We fully accept the CST's advice on the need for departments to adopt a strategic approach to S&T, taking full account of the long term nature of S&T expenditure and relating it clearly to their Public Service Agreements. Whilst many departments already make substantial efforts here and go a long way towards meeting this recommendation, there is more that can be done. We agree that there should be clear accountability within departments for the development and delivery of their S&T strategies and that these strategies should be brought together and reviewed by the Ministerial Science Group.

Promoting joined-up Government is a high priority, and we support the CST's call for better communication between departments on all matters relating to S&T. Departments and Research Councils also attach importance to this and there are many examples of good practice in, for example, the concordats between the Research Councils and Departments. Departments will consider what more can be done to improve their links with, and knowledge of S&T activity elsewhere in the UK and overseas.

We also recognise the need for the highest quality scientific advice in policy making and service delivery. We shall consider how best to take forward the CST's recommendations in relation to the supply of high quality in house expertise.

We welcome the views of the Council on the importance of European collaboration in science and note their concerns as to whether the Framework Programmes are cost effective in promoting such collaboration. The UK has been a consistently strong player in the Framework Programmes and our science and industrial community clearly makes effective use of the opportunities on offer. In some areas European collaboration is the key to success and the Framework Programmes have made an important contribution.

Nonetheless, the Government shares some of the concerns of the Council about the Framework Programmes. While both the orientation towards objectives and the management of the Frameworks has steadily improved, the system remains complex to manage and can be inflexible in the application of its mechanisms to different types of research problem. The Government therefore accepts the recommendation for a searching review, and is pursuing this in developing its view on the 6th Framework Programme. The Government has already initiated work intended to feed into this, which will examine the effectiveness with which the Programmes address real needs and the scope for further improvements in their value to the users of the research output.

Over the next few months the Government will consider the recommendations in the report in more detail. An implementation plan, setting out how the recommendations will be taken forward, will be published in the Autumn.

The Government would like to thank the members of the sub-group for the time and effort they have devoted to this report. Their constructive approach was greatly appreciated by the Departments involved in this review.

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