



House of Commons
Science and Technology
Committee

**Government Response
to the Committee's
Sixth Report: UK
Science and Europe:
Value for Money?**

**Eighth Special Report of Session
2002–03**

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The Science and Technology Committee

The Science and Technology Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Office of Science and Technology and its associated bodies.

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Eighth Special Report

On 24 July 2003 the Science and Technology Committee published its Sixth Report of Session 2002–03, UK Science and Europe: Value for Money? On 8 October we received a memorandum from the Government which contained a response to the Report. The Memorandum is published without comment as an appendix to this Report.

Appendix

INTRODUCTION

The Science and Technology Committee published a report on its findings on 24 July 2003. This note sets out the Government response to the Committee's conclusions and recommendations.

The Government welcomes the report, which contains many useful observations about European research issues and the Framework Programmes.

The Government agrees with many of the recommendations and particularly welcomes the Committee's acknowledgement of the strong performance of the UK science base in Framework Programmes and good returns to the UK.

The Government welcomes the support the Committee has given to its proposals to reorganise and expand the National Contact Point network for Framework Programme promotion, and to its creation of a Central Information Point to coordinate promotion.

We endorse many of the Committee's observations on European Commission bureaucracy and contract complexity. We will continue to press the Commission to simplify its processes and increase transparency.

The Government is commissioning a review of existing evidence and an external evaluation of the Framework Programmes in order to produce current information on both the EU and the UK gain from participation, and options for improving the net gain to UK interests. Results are expected in mid-2004 and will inform the UK position on the Seventh Programme.

This response has been produced by the Office of Science and Technology, Department of Trade and Industry, with input from other Government Departments and the Research Councils.

The new instruments in FP6

1. Whilst the Commission is responsible for disseminating information about the Framework Programmes, it now falls to the UK Government to ensure that the research community is fully aware of the opportunities available and the new structure of FP6. This could be done through the National Contact Point network, which is discussed later in this Report. The Government and Research Councils should monitor

the UK take up of FP6 carefully to carry forward suggestions for improvement in FP7. (Paragraph 26)

The Government agrees with the recommendation and aims to increase awareness and involvement in the Framework Programmes through the expanded National Contact Point network. We are monitoring the UK take up of Framework 6 through the Programme Management Committees and will be building further on this. This analysis will be used to inform our negotiating position for FP7 and promotional efforts for FP6.

2. The Marie Curie Fellowship Scheme under FP5 seems to have been well regarded by the research community and it is unclear to us why change was necessary. The Government should monitor their take up under FP6 and consult industry for its views of the success of the new fellowships. If necessary, the Government should negotiate with the Commission for improvement or reinstatement of the previous scheme. (Paragraph 31)

The Government accepts this recommendation and agrees to consult with industry and monitor take-up of the new fellowship schemes under Framework 6 in the areas of particular concern to industry. The UK in fact argued for wider eligibility criteria for these schemes during the negotiation of the work programme in the Human Resources and Mobility element of FP6. If necessary, the Government will seek agreement on improvements to the schemes to meet industry's concerns in Framework 6 and will take account of these concerns when negotiating future mobility schemes under FP7.

Measuring the success of European research

3. We welcome the development of a European Patent as a step towards encouraging the registering of patents in the EU, and recommend that the Government monitor the situation carefully to ensure that the resulting patent is favourable to UK interests and not unduly delayed by the enlargement of the EU. (Paragraph 37)

The European Patent Office plays a vital role in European innovation by providing a single application and grant procedure for patent protection in Europe. Alongside the existing national and European patent systems, the Community patent will provide a further option for those seeking protection for their inventions in the EU. The Government will continue to work with European partners, including the acceding and candidate countries, to ensure that the system is attractive to business. We agree that changes to the patent system will need to be taken into account in any use of patent figures as an indicator.

4. The Government must make it clear to the UK research community how it, and the Commission, will be assessing the performance of FP6. (Paragraph 43)

The Commission already provides regular assessments of the success of Framework Programmes through its annual, publicly available, reports on the research and development activities of the EU and five-year reviews. The UK is currently pressing the Commission for improvements in EC performance indicators and the statistical data it provides. With regard to the UK Government's own assessment of the Framework Programme, we are commissioning an external evaluation of the Programmes to assess more fully the UK gain from participation. A number of National Contact Points carry out

their own analysis, measuring the success of UK organisations in terms of EU funding received, UK led or coordinated projects, and UK participation. We intend to make better use of all this data to inform the future direction of programmes. The Government will consider how to improve performance metrics in developing its approach to Framework 7.

Overheads

5. From the evidence we received, we consider that there is an issue of the cost of overheads in the UK which needs to be addressed by the UK Government, particularly if SMEs and universities are reluctant to participate as a result. (Paragraph 72)

The Government notes the Committee's conclusion. We note that there is a healthy level of Framework Programme applications from universities—in 2001 the UK had the highest level of participation by higher education institutes in Europe, but the Government will keep under review the need to introduce matched funding across the board, and will continue to monitor the level of applications.

As the Committee is aware, the Government is consulting about the sustainability of university research. It wants universities to cover the full economic costs of research from the range of income sources available to them taking one year with another, so that they are sustainable in the long term. The Government's approach would not, however, require universities to charge full costs to all funders. Projects in the public scientific good could be charged at less than full cost with the balance found from other sources such as Funding Council block grants. These are available to universities to do with as they wish, including making up the costs of European research projects if this is a priority. We would, however, welcome a gradual move, as universities develop more transparent accounting systems, towards Cost Models for Framework Programmes which would allow them to identify their actual overhead costs. Universities could therefore be reimbursed for overhead costs as part of the funding they receive—either from the Commission or from any additional sources of matched funding which they obtain to support their participation in Framework Programme projects.

EUROPES and DEL

6. Whilst RCUK are now satisfied with the settlement over DEL, we remain concerned that there is a potential for HM Treasury to claw back money from Government Departments and research institutes in respect of money received from the EU. (Paragraph 75)

The Government is responsible for ensuring that expenditure of taxpayers' money, including its net contribution to the EU Budget and funds from the EU Budget that are spent in the UK via the EU Budget, is controlled sensibly and spent in a way which is consistent with national priorities. Spending managed by Government Departments on programmes funded from the EU Budget is therefore covered by UK public spending rules. Government Departments are rightly obliged to consider this expenditure as part of the Spending Review process and bid for budgetary cover accordingly.

Changes in structure to Framework Programmes raised complexities for Public Sector Research Establishments, including Research Councils, wishing to lead consortia, given the

standard public spending rules for EU income. Essentially, more funding will be flowing through these bodies than predicted, leading to budgeting difficulties. The Office of Science and Technology raised this issue with the Treasury and agreed a solution, as acknowledged by the Select Committee. In recognition of the significant benefits of UK participation in the Framework Programme, the Treasury has agreed exceptional treatment for UK receipts from this and similar programmes. Only 50% of the EC Framework Programme income spent by Government Departments and Research Councils will count against their spending limits (where previously 100% of the spending counted). This is a real improvement for Research Councils and Government Departments participating in the Sixth Framework Programme. The Research Councils have agreed to the new arrangements. OST will continue to monitor this arrangement in the light of experiences with FP6 to assess how far it is having the desired impact.

The Selection Process

7. We are reassured by the evidence that the UK Government was able to argue its corner on the issue of stem cells, but we are concerned that the Commission has also shown itself capable of disregarding projects such as the Ocean Drilling Programme supported under FP5. (Paragraph 88)

The UK argued for Framework Programme funding of the Integrated Ocean Drilling Programme at both official and Ministerial level and was disappointed that this area was not included in the Commission's initial work programme for Framework Programme 6. We understand it is now likely that the coordination of the European aspects of this International Programme will be funded by Framework 6 as part of the ERA-NET scheme from 2004.

It is clearly not possible for the Commission to fund all projects which are proposed for the Framework Programme given that the number of proposals is significantly in excess of the budget available. All decisions on selection of projects have to be made following a fierce competition for funds, with projects being assessed through independent evaluation carried out by experts in the field.

8. The Research Councils should continue to consult their communities and provide the results to the OST in preparation for FP7. It is important the science community is consulted not only on the priorities that ought to be included in FP7, but on the optimal balance of funding between applied and basic research. (Paragraph 92)

The Government agrees with the recommendation and has just begun an initial consultation with all stakeholders to develop the UK position on FP7. A formal public consultation will begin early in 2004. The Research Councils, science and technology community and industry will be fully consulted on the priorities for Framework 7, including the balance between pure and applied research. We understand that the Research Councils are planning the collection of views on FP7 from the research community and we look forward to discussing these with them.

9. Whilst those who are privy to the selection process accept that the Commission consults widely in formulating its priorities, it would benefit the Commission greatly if it made the selection process better understood. The Expressions of Interest exercise

was a step in the right direction in allowing all sections of industry and academia some input into the process, and we would recommend that this is retained and expanded upon for FP7. (Paragraph 99)

The Expression of Interest exercise helped to define priorities for Framework 6, with contributions from a large number of researchers. UK delegations to FP6 Programme Management Committees are monitoring the extent to which the Commission continues to use the results in prioritisation. Early findings suggest that this has indeed been an effective way of offering the research communities an opportunity to make a direct input to FP work programmes. We believe that the approach should be retained in the development of FP7, but the Commission also needs to review the supporting administrative systems to ensure that applicants can access information in a user-friendly format.

10. Whilst the Government appears to be closely involved in negotiating with the Commission, there is a need for the UK Government and Research Councils to disseminate their work with the Commission to the wider research community to avoid suspicion and misunderstanding. The Government should make its role in the negotiations clearer to the UK research community. (Paragraph 100)

We realise that the process of Framework negotiations is complex and that it is not practical to explain progress with negotiations in detail. We do, however, recognise the importance of consulting widely and explaining the principles that the UK is following in developing its priorities. We will be opening formal consultation on Framework 7 next year. This will include an explanation of the timescale and main features of the negotiation process, as currently anticipated.

We understand that as well as seeking input and early advice from the scientific and technological community on what Framework Programmes should cover, the Research Councils also share progress with the community on how effective the UK line has been in negotiations. This is easier to do in some programmes than in others, although overall the UK was pleased that the outcome of negotiations on Framework 6 was close to our original objectives. We plan to use the outcome of the public consultation and close contact with key UK partners such as the Research Councils and relevant Government Departments to identify UK priorities that need to be pursued in negotiations.

Opportunities for basic research

11. We consider that the budget for New and Emerging Science and Technology, which at €215 million amounts to no more than 1.2% of the total FP6 budget, is unlikely to rectify the lack of substantial Framework Programme funding for basic science. This is short sighted when considering the ambitious targets set for R&D in Europe. (Paragraph 104)

The Government notes that NEST was introduced as a new programme in FP6 and it is therefore too early to judge its impact. Early indications are that it is very popular and this popularity mirrors that of the RCUK basic technology programme led by EPSRC on behalf of all Research Councils. It should be noted that the European Parliament reduced the original budget proposed for NEST, and this was unfortunate. As NCP for NEST, EPSRC will be communicating widely to ensure high quality relevant participation.

The issue of basic research goes beyond further funding for NEST, and we comment on this issue later in this response. In addition to NEST, some thematic programmes have set aside funding specifically for new technologies. Information Society Technologies (Thematic Priority 2) has set aside about 10% of its budget (about €360m) for “Future and Emerging Technologies”, which is mainly basic research in promising areas of IT likely to bear fruit in 10–20 years time. The UK together with other Member States pressed strongly for this during FP6 negotiations. It must be emphasised that it is difficult to distinguish between basic and other research and development activity in specific lines and projects in Framework Programmes.

Selection of projects

12. We believe that the Commission needs to emphasise the basis on which selection of projects is made, and give greater feedback to applicants on the reasons for failure. (Paragraph 119)

The Government endorses this recommendation. We continually press the Commission to provide greater clarity in its justification for the selection and non-selection of projects and to give better (and more helpful) feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

The response to failed projects is much faster than in Framework 5 and we sympathise with the Commission given its limited administrative resource and the total number of proposals submitted. The confidentiality clauses currently operated by the Commission mean that National Contact Points are unable to help in providing feedback to applicants.

The application process

13. We are encouraged that both the Government and Research Councils are aware of the problems encountered by UK applicants in submitting proposals. However, we are sceptical of the Commission’s commitment to reducing bureaucracy. We urge the Government and RCUK to continue to bring pressure to bear on the Commission to improve the application process, in particular to reduce the time taken in producing and issuing contracts. (Paragraph 127)

We agree that the Commission should be judged by its actions. We are closely monitoring the Commission’s performance and have pressed for a number of specific changes in the light of early experience with FP6. The Commission has accepted the need to reduce the bureaucracy of the Framework Programme and some progress has been made towards reducing both the complexity of the application process and the bureaucracy of the Programme. The new instruments in Framework 6 were planned to allow greater freedom for project managers to direct the evolution of their work and we need to monitor how far these aims are being achieved. UK delegations to FP6 Programme Management Committees continue to monitor Commission administration and management procedures. We will gather evidence on the impact of FP6 to inform our line on FP7.

Transparency of the process

14. The Government should press for the publication of Commission performance targets so that any improvements, or deterioration, in contract turnover time are easier to assess. (Paragraph 129)

We are currently pressing the Commission to improve the quality of the statistical information it provides on Framework 6 and one of the key areas where the UK will be monitoring the Commission's performance is on the turn around times for completing the evaluation and contract negotiation. The Commission expects to improve its performance in this area.

Support for applicants

15. The facility exists for feedback by applicants to the Commission on the application process in general, and we suggest that applicants convey the shortfalls of the system to the Directorate for Research in Brussels. Research Councils UK should support the research community by pressing the Commission to place more useful information on the website, without overloading those seeking help. They should work to alter the perception that you need to be an old Brussels hand to have any chance of success and to make the process more accessible to all. (Paragraph 133)

We have consulted the Research Councils with regard to this question. They have noted that the UK Research Office (UKRO) continues to provide a useful service by providing feedback to the Commission on the specific concerns of its subscriber base. The annual UKRO conference offers the opportunity for the UK community to debate these issues with Commission Services directly. The Commission websites together with UK information and tutorials are considerable improvements on the provision for Framework 5. The main formal means for making representations on these issues is through the relevant FP6 Programme Management Committees.

Information provided by the UK Government and Research Councils

16. We consider that this highly praised and well-run resource [UKRO] should be maintained by the Research Councils and developed where possible to include industry. The two extra staff is a good start, but it is likely that providing a tailored service to SMEs would require the Research Councils to consider whether UKRO needs to be expanded further, and to find the funding to do this. (Paragraph 137)

The Government is pleased with the endorsement given to UKRO by the Committee. UKRO funding is based on subscription, which gives possibilities for further expansion as any additional subscribers bring extra resource to the Office. The full cost of providing this service must be met by subscribers, including SMEs. The UKRO Steering Committee (all sponsors and representatives of subscribers) closely monitors UKRO resource against the level of subscription. The Steering Committee and Management Committee are timetabling a major review of office activity and resources incorporating these issues in preparation for the 2005 review by Research Council sponsors of their UKRO Agreement. The implications of providing UKRO services to an expanded subscriber base will be fully incorporated in this review.

More generally on the issue of support for SMEs, it should be noted that all National Contact Points provide advice and support to SMEs engaged in projects within their particular thematic area. In addition, we are setting up a new rationalised National Contact Point service covering those thematic areas where there is potential for significant or increased industry participation, and this will provide specific advice for SMEs and promote SME specific actions.

17. We welcome the Government's commitment to improving the National Contact Point Network, and whilst we also welcome the creation of the Central Information Point, we expect the Government to ensure that the service and information provided by National Contact Points is substantially improved by Autumn 2003. (Paragraph 143)

The Government welcomes the Committee's endorsement of its plans to reorganise and expand the National Contact Point network with a new Central Information Point. The contract for the Central Information Point has now been awarded following an open tender. The Government has increased funding for NCPs to £2.3 million in the current fiscal year, compared with just under £1 million in the previous year. We will continue to monitor the NCP network to ensure it is responding to client needs.

Individual contact points have built up strong networks within the UK, including the devolved administrations, the RDA network and consultancy firms, and the feedback we have indicates they have been successful in providing support. We intend to strengthen the links with other networks, notably the wider business support infrastructure. The CIP will ensure that best practice is shared and promote a more consistent level of service. We believe that these measures will go a long way to addressing the previous fragmentation of the National Contact Point network.

18. We recommend that the Research Councils, together with the Government, should have a clear strategy on how to identify the key areas in which the UK could excel and then be more aggressive in ensuring that these areas were properly represented by UK applicants. (Paragraph 149)

The Government intends to strengthen its strategic approach to the Framework Programmes. We agree with the Committee recommendation and intend to be more proactive in identifying UK strengths and opportunities, focusing our resources appropriately by coordinating UK participation and input into individual Programme Management Committees. The Central Information Point will also contribute by identifying those sectors of the UK research and business community that are under-represented in Framework Programme and should be targeted for greater promotion. The Research Councils are already harmonising their approach to Framework 6, working with relevant information providers to ensure that key organisations are making the most of the available opportunities. One example of this is the FP Life Sciences Coordination group involving Research Councils and UKRO with DTI, DEFRA, DH, FSA, and others.

19. The UK's support for Framework Programme applications is too fragmented. While central government, Research Councils and RDAs all have a role, this effort should be streamlined and offer a single advice point regardless of the sector or the location of the applicant. (Paragraph 150)

The Government accepts the need to streamline support for applications and for a central contact point. We hope the new Central Information Point will fulfil the role suggested by providing a single access point to the National Contact Point network. The Central Information Point will provide information on general issues or pass enquiries on to the National Contact Point that can provide more specialist advice. We have further rationalised the support arrangements for those thematic areas where there is potential for significant industry participation into a single National Contact Point. This will provide support for the thematic priorities covering information society technology and nanotechnology, SME specific actions and innovation, as well as providing promotional activities for industrial bioscience research.

EURATOM

20. We urge the Government to consider how it will develop the national nuclear skills base and negotiate accordingly in future framework programmes. (Paragraph 161)

The DTI/OST response to the Science and Technology Committee report, Towards a non-carbon fuel economy, research, development and demonstration, Fifth Report HC (2002–03) 674, refers to the national nuclear skills issues and outlines how the Government is addressing them. The EURATOM programme provides opportunities for research that will potentially help support the domestic skills base. The programme complements current industry and Government programmes and the future EPSRC-funded fission R&D programme. The Government will continue to keep this potential contribution in sight during the negotiation of future Framework Programmes. Industry leaders, the regulator and academia are likewise fully seized of the possible benefits EURATOM research might offer in their work to sustain the UK skills base.

Suggestions for improvement of the JRC

21. When responding to the Report of the Five-Year Assessment, due in early 2004, the Government and Research Councils should press the Commission for a more accountable system of advice and a decision on the future of the JRC which does not involve further reviews and the time delay that would cause. (Paragraph 176)

The Government has to date been supportive of the steps taken to improve the management of the JRC following the reform of its mission after the last Five-Year Assessment. These measures included the introduction of strengthened arrangements for its customers in policy DGs to determine programme priorities, with accountability by the JRC to its customers for the delivery of policy-driven services. We would like to see a move to greater competition for funds, and have already pressed for this.

The future of the JRC was the subject of a report in 2000 by a group led by Viscount Davignon on which the UK was represented. The report recommended that the budget and work plan of the JRC should be related to specified needs and requests from its customers as a necessary step to the introduction of market testing by the customers to a rolling programme. This will continue to be a priority in UK policy and is supported by other Member States and by the JRC Board of Governors.

The proportion of Framework Programme money allocated directly to the JRC has declined in Framework 6 over Framework 5 (from 8.4% to 6%). The JRC is however allowed to compete for additional resources both within Framework and in seeking contracts to provide services outside the Framework Programmes to other European Commission Directorates and to third parties. The latter permits the JRC to benchmark the quality of its services against outside competitors. We welcome this, though we need to ensure that the tendering process is transparent.

Why do we need a European Research Council?

22. We consider that whilst an ERC could be a possible solution for the current need for greater funding for basic research in Europe, FP6 should, instead of creating a separate ERC, develop into an FP7 with the goal of a 50:50 ratio of applied and basic research funding. (Paragraph 198)

The Government will be consulting stakeholders and examining evidence on the balance between basic and applied science as part of the review for Framework 7. It is too early to say in this response to the Committee what view we will take after this reappraisal, but we would like to see greater clarity in what the Commission is seeking to achieve in different programme areas. Any Government position taken on this should be founded on a wide basis of evidence and formulated in the context of Treaty provisions and the need to identify those areas where European funding will give greatest added value. The debate must also take into account the various types of research constituting ‘applied science’, ranging from policy-oriented research to technology development, and include views from the academic, research and industrial/SME communities. We do not think the balance is necessarily wrong but would like to see greater clarity in what balance the Commission is seeking to achieve in different programme areas.

23. Whilst we are reassured that the Government intends to participate in the debate over the possibility of the European Research Council, we recommend that the Research Councils engage the research community in the debate. (Paragraph 199)

The Research Councils note that they have engaged their community in the ERC debate, through discussions at workshops, seminars and international fora, as their community is fully aware of the funding implications if an ERC is created.

24. We are concerned that the Government is taking the back-seat approach to the European Research Council. We recommend that it establishes a blue-print for an ERC that will work well with the UK’s national funding structures and its research base. (Paragraph 200)

The UK is fully engaged in the ERC debate through, for example, Dr John Taylor’s ad hominem membership of the European Research Council Expert Group (ERCEG). Several Research Council Chief Executives actively participated in the Copenhagen Conference in October 2002 (Prof Sir George Radda was a speaker). Prof Sir George Radda was also a speaker at an ERC session at the FP6 launch conference in Heysel in November 2002. Discussions continue involving the Chief Executives of the Research Councils at

EUROHORCs and bilaterally with other organisations. The ERCEG is expected to circulate the first draft of its recommendations this autumn, at which time OST will conduct further consultation with the Research Councils, relevant Government Departments and the Royal Societies, in order to form a coordinated UK response.

The Government shares many of the Committee's concerns. The UK response will evaluate the necessity of an ERC as well as exploring the options for its possible remit, structure and funding.

The Research Councils look forward to continuing their close involvement in ERC discussions, and will be in a position to share experience of early participation in ERA-Net and other activities between national funders of research across the EU. The RCUK Strategy Group will next discuss this in September 2003.

25. The Government must consider where extra funding for a European Research Council will come from. (Paragraph 201)

The Government feels that any extra funding for a European Research Council must not be at the expense of existing national budgets. Discussions between OST and HMT will form an important part of the UK response to the ERC debate in the autumn, so that the financial implications are fully understood.

**OST International
Department of Trade and Industry
October 2003**

Additional pages

Reports from the Science and Technology Committee 2002–03

The following Reports have been produced by the Committee since the start of the present Session. The reference number of the Government's response to the Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

First Report	The Work of the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council	HC 161 (HC 507)
Second Report	Annual Report 2002	HC 260
Third Report	The Work of the Medical Research Council	HC 132 (CM 5834)
Fourth Report	Towards a Non-Carbon Fuel Economy: Research, Development and Demonstration	HC 55-I (HC 745)
Fifth Report	The Work of the Natural Environment Research Council	HC 674
Sixth Report	UK Science and Europe: Value for Money?	HC 386-I
Seventh Report	Light Pollution and Astronomy	HC 747-I
First Special Report	Government Response to the Science and Technology Committee's Fifth Report, Session 2001–02, Government Funding of the Scientific Learned Societies	HC 53
Second Special Report	Government Response to the Science and Technology Committee's Sixth Report, Session 2001–02, the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts: A Follow-up	HC 276
Third Special Report	Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report, Session 2001–02, The Office of Science and Technology: Scrutiny Report	HC 293
Fourth Special Report	Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report, Session 2001–02, Short-term Contracts in Science and Engineering	HC 442
Fifth Special Report	Government Response to the Committee's First Report, The Work of the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council	HC 507
Sixth Special Report	Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report, Towards a Non-Carbon Fuel Economy: Research, Development and Demonstration	HC 745
Seventh Special Report	Government's response to the Committee's Fifth Report, The Work of the Natural Environment Research Council	HC 1161