

next few months are likely to see: A world renowned scientist appointed as Chief Scientific Advisor to each government department; an external peer review process instigated; and departmental science strategies strengthened and given more clout.

In terms of future research directions, the three cross-cutting themes identified as priorities in the 2000 spending review – Genomics, E-Science and Basic Technology – will continue to attract enhanced funding and attention. However, new areas likely to emerge from SR2002 as priorities include: An initiative to create a national network of stem-cell research; mental health/cognitive and neurosciences; the formation of a national Energy R&D Centre to look at low-carbon technologies; a cross-council initiative on the rural economy and land use; an initiative to support UK research on global warming by balancing the global carbon budget; water resources; and environment and health.

**Foresight:** To help guide longer-term S&T policy and research directions the Government is able to call upon its Foresight exercise. Foresight has recently undergone a significant review and in the future it will be more focussed and concentrate on areas where it can add most value. While the benefits of creating new networks will continue to feature strongly, the programme will move away from its current structure of panels covering broad sectors over a 5-year period. Instead, it will be reorganised into a series of rolling projects in particular areas of science and technology. It will tackle only 3-4 topics at a time, be flexible to accommodate emerging issues, and undertake an in-depth review of existing knowledge and a detailed analysis of what can and should be done. As well as identifying the potential business opportunities, it will scan the horizon for potential risks that could be avoided by advanced thinking. A forward programme of projects is currently being developed, but two likely options are: Cognitive systems and neural sciences; and Flooding and Coastal defences. The new plans will be applied in the next few weeks and will run until the end of the current round in March 2004 and beyond.

**Trends:** An increasing trend in the funding of UK research is the concentration of resources into large collaborative programmes and Centres of Excellence, rather than increasing the funding for individual grants. Such collaboration is being seen between Research Councils on interdisciplinary projects such as the multi-million pound cross-Council research programmes in genomics, e-science and basic technology announced in the 2000 spending review. The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research is another prime example of interdisciplinary Research Council co-operation. Individual Councils are also starting to restructure some of their specific programmes by concentrating funding down from hundreds of separate grant holders to several larger collaborative centres of excellence, each with a critical mass of researchers, equipment and support. The EPSRC, for example, has recently allocated £60 million to 12 research centres under its new Innovative Manufacturing Research Centres initiative. Finally, "Research Funders Fora" – which bring together principal funders in specific areas of research (Research Councils, Government departments, Medical Charities etc.) to stimulate multidisciplinary working and develop joint research activities – are becoming more frequent, especially in the life sciences, and Fora now exist for Cancer, Ageing, Stem Cells, and Cardiovascular diseases.

Enhanced collaboration also featured strongly in the recent Quinquennial Review of the six grant-awarding research councils – the key recommendation of which was the creation of a Research Councils UK Strategy Group to enhance the collective leadership and influence of the research councils and to encourage cross-council collaboration. This group, which will be chaired by the Director General of Research Councils and will bring together the chief executives from the research councils, has also been given a remit to develop cross-council international science policy and the exploitation of opportunities for international partnerships. Other recommendations of the review include creating a forum for all major science funders in