

commercial work, half offer incubation or start-up facilities and 70% have access to "seed corn" investment. Today, Britain is home to strong science-based industries in aerospace, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, software, multimedia, internet and satellite communications, as well as being a leading centre in optoelectronics, computer games and mobile telephone software and services.

In addition to maintaining an excellent science base and improving the exploitation of scientific knowledge for competitive advantage, the UK needs society to be receptive of new technologies and to be confident that science is serving its best interests. With the BSE and GMO crises, the unknown risk of radiation from electricity pylons and mobile phones, and issues such as nuclear waste, and the combined MMR vaccine, science has had a tough time in Britain over the past few years. Few would deny that the British public is losing faith in the way science is handled, with the life-sciences in particular coming in for criticism. Increased emphasis is therefore being placed on trying to halt and reverse the growing tide of anti-science in public opinion: Transparency and openness is now a prerequisite for all Government advisory committee behaviour and numerous initiatives are being implemented to try and engage the public in national debate on topical issues.

Since entering office in 1997, the Labour Government has been committed to enhancing the strength of the science and engineering base – often referring to it as the "*absolute bedrock of Britain's economic performance and quality of life*". The government's first Spending Review in 1998 increased the Science Budget by more than 15% over the three year period (99-01) and its second Review, in July 2000, saw an additional £725 million added to the Science Budget for the years 01/02-03/04 (an average real-terms increase of 7% per year). Lord Sainsbury, Minister for Science, is also said to have submitted an 'ambitious' bid for extra science funds into the next Spending Review, and despite economic circumstances being more difficult than in previous years, it is expected that science will again be a winner. The 2002 Spending Review will extend existing spending plans to 2005/06 and its outcome will be announced in the summer.

The Government's policy and priorities for science, engineering and technology (SET) were identified in the July 2000 Science and Innovation White Paper: "*Excellence and Opportunity*", which set a framework for the Government's role as a key investor in the science base; a facilitator for collaboration between universities and business; and a regulator for innovation, including the promotion of public confidence in science. Building on this, the February 2001 enterprise, skills and innovation White Paper: "*Opportunities for all in a world of change*" emphasised the importance of science and innovation to regional (and national) economic growth, with the need to raise skills being a key issue. The *Foresight* exercise, now approaching the end of its second 4-year cycle, continues to provide direction for much of the UK's S&T agenda, whilst the *Forward Look 2001* gives an overview of the government's progress in implementing the above policies. This latter publication provides a comprehensive statement about the science strategies, research priorities and spending plans for each of the science-based departments and agencies for the period set out in Spending Review 2000 - i.e. 2001/02 - 03/04.

In terms of scientific priorities, there seems to be an emerging UK trend to concentrate resources in big, collaborative programmes, rather than increasing funding for individual grants. The 2000 budgetary announcements illustrate this point with over £250 million going to the interdisciplinary themes of *Genomics*, *E-Science* and *Basic Technologies*. Priorities for the future look to include climate change, sustainable energy, stem cell research, and advanced materials. Other issues which continue to attract government attention include university infrastructure,