

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM - UNITED KINGDOM

The Government's S&T policy is, at least for the moment, based on its flagship 1993 White Paper '*Realising Our Potential - A Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology*' which has a broad aim to maintain the excellence of UK SET and to harness it more effectively to wealth creation and enhancing the quality of life. The Foresight process continues to provide the central core and direction for much of the UK's S&T agenda, while the DTI's Competitiveness White Paper ties many SET issues into the Government's strategy for national competitiveness and the building of a *Knowledge Driven Economy*.

2. Recent S&T Developments

Following the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) in July 1998, last year saw a series of major S&T policy announcements in the UK including: the publication of a Competitiveness White Paper and a Forward Look 1999 document (which highlights how the Government spends its SET budget, and identifies priority areas and expected outcomes); the launch of a second round of the Foresight exercise; the establishment of a Ministerial group to steer science policy across government and to implement the use of scientific advice in policy making; and a number of initiatives to improve public confidence in, and understanding of, science and the regulatory procedures in place.

Enhancing the strength of the science base

The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) saw a commitment from Government to invest over £20 billion in UK SET over the three year period from 99/00 to 01/02 - a real terms increase of £1.8 billion over its 98/99, pre-CSR, allocation - thus providing evidence that enhancing the strength of the science base is a major priority. Of this, an additional £1 billion has been allocated to the science budget - this 15% increase representing the highest proportional increase of any budget across Government. When further augmented by the £400 million provided by the Wellcome Trust, the overall net increase in public spending on the science base is nearly £500 million annually. This increase should go some way to reverse the gradual decline in Government R&D expenditure seen since its peak in 1980-81. Moreover, since the science budget is fixed for three years it should add a degree of stability and enable long term plans to be made.

Included within the £1.4 billion increase to the science budget is an unprecedented £750 million partnership with the Wellcome Trust to establish a Joint Infrastructure Fund (JIF) to modernise and re-equip research infrastructure within universities, and the Wellcome Trust have also provided £110 million towards the costs of a new synchrotron facility (the Diamond project). The remaining funds are being used to support specific, priority, research within the Research Councils and to boost the numbers and stipends of highly qualified scientists and engineers. Positive results are already stemming from this investment, with new research programmes being implemented and new centres being developed. Biomolecular and biomedical research did particularly well in the CSR, with a real emphasis placed on 'Post-Genomic' research. Understanding the impacts of Climate Change is another major priority (a national Climate Change Centre has recently been established), together with research into new and renewable energy resources, more efficient energy use, and cleaner emissions. IT and Communications, Ageing research, Social Sciences, and Engineering (particularly chemical and biochemical engineering - an area of weakness in the UK) also feature as high research priorities. Finally, funding is also being directed towards interdisciplinary work, especially at the interface between