

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM - FRANCE

A **Conseil national de la science (CNS)** [National Science Council] was created in October 1998 and mandated to advise the government on research and technology policy. The Council is composed of approximately twenty French and foreign scientists (1/3) and representatives from the economic sector. The Council's biannual meetings are chaired by the Minister of Research.

The mission of the **Conseil national pour le développement des sciences de l'homme et de la société** [National Social Sciences Council] is very similar to that of the CNS, i.e., advise the government on what areas of research should be made priorities. Government interest in social sciences has declined in recent years, and the government now wants to establish key themes, such as urban life, education and the workplace.

The government is currently launching **Technology Networks** focussing on specific technologies that bring together public and private research laboratories, including SMEs. The first network, the **Réseau national de recherche en télécommunications** [National Telecommunications Research Network] was established in 1998, and the second, the land transportation network (**PREDIT**) shortly after. The projects, which must be at least 50% cofinanced, are selected by members of the network and representatives of the ministries concerned. To help SMEs, quotas will be set on the total value of grants and required level of cofinancing. In addition to these two networks, four technology research and innovation networks were launched in late 1999: the **Réseau micro et nanotechnologies (RMNT)** [the Micro- and Nanotechnology Research Network], the **Réseau Génoplande** [Genoplant Network] (organic food engineering) and more recently, the **Réseau Génie Civil et Urbain** [Civil and Urban Engineering Network] and the **Réseau Piles à Combustible** [Fuel Cell Network]. To demonstrate the new priority given to life sciences, the **Réseau de recherche et d'innovation sur le génome humain** [Human Genome Research and Innovation Network] called "Genhomme" was recently created in December 1999 to co-ordinate research in public laboratories, non-profit associations and industry to accelerate human genome research. With an annual budget of FF350 M, Genhomme will be composed of a network of companies devoted to genomics based on the highly successful Evry model. Similar networks, Genoplantes and GenAnimal, have also been created, and new networks are being explored for sectors such as health, water and environmental technologies, materials and use procedures, software technologies, and earth observation.

The government intends to continue reducing direct public aid to companies by encouraging them to cofinance joint activities, as has been the case in Canada for several years. Finally, we should mention an original incentive measure, a new **Concours de création d'entreprises innovantes** [Innovative Business Creation Competition], the first of which was held in 1999 and attracted over 2000 proposals.

Future actions

France must meet the challenge of the globalization of the market for knowledge workers and ensure that its researchers have career opportunities in France. Unemployment is a major concern for the socialist government, which is counting on innovative SMEs to create jobs. Since the early 1990s, emigration among France's brightest young people has been on the increase, caused by a hiring freeze and a lack of the autonomy needed to create new teams. To solve this problem and renew the researcher population, the French government adopted a scientific employment policy aimed at recruiting 3000 senior instructors each year and increasing total staff in research agencies by 3%.