keen for the UK to develop and strengthen links with major scientific partners across the world, on a bilateral and multilateral basis, if they offer promise of a scientific, commercial or political return to the UK. The Government believes that international collaborations are best generated from the bottom-up, with researchers identifying those partnerships which are likely to yield the greatest mutual benefit. It does not direct these links, but instead helps to set the framework within which such links can flourish e.g. by signing S&T agreements with other Governments and by buying in to international facilities.

Bilateral Relationship

The UK considers Canada a country with whom it has mature S&T relationships, largely due to cultural, linguistic, personal and historical ties. There is no formal S&T cooperation agreement between Canada and the UK, however, many bilateral MOUs have been signed at an agency-agency level, and a thriving network exists between the two countries at the researcher level in leading edge sectors such as advanced materials, aerospace, biotechnology, agriculture, forestry, medicinal sciences and information technology. The bilateral relationship was invigorated further in June 1997 when Prime Ministers Chretien and Blair signed the Canada-UK Joint Declaration, and since this date several new links have been established between some of the countries most prestigious scientific organisations. Furthermore, the Joint Declaration provides a strong platform on which to build new partnerships, both academic or industrial, in the future. For example, S&T agreements have been signed and are currently operating between: the National Research Council of Canada (NRC) and the British Council; the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and the Royal Society; the Medical Research Council of Canada (MRC) and The Wellcome Trust; Industry Canada (SchoolNet) and the Department for Education and Employment (National Grid for Learning); and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's (AAFC) Food Research and Development Centre and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council's (BBSRC) Institute of Food Research. In addition, the Radian program (Research and Development between Ireland and North America) seeks to stimulate, promote and support innovative and technology based joint ventures between Irish and Canadian SMEs in product and process development, and the Aerospace Industries Association of Canada and the Society of British Aerospace Companies are also looking to collaborate in a large research project to replace the use of cadmium in the aerospace industry.

Activities through the EU

Although the UK Government's chief advisory body, the Council for Science and Technology, has recently called for a radical overview of the European Framework Programme, having criticised it as being poor value for money and less effective in meeting the needs of the UK than comparable national programmes, the UK is still actively encouraging its researchers to form consortia with other European players to access EU funding. The UK currently invests 6% of its annual R&D budget (£380 million) into European programmes and it is therefore looking to achieve a maximum return on this investment. Britain continues to be the first choice partner in collaborative projects for most other Member States, and has so far exceeded the participation of all other countries in those Framework activities specifically designed for SMEs. Therefore, in light of the recently extended Canada-EU S&T Cooperation Agreement, there are many opportunities for Canadian researchers to use their ties with the UK to take full advantage of the many benefits that participating in the Fifth Framework programme can offer. Dedicated Canada-UK partnering events have and are being organised in this respect (e.g. in the areas of food safety, biotechnology and advanced networking computer applications).