

**Commission Services' response to the recommendations
of the 5-Year Assessment Panel for the**

**QUALITY OF LIFE AND MANAGEMENT OF LIVING RESOURCES
PROGRAMME**

These comments have been prepared by officials of DG RTD and represent their personal views on the conclusions of the 5-year assessment. These views have not been adopted or in any way approved by the Commission and should not be relied upon as a statement of the views of the Commission or DG RTD.

“The following comments of the Programme management have integrated the most recent developments, notably in the context of the European Research Area. As regards the overall 5-year assessment of the Framework Programmes, the Commission has expressed its position in the document COM (2000) 659, 19 October 2000.”

The summary of the panel's views could be split in three sets of remarks & recommendations:

1. Important issues that should be considered in life sciences
2. Technical criticisms
3. Recommendations for the future

The following comments of the Programme management are presented according to this structure.

1. Important issues that should be considered in life sciences

The Programme management endorses the Panel's recommendations on:

- *Ethical issues.* An important element of the FP5 evaluation process is the ethical review. All proposals to the Quality of Life programme are examined for possible ethical implications and transmitted to panels of ethical reviewers, as appropriate.
- *Public understanding of the life sciences.* The wide range of activities undertaken by the Commission in FP3 and FP4 will continue in FP5 and FP6. On their part co-ordinators of funded projects in the Quality of Life programme are encouraged to joint this effort of communication.
- *Ecological issues.* Research will increasingly have to take account of the environmental challenges facing society. This should receive higher priority in the formulation of FP6.

2. Technical criticisms

The Panel acknowledges the added value provided by Community-sponsored research in the life sciences, notably in stimulating the formation of trans-national research networks.

However, the panel's survey revealed a perception among their academic respondents that “EU funding strategy is much too heavily based on top-down approaches”, with a more mixed opinion from industry. A more positive message emerged from a questionnaire survey (352 respondents) carried out for the five-year assessment on behalf the DG RTD- participants in the life sciences programmes of FP3 and FP4 felt their projects were of relevance to world scientific and technological developments.

The panel's survey revealed a perception that funding mechanisms are too complicated, lack continuity, are of too short a duration and that insufficient money is available to meet the research goals. Part of this perception may arise from the competitive nature of the funding for life sciences research in the Community's Framework Programmes. It should be noted that the research budgets requested in project proposals are subject to review by external scientific experts during proposal evaluation; the Commission uses the advice of the experts in order to agree a budget for each successful project. The Programme management will continue to make representations to

Parliament and Council for budgets adequate for the scientific objectives of the Framework Programmes. Continued attention will be paid to the improvement of research management and funding mechanisms, notably in consideration of FP6.

With respect to the evaluation procedures used for grant proposals. The Programme management points out that evaluation procedures are subject to continuing review to increase quality of outcome; transparency, time- and cost effectiveness. In FP5, procedures for project selection are open to external observers and the advice of these observers is fully taken into account in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of existing procedures and in formulating appropriate improvements.

Though the panel itself found that the life sciences programmes of FP3 and FP4 have contributed decisively to European competitiveness, the panel's questionnaire respondents considered that present EU schemes of networking between academic and industrial research are too complicated and restrictive. Throughout the period covered by the assessment, the Programme management have made considerable progress in encouraging industrial participation in the life sciences research programmes. Dissemination of research results to the life sciences industrial community has been fostered in many and varied ways.

The importance placed by the Commission on improving industrial and SME involvement in and exploitation of research is reflected in Innovation and SMEs programme of FP5. Interestingly, for the first evaluation of SME proposals (May 1999), one third of all proposals (107/328) were for the Quality of Life programme.

Further initiatives are required to improve the general conditions (including financial and patenting aspects) for industrial-academic partnership and exploitation of research results; indeed, the issues requiring special attention have been outlined in the communication on the European Research Area. A life sciences contribution to this discussion is currently being prepared by the Commission services.

The Programme management recognises that the links between FP3 and FP4 and the problem-solving Key Actions of the Quality of Life programme in FP5 are not always clearly perceived by the scientific community. Continuing efforts to inform researchers will be made through the Programme Committee, the National Contact Points, through electronic means such as the programme website on the Community's RTD information service CORDIS (<http://www.cordis.lu/life>) and through direct contact between the Commission's scientific officers and research scientists.

The Programme management notes the panel's recommendations that more effort be spent on dissemination of the outputs of the life sciences programmes of FP3 and FP4 and that greater use should be made of electronic forms of communication. Electronic forms of dissemination, principally through CORDIS, are widely employed by the Commission. All FP4 project coordinators are required to complete a Technological Implementation Plan (TIP) describing the results of their research, including publications, and pointing out results with exploitation potential. In a new initiative, results will also be disseminated electronically and in brochures along specific themes, published by the Programme management in association with CORDIS. The first volume, describing exploitable results of FP4 projects from the Biotechnology, FAIR and Biomedicine & Health programmes, has been published.

The need for printed reports and proceedings of workshops, conferences etc will continue. Every effort will be made to improve the presentation of such publications.

3. Recommendations for the future

The Programme management takes notes of all of the panel's recommendations and welcome the panel exploration on the European Added Value.

The panel notes that the creation of a genuine culture of networking between European scientists is an important aspect of added value derived from Community RTD programmes in life sciences. Indeed, an average project in the Quality of Life programme involves approximately 9 academic and industrial partners, and a recent effort has started to promote other networking modalities in several areas of the work-program.

Although it is of little relevance to the five year assessment exercise, the Programme management notes with interest the suggestion concerning "trans-national network projects and platforms", which is the core of a concept the panel called "Euro-excellence". It outlines a different programme on essentially basic research and scientific mobility, with attractive mechanisms and no equivalent in the existing or previous framework programmes, with exception for the Human Potential horizontal programme on part. This program proposal is ground on the technical criticisms of the panel. However, it should be emphasised that most heaviness and imperfections have to do with the specific requirements of a democratically controlled process.

Before proposing research areas for consideration and approval by Parliament and Council, the Commission carries out extensive consultations with the European research community at many levels; the advice of national science policymakers is also taken into account. Similarly, the priorities of the research programmes are kept under constant review by the Programme Committees and external experts in order to respond in a timely manner to scientific developments and needs.

The priority setting has to take careful account of the ultimate objectives which legitimate European research: these are the reinforcement of competitive bases of industry and the contributions made to the policy needs in areas of EU competence. The structure of the quality of life program and the application of distinct selection criteria in evaluation have made this major goal a realistic one. And early results, in spite of the several weaknesses pointed out by the panel, reinforce the idea that life sciences in Europe may afford a strategic perspective with the participation of most relevant expert circles. The panellists had a different vision, which European policy-makers will be invited to consider as the European research agenda is revisited.

The Programme management thanks all the member of the panel for their dedicated work and the efforts they invested in carrying out the assessment

