

THE INSTITUTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

THE FORESIGHT PROGRAMME

Comments by the Institution of Environmental Sciences on the 'Consultation on the next round of the Foresight Programme'.

The Institution is a professional body with a specialised interest in environmental matters. We feel that it would be appropriate to comment on some of the broader issues and opinions sought and therefore restrict our response to those areas where we have particular knowledge and experience.

It is interesting to note that, of the present sixteen Sectoral Panels, the Institution has an active interest in the subject matter covered by at least five of these. They are:

- Agriculture, Horticulture and Forestry
- Construction
- Energy
- Marine
- Natural Resources & Environment

Of these, the most significant is the last, Natural Resources & Environment. We would strongly recommend that this should remain as an important Sectoral Panel. As the subject area covered is extensive and diverse we would suggest that a tiered structure at several levels (probably three) would be needed to provide a meaningful body of information.

The Panel itself should identify subject areas for consideration and set priorities and programmes and, working through a secretariat, invite participation from a wider range of bodies and individuals to contribute to a 'pool of knowledge' from their own expertise and experience. A third tier of contributions could also be invited, probably of a more specialised and possibly technological or scientific nature, on specific topics within a subject area. Where groups or individuals have a wish to combine to produce a response or contribution this could be effected through seminars or workshops.

Generally speaking, the Institution would be supportive of the OST proposal for the setting up of a 'knowledge pool' on the lines described. Access to this pool as a whole would be of considerable benefit to the contributors.

The proposal to give specific identify to the consideration of popular themes could fit within the Sectoral framework proposed above, probably at the second 'tier' of contributors. Theme Panels could be provided with a remit from the Sectoral Panels to review and respond on a particular theme. For example, Sustainable Development

could be a major theme to be considered by a Theme Panel commissioned by the Natural Resources & Environment Sectoral Panel.

It is, however, interesting to note that at least half of the emergent themes so far relate to social matters and do not fit easily with ANY of the present Sectoral Panels. Perhaps this is an indication of a gap in the composition of Sectoral Panels that needs to be remedied.

The Institution is concerned particularly with the theme of Sustainable Development, a broad-based topic area in its own right. At a very specific level, when the consideration arises of investment of funding for research, we would suggest a number of areas of high priority that would benefit in this area.

Firstly, a matter of growing concern, is the long-term effect of the increasing application of biotechnology, in particular its effect on the food chain and health. This is a fast growing industry with highly profitable and capital intensive potential and there is always the possibility that disadvantages or 'downside' effects will be ignored or overlooked until it is too late.

Secondly, re-cycling as a part of waste management is widely accepted as a beneficial option. To be adopted, however, the processes have to be economic and this is not always the case currently. More investigation is needed of the methods that could be introduced.

Thirdly, alternative energy sources, for similar reasons need containing research investment while there is still time.

Finally, remediation of polluted areas, land or water, needs the development of new techniques. These need to be both in the realm of technology and economic solutions.

In conclusion we would express our support for the programme and for the positive benefit that it produces. The Institution would be happy to play a larger part in the development into the next stage and make its own contribution to the body of knowledge that is being assembled.