

Recommendations for the Technology Offensive 2005 and 2006

The Council has defined clear priorities for the use of funds in 2005 and 2006 in its recommendations. These recommendations are based on previous Council recommendations and a discussion process with experts from science, business, politics and administration. The results of the strategy discussion and the Council recommendation can be viewed on the Council website under <http://www.rat-fte.at>

Human Resources

The percentage of university research which is financed through competition has already been increased in recent years. Efforts should be made to achieve a further increase in accordance with the timeframe and legal possibilities provided in the Universities Act 2002. The Action Programme and the funds of the National Foundation for RTD should contribute in the following areas:

- Safeguarding an internationally competitive research infrastructure of high quality by means of a temporary research infrastructure programme,
- Providing the Fund for the Promotion of Scientific Research (FWF) with the necessary resources to finance excellent bottom-up basic research as well as in the long term to finance overheads and pro rata infrastructure investments within the scope of its project promotion,
- Promotion of “oriented basic research” to complement the bottom-up promotion of the FWF.

One important framework condition is that the resources of the General University Fund (GUF) need to be used to safeguard a basic infrastructure for the universities and carry out the necessary major investments in building fabric and construction. Furthermore, savings can be made by focussing on individual locations and the shared use of infrastructure by several universities or institutes. Incentive measures should be established for reducing costs and obtaining third party funding.

Strategy of Excellence to Increase Research Capacities and Strengthen Co-Operation Between Science and Industry

The Council sees an urgent need to develop new strength areas and to network existing key areas in order to create thematic foci and critical masses. In particular, attention should be given to the diversity of the participating institutions, existing excellence in science and industry and upon economic demand. The networking of existing instruments and the integration of new measures (Bridge, Translational Research) are the most pressing tasks. The Council has therefore asked the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) to develop such a strategy together with an implementation plan, which should give particular consideration to the Council's thoughts on the "New Types of Centres of Excellence".

Expansion and Strengthening of Research Capacities in Industry

In addition to implementing the strategy of excellence the Council sees a particular need to:

- support the necessary process of structural change (e.g. through programmes to improve the possibilities for financing high-tech start-ups or incentives for the development and expansion of research centres of corporate groups in Austria)
- promote thematic foci on specific strength areas or in areas which have an especially high future potential and
- improve the transfer of technology and innovation, in particular for the benefit of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

Expansion of Internationalisation

In general Austrian research, technology and innovation policy should be harmonised to a greater extent with the goals of the European Research Area. At the programme level and in terms of grants, the Council believes that it is possible to promote internationalisation by continuing and expanding international co-operation programmes and by providing adequate endowments for incentives and additional financing for participation in EU programmes.

Dialogue between Science and Society

The public awareness initiative which the Council played a major role in initiating will be continued. However, the planned measures should be bundled and co-ordination between them improved.

Emerging Thematic Areas

The focus upon emerging sectors of research and Austrian strength areas such as the life sciences, information and communications technologies, nano-technologies and technologies for sustainable development will be continued. In the Council's view, the promotion of security research being a topic embracing several scientific disciplines and technology fields represents an essential development at the European level.

The implementation of theme-specific key area programmes must on no account take place at the expense of bottom-up promotion. Top-down programmes must fulfil both a scientific and economic demand (reality check) and in particular permit the development and expansion of clusters or similar structures. The topicality of the key areas must be reviewed at regular intervals.

Recommendations Regarding the Promotion Structure

The Council believes that the bundling of economically-oriented research promotion at the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) has now created a good general framework for continued structural reform. As a next step, and in keeping with past recommendations, the Council now demands the separation of the strategic level at the ministries from the operational level at the handling institutions.

The ministries should — where it is not yet the case — source out the management and handling of the programmes to the Austrian Research Promotion Agency or another suitable institution. These transfers must be carried out in a joint process between the ministries and the promotion agencies, whereby it must be ensured that the expertise needed to run the programmes is established at the promotion agencies at an early enough date and in sufficiently high quality.

Moreover, the Council recommends an overall simplification of the Austrian research, technology and innovation promotion system. For this purpose, thematically related programmes could be amalgamated and similar types of programmes integrated under a joint programme umbrella.

The RTD National Foundation makes a valuable contribution to increasing medium-term planning certainty. In the Council's view, Foundation funds should therefore be used primarily for programmes and initiatives with a long-term orientation. In particular, the development of long-term centres of excellence should be supported.

However, it must not be forgotten that in the past the Fund for the Promotion of Scientific Research (FWF) and the former Austrian Industrial Research Promotion Fund (FFF, now Division 1 of the FFG) received considerable funding from the Austrian National Bank.

As the National Foundation replaces the financing previously received from the National Bank, FWF and FFG will also have to receive funds from the National Foundation if the ordinary budget is not increased.

The funds from the Action Programme should be concentrated upon impulse programmes of a temporary nature.

The Council is aware that it is not yet possible to separate the tasks of the Action Programme, National Foundation and ordinary budget in an ideal form. Basic activities by the ministries, coverage of which ought to be safeguarded by ordinary budgets, must currently be financed by Action Programme or Foundation funds due to a lack of resources.

This diagram illustrates the dynamics of R&D expenditure over the last 6 years. From 1999 to 2004 the R&D quota rose substantially: from 1.91 to 2.27 percent of GDP. This is higher than the EU average of 1.93 percent (2002).

