

Creation of a National Database of Public-Sector Research Funding

Background

In view of the considerable size of the public sector contribution to total R&D spending – according to the latest figures from the Statistik Austria global estimate 2011 it is 38 percent – greater transparency is required with regard to public-sector R&D spending. As approximately 30 percent of direct federal funding for research is awarded through the funding agencies, it would be sensible to collect the relevant data in a comprehensive electronic database at the programme and project level. To some extent this can be done by merging existing databases such as the Federal Research Database and the project databases of the aws, FFG and FWF.

The National Audit Office already drew attention in 2005 to the need for a database containing information on all research funding provided by the Federal Government and the provinces. The Austrian Council picked up this suggestion in its recommendation concerning the amendment to the Federal Statistics Act issued on 19 September 2009. The 2008 CREST report and the system evaluation in 2009 also support providing access to micro-data. The RTI Strategy of the Federal Government also recommends developing a suitable legal framework for using statistical data.

Establishing this kind of interactive tool should make it easier to verify the use of public funds and at the same time provide a basis for analyses which in turn form the basis for policy recommendations.

Recommendation

The Austrian Council recommends that researchrelevant data be collected in a national database with the aim of documenting all research funding provided by the Federal Government and the provinces in a homogenous and transparent database. This would form the basis for complying with reporting obligations under special legislation (e. g. Report on Austria's Scientific and Technological Capability, The Research and Technology Report, facts documentation, reporting obligations for Europe 2020 etc.) and evaluations.

The data should be collected by the respective funding agencies as part of their standard collection of data from all funding recipients according to

uniform principles and survey logics. In particular, the following information should be collected (in German and English):

- Recipients (institutions and individuals) of receive research funding and contractors in the case of contract research
- the responsible project manager
- brief description of the research project and the funding
- thematic key words and categorisation by discipline
- sources of financing (funding programmes, direct funding by the public sector, research assignments etc.)
- terms /durations
- equipment that is to be or was purchased with the funding or as part of the research contract
- place where the final report will be available
- project results (publications, patents etc.)

In the opinion of the Austrian Council the database should be kept at Statistik Austria. This would have the advantage of facilitating linkage with existing data sets from statistical surveys (R&D, turnover, employees, labour market, foreign trade, etc.), and would minimise the additional effort and expense of investigating RTIrelevant questions.

If necessary, the statutory framework should be adapted accordingly.

The Austrian Council recommends that a project team comprising representatives of the relevant ministries, the National Audit Office, the funding agencies, Statistik Austria, the provinces and the Austrian Council be appointed to hammer out the details of the recommendation and implement it.