

April 1999

Ref: 5/99

Devolution and Science : Implications of Scottish Devolution

A Report by a Joint Working Group of the Royal Society of London and the Royal Society of Edinburgh

1. The publicly funded research capability in Science, Engineering and Technology (the SET base) is a vital resource for a modern society. It creates new knowledge and concepts, new products, new processes and newly trained scientists, engineers and technologists who continually regenerate the scientific capability of industry, commerce, government and of the SET base itself. Its innovations lead to improvements in the quality of life, more competitive and prosperous industries and a stronger national economy.
2. Devolution will change the patterns of responsibility for regional components of the SET base and is likely to produce regional priorities for it. This will create both risks to the effectiveness of the SET base and opportunities to increase its effectiveness. It will be important to avoid the former and exploit the latter.
3. The UK has strong basic research which has the diversity to permit it to adapt to innovation no matter what its source, focus in areas where there is the best match between scientific opportunity and potential for utility, and is excellent by international standards.
4. These are benefits, which Scotland shares, which flow from the large size and competitiveness of the UK basic research system. The dis-economies of small scale are severe, and barriers between Scotland and the rest of the UK would be to the great disadvantage of all. It is vital therefore that Scotland remains a well integrated part of the UK SET base.
5. Devolution also creates an opportunity to use the science base more effectively to support distinctive Scottish priorities
 - in promoting wealth creation and the quality of life
 - in policies for health, education, agriculture, fisheries and the environment
 - in supporting the new Parliament in its scrutiny of policy and legislation
6. Amongst the report's recommendations are
 - that the Parliament adopts an explicit policy to sustain Scotland's role in the UK SET base whilst promoting greater regional efforts to benefit from it;
 - that a senior minister is appointed with principal responsibility for SET in Scotland, supported by a Science Policy Advisory Board with high level representation from the research and industrial sectors and chaired by a senior scientist;
 - that a senior scientist of international standing is appointed to ensure a strong, functional focus for SET in Scotland, with responsibility for SET advice to ministers, for liaison with UK science policy bodies, and for day-to-day implementation of SET policy. This post should be embedded as a cross-Departmental function within the Scottish Civil Service;
 - that the new Parliament takes steps to ensure that it has access to sources of authoritative and independent scientific advice to underpin its scrutinising and legislative roles.

For further information or a full copy of the report please contact: The Science Advice Section at the Royal Society, 6 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AG (tel: +44(0)171 451 2585, fax: +44(0)171 451 2692) or The Royal Society of Edinburgh, 22-26 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 2PQ (tel: +44(0) 131 240 5000, fax: +44(0) 131 240 5024).