

Rt Hon Stephen Byers, MP  
Secretary of State  
Department of Trade and Industry  
1 Victoria Street  
London SW1H 0ET

tel +44 020 7451 2592  
fax +44 020 7451 2692  
[www.royalsoc.ac.uk](http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk)

*From the Physical Secretary and Vice-President Professor JE Enderby CBE FRS*  
4 April 2001  
Our ref: L040411F

**Dear Secretary of State,**

I welcome the review of Foresight that you have initiated and I write on behalf of the Council of the Royal Society. It is our view that the Foresight programmes have had a positive impact on the Science Base and on the transfer of technology in improving quality of life and UK competitiveness. Nevertheless, we also believe that improvements can be achieved.

A number of benefits may be attributed to Foresight, including:

- an extremely valuable networking and learning experience for Panel Members;
- the overviews that the Panels provide, which though unsurprising to experts in those fields, are useful to them and, particularly, people in related fields;
- its contribution to a change in culture where strategic thinking can enhance opportunities for wealth creation and enhancing quality of life;
- the increased funding for R&D achieved by Foresight Challenge, Foresight Link Awards, Foresight Fund 2001 and LINK programmes (not all of which might have been allocated in the absence of Foresight) and the leverage associated with these funds; and
- enhanced collaboration between academe and industry, as evidenced by the increasing number of papers with joint authorship.

Some scientists are sceptical about the value of the benefits ascribed to Foresight, and the extent to which they can indeed truly be attributed to Foresight. It is recognised that assessment of benefit is difficult – for example some will be due to its contribution to culture change, the benefits of which are hardly quantifiable. Some changes (for example, to culture)

will only be achieved over a period of many years, and even then their causes will be difficult to attribute.

Accordingly and in order to improve the perception of Foresight and to provide a basis for improving Foresight itself, it would be helpful to:

- provide a detailed, quantitative analysis of the achievements that can be attributed to Foresight (emphasising scientific results and development of commercial products, rather than collaborative arrangements that may achieve these things);
- encourage the dissemination of the debate of diverse views within the Panels and Working Groups, rather than the publication of relatively bland consensus statements;
- ensure that the focus on technology is not lost;
- increase the understanding of Foresight's Knowledge Pool and publicise the papers produced by participants; and
- establish clearly defined objectives for the panels, in order to facilitate analysis and comparison and to encourage the spread of best practice.

I would be grateful if these issues could be addressed in the Review.

Yours sincerely

John Enderby

cc The Lord Sainsbury of Turville, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Science