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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION ON HSC SCIENCE STRATEGY 2005-2008

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Cleared by Paul Davies on 18 April

Issue

1. Outcome of consultation on the draft HSC Science Strategy 2005 – 2008. A revised draft with the amendments highlighted is attached at Annex 1. Science plays an important role in health and safety risk management and the Science Strategy is a key ‘daughter’ document to the HSC Strategy.

Timing

2. Prompt publication of the revised Science Strategy will meet the commitment made at the Commission’s Open Meeting in October 2004.

Recommendation

3. The Commission is invited:
 - to note and agree the Executive Summary of the revised draft Science Strategy. This aligns the Strategy with the recently agreed HSC Business Plan 2005-8 and summarises the key scientific areas to be addressed over the next 3 years (Annex 2(v));
 - to agree that, subject to the incorporation of its comments, the revised draft Strategy should be published; and
 - to agree that the main route of publication of the Strategy should be electronic with hard copies made available on request (paragraph 9).

Background

4. The present HSC/E S&I Strategy has been substantially updated and revised to align with the new HSC Strategy - *A strategy for workplace health and safety in Great Britain to 2010 and beyond*. The draft new Science Strategy 2005 – 2008 was considered by the Commission at its Open Meeting in October 2004 (HSC/04/118). The Commission agreed that the draft Strategy should be posted on the HSE intranet and web site in November 2005, with hard copies made available on request, to enable internal and external stakeholders to comment. The consultation process was announced in an HSE global e-mail and e-express, the new Science and Research Outlook (SRO) electronic newsletter and by means of a Press Release.
5. During the 3 months' consultation period there were 242 'hits' on the draft Science Strategy via the SRO and others could have accessed it directly (the statistics are not available). However, only thirteen responses were received, eight of which were external and five internal. The low response rate could be interpreted in a number of ways but it seems fair to assume that those who did not respond were not sufficiently dissatisfied to feel the need to do so. In addition to the responses, valuable feedback was obtained from the Office of Science and Technology (OST) scoping study undertaken as a first stage of the external review of HSE science and at the first meeting of the Steering Group for that review. Finally, the draft Strategy required updating to reflect changes to the Strategic Programme structure.

Argument

6. The majority of responses welcomed the approach set out in the draft Strategy. In addition to substantive comments, there were a range of detailed points together with observations and comments on elements of individual Strategic Programmes and Business Enabling activities and requests to co-operate on some of these; these have been copied to the relevant programmes. All of the responses have been carefully considered and the draft Strategy amended in the light of these. Some of the main points raised are summarised in Annex 2 (i – vii) together with the proposed response (in italics) and, where appropriate, a cross-reference to the relevant amendment in Annex 1.
7. Four of the responses, from *DNV Consulting*, the *Steel Construction Institute*, *Physical Environment Ltd* and *Malcolm Birkenshaw* (on behalf of the OSD S&T Forum) express serious concern about the proposal to reduce research into major hazards. They urge that this reduction be reconsidered for a number of reasons - see Annex 2 (viii). The HSE Board has given careful consideration to these responses but reaffirmed its decision to reduce effort on major hazards. It is the responsibility of operators in the major hazards industries to carry out research that is needed to ensure the safety of their operations not for HSE to compensate for industry cutbacks.

Consultation

8. The responses were sent to appropriate HSE colleagues for comment and a CoSAS review team was established to ensure that all responses were properly considered.

Presentation

9. The recommendation is that the Science Strategy should be published primarily as an electronic document. Advice is being sought from the HSE Communications Directorate on presentation of the Strategy, including the possible addition of illustrations to enhance its visual appeal. All respondents will receive an individual reply.

Costs and Benefits

10. HSE annually spends about 15% of its grant in aid on commissioned S&T (£35m in 2003/04). In addition, HSE spends a similar amount on the salaries of some 780 S&T specialists. The new Science Strategy explains how HSE intends to use this science and engineering resource strategically to deliver the challenges set out in the HSC Strategy.

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

11. Work to develop the Strategy and to undertake internal and external consultation has been undertaken by CoSAS staff and contained within existing resources.

Other Implications

12. n/a

Next steps

13. To publish the HSC Science Strategy 2005 – 2008 on the HSE web site and make hard copies available on request.