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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

First Annual Report on Implementation of HSC Science Strategy 2005 - 2008

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Cleared by Paul Davies on 24 April 2006

Issue

1. This paper reports on progress to implement the HSC Science Strategy 2005 –2008.

Timing

2. Routine

Recommendation

3. For information

Background

4. The HSC approved publication of its Science Strategy in May 2005. It was published on HSE's website in July 2005 and HSC asked to be provided with annual reports on its implementation. Specifically, HSE was asked to include in this first report consideration of the impact of the proposal to reduce sponsored research into Major Hazards (MH) and to review our approach to peer review.

Argument

5. The Office of Science and Innovation has considered the HSC Science Strategy as part of its review of HSE science. That review is many months behind schedule and the final report is not expected until summer 2006 but OSI have provided their emerging findings to help inform HSE's Fundamental Review. These findings are largely positive throughout and the Science Strategy is well received but it is noted that:
 - There was a lack of engagement with external stakeholders on the Science Strategy despite effort put into it.
 - Because the current PSA targets were based on aspirational targets, they do not take account of longer-term/broader issues such as scientific capacity and capability, including the ability to respond to crises or emergency situations.

Major Hazards

6. The Science Strategy announced that “HSE would reduce its expenditure on MH research, and whilst recognising the need to continue to collaborate and engage with these industries, particularly focusing on new areas of health and safety risk control, HSE believes that the industries should fund more of the research effort that is needed to meet their own needs.” During discussion assurance was sought that HSE would take appropriate steps to ensure that MH industries fund the right research and that appropriate technical expertise and technical know-how is maintained. The Chief Scientist explained that HSE would ensure that this happened and that the safety case regime and the MH Strategic Programme would be the main vehicles.

7. To gather the supporting evidence for this annual report, HSL was commissioned to review with a group of key internal stakeholders the range and effectiveness of available mechanisms for identifying and delivering future ‘non nuclear’ MH research. This group was also asked to consider whether a strategic input is available or needed from ‘higher level’ committees such as the ‘former’ Advisory Committee on Dangerous Substances (ACDS) and the Chemical and Downstream Oil Industries Forum (CDOIF). The final report will be issued following internal consultation but the main emerging findings are:

- Overall HSE has appropriate mechanisms in place for delivering the right research on MH. These mechanisms recognise the importance of research, often expressed in formal ‘S&T’ strategies, as an essential means to underpin, with other key interventions, the delivery of PSA and other targets set by the MH Strategic and Industry Programmes. These include, extensive and established, but changing, contact and liaison groups with Industry Stakeholders which range from specific Dutyholders, through Trade Associations to ‘Advisory Committees’ (and their successors) and which continue, despite the financial pressures across the MH industries, to generate some collaboratively funded research.
- The offshore oil and gas sector would benefit from the setting-up of more formal arrangements for the establishment of an HSE/industry consensus on future research needs and how they should be met. The Offshore Division of HSE had already recognised this need and has secured the support of the UK Offshore Operators’ Association (UKOOA) and the Energy Institute for establishing a forum to develop a joint HSE/industry research programme.

In the first year of implementation it is too soon to fully assess the Science Strategy’s impact, but HSE will continue to monitor, assess and remedy significant effects.

Peer Review

8. Work is in hand to develop a more robust approach to deciding when peer review should be undertaken. When new research proposals are being developed the HSE customer is required to consider the need for peer review before work commences. As part of the approval process, customers will be challenged where there is inadequate consideration of peer review. As HSE undertakes many small (< £30k) projects, peer review needs to be proportionate. The OSI review has selected 9 completed projects and arranged for these to be reviewed by senior academics. The initial feedback is that the science is sound and the work relevant to HSE’s corporate aims and objectives. HSE has

approached the Royal Academy of Engineering as a potential source of peer reviewers with the intention of developing a rolling programme of peer reviews.

Other Activities

9. Progress to take forward other parts of the Science Strategy is summarised below:
- HSL will be HSE's first choice provider for all commissioned science and work is in hand to develop the HSE/HSL Strategic Partnership. One important step is that HSL's Chief Executive is now a member of the HSE Board.
 - HSE's internal science resource is being aligned to support the HSE Strategy. The introduction of new arrangements for work recording will enable the allocation of resources to programmes to be tracked more effectively.
 - The Evidence Analysis and Evaluation Plan for the Fit 3 Strategic Programme has been finalised. This sets out the research needed by that Programme to support delivery and evaluation of the change pathway essential for the improved risk control that it requires to deliver its PSA targets by 2007/08.
 - Substantial progress is being made with reviewing and aligning specialist expertise to meet HSE's business needs, including increasing expertise in social science, human and organisational behaviour, ergonomics and statistics.
 - A number of projects are being undertaken to review and revise HSE's business processes for commissioning and managing research and reactive support. The objective is to produce a coherent set of processes that provide a fit-for-purpose system that meets HSE's requirements in the simplest way possible.
 - Good progress has been made with the initiative to make £5m available to Local Authorities over the period 2005 – 2009 to investigate how they might make increased use of science. Over £650k was spent during 2005/06 on a wide range of projects and there have been a number of positive outcomes ranging from press releases on hazardous substances in henna dyes to presentation of expert evidence at an inquest.
 - A new science strategy committee with external membership is in place to advise the Chief Scientist. Minutes of meetings and papers are published on the website.
 - HSE has established a dedicated team, based in HSL, to provide the necessary resource to support its horizon scanning activities.
 - HSE is continuing to work closely with other Government Departments for example with DEFRA, DH and HPA on guidance for avian and pandemic influenza and with DEFRA, DTI, OSI and other Departments on nanotechnology.

Action / Next Steps

10. Work to implement the Science Strategy will continue and a further annual report will be provided in spring 2007.

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