Open Government status: Fully open	**Paper Number: HSC/05/58**
	Meeting Date: 10 May 2005
	Type of Paper: Below the line
Exempt material: None	**Paper File Reference:**
	Intranet embargo?: No

HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION ON HSC SCIENCE STRATEGY 2005-2008

A Paper by John McGuinness

Advisor(s): Brian Fullam

Cleared by Paul Davies on xx

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.

Timing

2. Commission meeting of 10 May.

Recommendation

3. The Commission is invited:
   - to consider the responses received on the draft Science Strategy 2005-2008, attached at Annex 2;
   - 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;
   - 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.

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 (see Annex 2). 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 below together with the proposed response (in italics) and, where appropriate, a cross-reference to the relevant amendment in Annex 2.

   i. The draft Strategy is not sufficiently forward looking and does not recognise the need to ensure the availability of appropriate internal and external expertise in the longer term*. We have emphasised in section 1 (p.1) that maintaining and developing appropriate expertise is essential; section 4 (p.10) has been extended to explain the key role of horizon scanning in identifying future such needs.*

   ii. There does not appear to be a clear, resourced and practical mechanism by which HSE takes internal and external advice to identify information gaps and define research priorities. *Steps we are taking to enhance the capability of the Strategic Programmes include defining the competencies and skills needed within the Programmes and developing a training package to deliver these: encouraging programme directors and managers to "embed" in their teams sufficient suitably qualified staff, including analytical scientists from the Corporate Science and Analytical Services Directorate (CoSAS). This is work in hand and too detailed for the Strategy but we will address this issue in replying to the respondent.*

iii. Professional bodies (IOSH, ESRC) share the views of the OST scoping study that HSC's science strategy should develop more innovative partnerships with stakeholders, OGDs and professional and academic bodies*. We have expanded section 6 (p. 1) to emphasise the importance that we attach to establishing better mechanisms for involving academic and professional institutions. The offer to collaborate with ESRC on evaluation methodology is being followed up by CoSAS.*

iv. The section on Science Governance suggests that everything is working as intended but the OST scoping study reports that there are significant weaknesses in practice – largely connected with i. and ii. above. Also there has been a suggestion that HSE should peer review all of its published research. *We believe this would be disproportionate and that the current measures, as set out in section 7.3 (page 22), are appropriate but we may need to re-visit our criteria following the OST review.*

v. There is a need to specify the overriding scientific issues that need to be addressed during 2005 – 2008. *Several key scientific issues are covered in the text and, to avoid significant redrafting, these have been listed in a new Executive Summary.*

vi. The social sciences have an important contribution to make to HSC's efforts to understand problems and develop effective practical solutions to workplace health and safety. *We strongly endorse this comment and have made additions to sections 2 (p.2.) and 4 (p. 9) to reinforce the importance of the social sciences).*

vii. The Strategy should include equality issues at work both in its methodology and with regard to the subject matter. *We agree and have amended one of the principles in section 2 (p. 2) to make this explicit.*

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, arguing that:

   - Although the major hazards industries have achieved a welcome improvement in occupational health and safety in recent years, there has not been a corresponding reduction in the frequency or magnitude of major accidents.
   - Many of the UK facilities are over 40 years old and operating well beyond their original design life.
   - As HSE has reduced its emphasis on major accidents, so the major operating companies have dramatically reduced their expenditure on research into such hazards.
   - The large operators are cutting back heavily on health and safety, and divesting assets to smaller operators, who have little specialist resource or operational expertise. The North Sea has lost its pre-eminent position with much of the deep water technology being developed elsewhere In consequence, many of the key scientists have been made redundant or have taken early retirement and young engineers are reluctant to enter or remain in the industry.
   - Standards and guidance are the backbone of regulation of hazardous installations and, given the reductions in industry expertise, HSE support is critical.

The HSE Board has given a clear signal that it wishes to reduce effort on major hazards; it is the responsibility of operators in the major hazards industries to ensure the safety of their operations not for HSE to compensate for industry cut backs. The Strategy has been amended to reflect the above points but without compromising the Board's decision that HSE research into major hazards should be reduced. The Chair of the HID Research Scrutiny Panel has approved the revised wording.

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.

Environmental Implications

12. n/a.

Other Implications

13. n/a

Action

14. The Commission is invited to:

a) to consider the responses received on the draft Science Strategy 2005-2008;
b) to agree that, subject to the incorporation of its comments, the revised draft Strategy should be published; and
c) to agree that the main route of publication of the Strategy should be electronic with hard copies made available on request.