

PRESS RELEASE

SCIENCE COUNCIL CALLS FOR NATIONAL PLAN FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Irish Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (ICSTI), chaired by Dr. Ed Walsh, has proposed radical reforms in the way Government plans and invests public funding for science, technology and innovation in a statement published today (Monday, 9th November).

Referring to the statement Dr. Walsh said “there is a strong argument that Government should use the fruits of the current performance of the economy to reinvest in areas which will ensure that its development potential remains strong when the current period of exceptional growth comes to an end – as inevitably it must. Science, technology and innovation (STI) is one such area.”

Dr. Walsh added that the Government constantly faces multiple demands for investment in a wide range of areas and in the circumstances there is a need to demonstrate clearly the sectors, technologies and structural areas where STI investment will pay high social and economic dividends. There is also a need to achieve greater clarity in relation to the priorities which

underlie existing State expenditure on STI which amounted to over £800m in 1997.

ICSTI carried out a study to identify how priorities for State expenditure on STI are currently established and compared the situation with procedures in other countries. The findings of the study are contained in a Statement by the Council entitled "Mechanisms for Prioritisation of Public Expenditures on S&T". The Council concluded that:

- Spending on STI within Government Departments is 'derived' from wider policy objectives and there is no clear system for relating STI expenditure to these policy objectives.**
- In general there is a weak focus on STI within Departments and particularly across Departments.**
- As a percentage of GDP the level of State expenditure on R&D undertaken in the public sector is less than half the EU average.**

Based on that analysis the Council has made the following recommendations:

- Government should make an explicit strategic commitment to STI which should be reflected in the Statements prepared by each Government Department under the Strategic Management Initiative**

- **Each Government Department should draw up a Statement covering its STI activities and objectives based on a three-year framework**
- **Each Department with significant STI activity should appoint a scientific advisor**
- **The initial focus of Departments STI Statements should be on R&D activities. The R&D component of the Forfás Science Budget should be separately extracted for commentary**
- **The STI Statements of Departments should be synthesised by the Interdepartmental Committee on Science and Technology into a National STI Plan**
- **Under a new round of Structural Funds, all STI activities should be encompassed under a single programme**
- **A national innovation investment fund should be substantially funded and utilised to encourage Departments to reallocate resources and activities to areas of emerging national priority**

ENDS.

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