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An examination of the provision of research funding information by the External Relations Office, Loughborough University of Technology

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**An examination of the provision of research funding information
by the External Relations Office, Loughborough University of
Technology**

by

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**A Master's Dissertation, submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of Master of Science degree of the
Loughborough University of Technology.**

September 1995

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Abstract

This study examined the provision of information concerning external funding for research by the External Relations Office to researchers at Loughborough University. The information service was evaluated using a questionnaire survey of researchers across the University. Details of information provision strategies at three other universities were obtained through interviews with staff in the equivalent research offices. Comparison of the activities carried out by other institutions with those undertaken at Loughborough generated ideas for the development of the information service.

The study includes a summary of the UK research funding system, providing the context for the consideration of research activities at Loughborough. The range of information about funding schemes accessed by the External Relations Office is also reviewed in detail.

Most of the staff surveyed were involved in externally funded research and received information about funding opportunities. At the departmental level, the structure for acquiring and distributing information varied considerably across the University. Thus, it has been difficult for the External Relations Office to find out researchers information requirements and establish a comprehensive system of information distribution.

The majority of researchers who received the *Funding Information Bulletin* produced by the External Relations Office were satisfied with the range and content of the information provided. The information disseminated in this bulletin appeared to complement that obtained from other sources. Many researchers placed a high value on more selective dissemination of information. This has been limited by poor communication about research interests between the departments and the External Relations Office. There was considerable potential for extending the information and advice services offered by the External Relations Office, developing strategies used at other universities if they proved appropriate. Suggestions for further study are included.

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Contents	Page
Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Contents	iii
List of figures	vi
List of tables	vii
Appendices	viii

Chapter 1 Introduction.

1.1	Funding for research.	1
1.2	Outline of the study.	1

Chapter 2 Policy in the United Kingdom concerning research in higher education.

2.1	Research and development.	3
2.2	Funding for research and development.	3
2.3	UK bodies.	5
2.4	Industry.	10
2.5	Charitable bodies.	10
2.6	European organisations.	11
2.7	International agencies.	15

Chapter 3 Information sources.

3.1	Information provision.	21
3.2	General funding information.	22
3.3	UK sources.	22
3.4	Industry.	26
3.5	Charitable bodies.	27
3.6	European Union.	27
3.7	International sources.	31
3.8	Information services.	32

Chapter 4 Research and Information provision at Loughborough University.

4.1	External research at Loughborough.	40
4.2	The role of the funding information service within the External Relations Office.	43

Chapter 5 Survey methodology.

5.1	Objectives.	48
5.2	Questionnaire design.	48
5.3	Analysis.	50

Chapter 6 Survey results.

6.1	Survey responses.	52
6.2	Responses for each question.	
6.2.1	Question 1: The position of respondents within their department.	52
6.2.2	Question 2: Departmental responsibility.	52
6.2.3	Question 3: European responsibilities.	55
6.2.4	Question 4: Externally funded research.	55
6.2.5	Question 5: Sources of information.	57
6.2.6	Question 6: Distributing information.	59
6.2.7	Question 7: Further information.	61
6.2.8	Question 8: European research.	61
6.2.9	Questions 9-11: Assessment activities.	63
6.2.10	Question 12: The role of the External Relations Office.	66
6.2.11	Question 13: Survey of researchers not receiving the <i>Funding Information Bulletin</i> .	66
6.2.12	Question 13: The value of <i>Funding Information Bulletin</i> .	66
6.2.13	Question 14: External Relations Office services.	69
6.2.14	Question 15: Other services.	71
6.2.15	Question 16: The role of a central body.	73
6.2.16	Question 17: University objectives.	75
6.2.17	Question 18: Other comments.	75

Chapter 7 Information provision in other universities.

7.1	Administrative structure and position of the research office.	78
7.2	Gathering information.	79
7.3	Use of information services.	79
7.4	Contacts with industry.	80
7.5	Dissemination of information.	80
7.6	Other services.	83
7.7	Electronic information provision.	83

Chapter 8 Discussion of results and conclusion.

8.1	Acquisition of information.	86
8.2	Information distribution within departments.	86
8.3	Funding information.	87
8.4	The <i>Funding Information Bulletin</i> .	88
8.5	Acquiring more information.	89
8.6	European programmes.	90
8.7	The peer review process.	90
8.8	External Relations Office Services.	91
8.9	The role of a central body.	93
8.10	Conclusion.	94
8.11	Further study.	95

Bibliography	97
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Appendices	106
-------------------	------------

List of figures	Page
Figure 4.1	External research income 1993-94. 41
Figure 6.1	The position of respondents within their department. 53
Figure 6.2a	Departmental responsibilities. Does any member of the department have responsibility for obtaining information about external research opportunities? 54
Figure 6.2b	The proportion of departments where one or more members of staff has responsibility for obtaining information about external research opportunities. 54
Figure 6.3a	European responsibilities. Does any member of the department have responsibility for European contacts in research or teaching? 56
Figure 6.3b	The proportion of departments where one or more members of staff has responsibility for European contacts in research or teaching. 56
Figure 6.4a	Information about funding opportunities passed on by respondents to other members of the department. 60
Figure 6.4b	Information about funding opportunities passed on by respondents to other members of the University. 60
Figure 6.5	The proportion of respondents who would like to receive more information about external funding opportunities. 62
Figure 6.6a	Assessment activities. Does participation in assessment activities provide you with any information about research opportunities which is of value to other members of the department? 64
Figure 6.6b	Assessment activities. Does participation in assessment activities provide you with any information about research opportunities which is of value to other members of the University? 64
Figure 6.7	Assessment activities. Do you feel participation in assessment activities has any bearing on the department's ability to obtain external research funding? 65
Figure 6.8	Respondents who do not receive the <i>Funding Information Bulletin</i> . How frequently these respondents see this bulletin. 65
Figure 6.9a	The frequency of requests from respondents to the External Relations Office in connection with items from the <i>Funding Information Bulletin</i> . 68
Figure 6.9b	The frequency of requests from respondents to outside bodies in connection with items from the <i>Funding Information Bulletin</i> . 68
Figure 6.10	Awareness of External Relations Office Services. 70
Figure 6.11	Interest in other services carried out by the External Relations Office. 72
Figure 6.12a	The proportion of respondents who feel a central body is needed to coordinate the University's efforts to obtain external research funding. 74
Figure 6.12b	The proportion of respondents who think their department would be prepared to produce a quarterly update of research interests for a central body. 74
Figure 6.13	The proportion of respondents who feel establishing University-wide objectives for research funding would be helpful. 76

List of tables		Page
Table 2.1	Estimated government expenditure on research and development 1994-95.	6
Table 2.2	Funding allocations for the activities of the Framework 4 programme.	13
Table 4.1	External support for research at Loughborough University.	41
Table 6.1	Information received by respondents from the funding bodies.	58
Table 6.2	The value of the Funding Information Bulletin.	67

Appendices	Page
Appendix 1 Loughborough University: Schools and departments.	106
Appendix 2 Questionnaire survey form.	107
Appendix 3 Questionnaire survey form: Question 13 for recipients of the <i>Funding Information Bulletin</i> .	112

1.1 Funding for research

The two essential functions of higher education institutions are teaching and research. Both activities receive a considerable amount of public funds. However, public funds are only designed to establish a research base in higher education and it is important that universities attract further funds for research. Organisations which support university research, generally particular projects undertaken for their own benefit, include industry, charitable bodies, international agencies and European organisations. Universities also need to bid for government research funding, much of which is allocated on a competitive basis through the research councils and government departments.

The development of a successful research strategy relies on effective information provision. Researchers need to be aware of the opportunities available and understand the objectives of the funding bodies in order to make successful applications. This requires a knowledge of the types of information available and the methods of obtaining it. At Loughborough University information concerning research funding is gathered and distributed to researchers by the External Relations Office. This report examines the service provided by the External Relations Office and considers the present and future role of this service in relation to other forms of information provision at the University.

1.2 Outline of the study

The objectives of research funding information provision at a local level reflect national policy concerning support for research. The second chapter of this study summarises research funding priorities in the UK, covering government policy and the strategies of the major funding bodies. The funding bodies supply information about their activities through a number of different channels and in a variety of formats. Chapter three describes the sources of information which can be accessed and utilized by universities. The situation at Loughborough University is considered in chapter four, which gives a brief description of research activities at the University and the information services used to support them.

The central objective of an information service is to satisfy user needs, supplying the right type of information at the right time. Evaluation of the information service provided by the

External Relations Office was carried out through a questionnaire survey of researchers, covering information-seeking behaviour and opinions. Chapter five describes the survey methodology and the results obtained are presented in chapter six.

Chapter seven looks at the provision of research funding information at three other universities. Visits were made to these universities in order to obtain a comparison with activities at Loughborough. The effectiveness of information service provided by the External Relations Office and suggestions for the future development of this service are discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter 2 Policy in the United Kingdom concerning research in higher education

This chapter sets out the background to and objectives of research funding in UK higher education institutions.

21 Research and development

Research and development (R&D) is

the process by which new scientific and technological information is gathered and used, involving theoretical conjecture, observation, experiment, measurement and deduction.¹

This information gathering process is directed towards increasing national prosperity and improving the quality of life. The United Kingdom government funds research to contribute to: industrial and commercial competitiveness; food, resource and energy self-sufficiency; health and public well-being; national security; culture and national status.² Other bodies, including industry, charities and the European Union, finance research to meet their own objectives. These objectives are often similar to those of the government, as industrial research aims to benefit the economy and society generally and international agencies support corresponding goals at a wider level.

The government sees the central mission of higher education as the production of a highly qualified workforce.³ Support for research in higher education institutions is based on the view that “staff can teach effectively at the highest level only if they are engaged in research, scholarship or some other form of high-level professional activity.”⁴ The training and research expertise provided by universities meets the needs of many other sectors of the economy including industry. Once research centres are established in higher education institutions they can act as a focus for further support and attract funding from charitable bodies and international organisations.

22 Funding for research and development

Each year the UK spends approximately 2% of Gross Domestic Product on research and development, amounting to £13.75 billion in 1993.⁵ As indicated in the annual *Forward look of government funded science, engineering and technology*⁶ the proportion of this funded by the public sector is falling, largely due to reductions in spending on defence procurement and

nuclear energy. Private sector funding is slowly increasing and accounts for just over two-thirds of total R&D.

221 Funding of higher education institutions

Higher education institutions obtain research funding from both public and private bodies. In 1993 approximately £2.2 billion was spent on R&D in higher education. The majority of this, £1.5 billion, came from the UK government, the remainder was contributed by overseas and non-governmental sources.⁷ Some research projects are financed jointly by one or more funding bodies, such as the LINK scheme involving industry and the research councils.

222 Government support

Under the dual-support system most government funds for university research are allocated by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Education.⁸ The Department for Education provides money for the Higher Education Funding Councils (HEFCs). These councils give grants to institutions for teaching and research, primarily to support basic research and expenditure on staff and premises. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) finances the research councils whose support is directed at specific projects. Responsibility for the research councils was transferred from the Office of Science and Technology to the DTI in July 1995 in line with government objectives to enhance technological innovation and wealth creation.⁹ The remainder of this report considers government policy prior to this change; it is not yet clear how activities will be coordinated by the DTI, although it is expected to be in a similar vein.

223 Government strategy

The government's overall strategy for research and development is outlined in the Cabinet Office's annual *Forward look of government funded science, engineering and technology*¹⁰. This gives the research objectives, priorities and current projects of the government departments, research councils and funding councils. It also provides statistical data on the past and proposed funding allocations of these bodies. As the title suggests the emphasis is towards science and technology.

The major thrust of government policy is the harnessing of science, engineering and technology towards wealth creation, whilst at the same time ensuring that the strengths of the UK science and engineering base are

protected and that the research and development necessary to meet specific departmental needs continue to be provided.¹¹

The government is advised on research policy by the Council of Science and Technology (CST). The CST collates outside, independent opinions on research priorities, including the findings of the Technology Foresight Programme. The Technology Foresight Programme has been initiated by the government to “assemble a national portfolio of strategic research areas”.¹² The recently published report of the Technology Foresight steering group¹³ has assessed the needs of future markets and technologies and the research which is necessary to support them. Certain topics have been identified as research priorities. Government departments, research councils, HEFCs and industry are expected to consider how existing activities match up to Foresight findings and how new priorities can be incorporated into their respective programmes.¹⁴

23 UK bodies

23.1 Research councils

The research councils, the Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering are funded through the Office of Science and Technology (OST). Table 2.1 shows government funding allocations for research and development. Government funding priorities are reflected in the reorganisation of the research councils undertaken as a result of *Realising our potential*, the 1993 White Paper on science and technology.¹⁵ The Science and Engineering Research Council has been split into the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council. The Agricultural and Food Research Council has been modified into the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council. The mission of all six councils includes the “need to enhance the United Kingdom's industrial competitiveness and quality of life”.¹⁶ In addition to a full-time Chief Executive, each council also has a part-time Chairman from industry or commerce to bring experience from this sector and to represent the users of research.

The research councils are encouraged to allocate grants on a competitive basis to fund applied rather than basic research. Applied research is directed towards practical objectives, not carried out solely to acquire new knowledge. The government requires the research councils to define applied research areas in consultation with the ‘customers’ of research - industry and society in general. Basic research (experimental work undertaken without any

particular application or use in view) that falls within the 'fields of responsibility' of particular research councils will continue to be supported¹⁷ and multidisciplinary research is seen as increasingly important¹⁸. The Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council, unlike the other five councils, will focus primarily on basic research.

Table 2.1

Estimated government expenditure on research and development 1994-95

Government Department	Expenditure (£ million)
Office of Public Service and Science	23.9
Research Councils	
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council	141.8
Economic and Social Research Council	52.5
Medical Research Council	268.6
Natural Environment Research Council	146.8
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council	345.0
Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council	180.0
Pensions/Other	30.8
Higher Education Funding Councils	942.2
Civil Departments	937.1
Ministry of Defence	2,480.0
Total	5,608.2

Source: Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service and Science, Office of Science and Technology. *Forward look of government funded science, engineering and technology, volume 3: statistical supplement*, p. 19.

232 Higher Education Funding Councils

The Higher Education Funding Councils are the main sponsors of basic research in universities, although institutions are given flexibility to use funds to "local best effect".¹⁹ The intention is that this money is used to take work to a point where it is sufficiently defined to attract other sources of funding. The funding councils aim to promote excellence in research through selective distribution of public funds. To ensure funds are used to the best

effect there are close links between the HEFCs and the research councils. HEFCs are responsible for helping to secure an adequate supply of trained people and are encouraged to develop institutional and personal incentives to motivate staff.

Research funding is allocated to institutions under four headings. The majority (94%) is allotted according to the quality and amount of research as ranked by the research assessment exercise.²⁰ Some money is designated for the development of research potential in institutions not previously funded for research. In the academic year 1994-95 smaller amounts are set aside for rewarding institutions which are successful in securing contract research income and for encouraging generic research with external sponsors. In future years this money will all be directed at generic research in line with government policy to foster industrial collaboration.²¹ Funding councils are expected to adjust their funding allocation for different subject areas to reflect the findings of the Technology Foresight Programme and consider how funding formulae could be used to reward collaborative research, particularly with industry.²²

233 Office of Science and Technology

The role of the Office of Science and Technology is:

to act as the mechanism for developing and coordinating government policy on science and technology both nationally and internationally.²³

The OST is responsible for collaboration between government departments, links with other professional organisations such as the Royal Society and the management of international relationships. In order to develop a coordinated approach to science and technology and respond to the priorities of the Technology Foresight Programme the government is setting up a new working forum between the OST, Ministry of Defence, Department of Trade and Industry and the research councils.²⁴

234 Government departments

Government departments are expected to "align their own policy objectives with the general objective of using publicly-funded science and technology programmes to increase national prosperity and the quality of life."²⁵ Each department commissions research and development to meet statutory responsibilities and relevant policy objectives. Funds are usually distributed by competitive tender to industry, higher education institutions and

independent research establishments. Research concordats help ensure that schemes supported by government departments complement those initiated by the research councils.²⁶

Departmental policy objectives and research priorities are promoted in the annual *Forward look of government-funded science, engineering and technology*,²⁷ e.g. the Department of the Environment, in conjunction with industry, is supporting innovation in the environmental, energy efficiency and construction sectors.²⁸ Higher education institutions are able to participate in company-orientated schemes as sub-contractors or consultants. In response to the Technology Foresight Programme the Department of Trade and Industry is establishing a number of new initiatives in Foresight priority areas, e.g. the Information Society Initiative on multimedia services and the information superhighway.²⁹

Cooperation between defence and civil research is encouraged wherever possible to enhance the contribution of defence to the economy as a whole,³⁰ e.g. joint grants for work in higher education institutions related to defence are provided by the Defence Research Agency and the research councils.

2.3.5 Collaborative schemes

These schemes generally require industry to fund 50% of the research costs, with the government providing the other half through grants from the departments or research councils. The Office of Science and Technology budget proposals for 1995-96 and 1996-97 set aside increasing amounts for these initiatives, in particular the ROPA (Realising Our Potential Awards) and LINK schemes.³¹ ROPA awards provide researchers already working with industry on strategic/generic research with grants to carry out research in an area of their own choice. LINK programmes are jointly funded by the government and industry, bringing together companies and higher education institutions to work on pre-competitive research. The Technology Foresight steering group are recommending that LINK is "broadened to serve as an umbrella organisation to assist public sector and private sector partnership in areas related to Foresight".³² The government has set aside £40 million, to be matched by industry, for funding further collaborative schemes through a competitive Foresight Challenge.³³

23.6 Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering

The Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering are both independent, non-governmental academies concerned with the natural sciences and engineering respectively. Both bodies receive grant-in-aid from the Office of Science and Technology, which is used to encourage research, increase public understanding of science and promote international exchange of scientists.

The Royal Society gives highest priority to research appointments, supporting 240 research fellows during 1994-95.³⁴ Considerable amounts are allocated to international exchanges, particularly with the countries of the former Soviet Union during 1994-95.³⁵

The Royal Academy of Engineering plans to raise £5.3 million in 1994-95 in addition to its £2.2 million grant-in-aid. Some income comes from industry to sponsor joint Senior Research Fellowships and industrial placements. Like the Royal Society, the Academy also finances overseas exchanges. The two academies liaise with each other and the research councils to ensure best use of resources.

23.7 Research in the humanities and social sciences

Support for research in the social sciences comes from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the British Academy. In July 1995 responsibility for the ESRC was transferred to the Department of Trade and Industry, and there is some concern that the new arrangement does not make any specific provision for research that relates to non-economic objectives.³⁶

The British Academy administers various grants in the social sciences including readerships, fellowships and overseas exchanges.³⁷ Research in the humanities is now the responsibility of the recently established Humanities Research Board of the British Academy which has "come to act and be perceived as acting as a quasi-research council for the humanities."³⁸ The Academy is funded by the Department for Education, and made responsible for grants of nearly £23 million each year. Most money (£13.7 m) is spent on postgraduate studentships allocated through the HRB, but there is also funding for more advanced research.³⁹ The HRB mission is to enhance the quality of life through increasing the understanding of human culture, and to support the provision of highly qualified manpower.

Research in the humanities is nearly all 'basic' and the contribution it makes to UK competitiveness and/or wealth creation is not always straightforward.

24 Industry

Funding of higher education institutions by industry for research and teaching has grown from about £30 million to £120 million over the past decade.⁴⁰ Support from industry and commerce varies considerably between disciplines. In 1989 the aerospace, electronics and pharmaceutical industries accounted for approximately two-thirds of total spending on R&D by all manufacturing industries.⁴¹

Projects initiated by industry can usually be classified as applied research and often have a fixed, relatively short, time span. Companies undertake research to solve specific problems or to generate results which can be used directly. Some companies "actively promote their research interests and are very receptive to speculative enquiries".⁴² On the whole these are large companies, such as Alcan, Anglian Water, Cadbury and Shell, but small high technology industries are also keen to fund research.

Many companies collaborate with higher education institutions through the Department of Trade and Industry, particularly the LINK and Senior Academics in Industry schemes. Studentships and fellowships, where the costs are shared between the funding body and the industry concerned, are also supported by the research councils and the Royal Society.

25 Charitable bodies

There are a large number of charitable Trusts and Foundations which provide funds for research and related expenditure. They range from the large medical charities, which behave rather like research councils and allocate large sums of money, to small Trusts - often based on the legacy of one individual - which allocate a few hundred pounds.⁴³

Charities generally establish and publicise particular research priorities and funding conditions. Proposals are submitted by organisations or individuals and grants allocated to those which most closely satisfy the relevant criteria. Some charities focus on specific research topics while others concentrate on certain bodies or individuals, such as universities or postgraduate students. The government is encouraging charities (and industry) to take account of the research priorities highlighted by the Technology Foresight Programme.⁴⁴

The Wellcome Trust is one of the largest sponsors of scientific research. Since the sale of the Trust's shares in Wellcome plc to Glaxo, the Trust's income is set to increase to approximately £300 million per annum.⁴⁵ This sum is greater than the spending of the Medical Research Council, although it is unlikely that it will all be spent in the UK. Other significant funding providers are the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in the field of social research and the Leverhulme Trust - primarily for research fellowships and education. Due to their size, these major charities have most influence on the research objectives and targets of this sector.

2.6 European organisations

2.6.1 European Union

The driving force behind European Union (EU) research and development is the need to provide industry with a scientific base that will enable Europe to compete with Japan and the United States.⁴⁶ Research and development activities have been coordinated since 1984 through a number of Framework programmes, from which industrialists and academics compete for grants.

UK government policy aims to ensure maximum take-up of EU opportunities, particularly encouraging the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises. In order to prevent overlap between domestic and European programmes the government is keen to contribute to the formulation of EU policy. This involves identifying topics which are best done on an EU basis, (e.g. large nuclear fusion projects) at the same time maintaining the principle of subsidiarity and refraining from elevating all national projects to the European level.⁴⁷

The Office of Science and Technology coordinates government involvement in the EU Framework programmes. Other departments take the lead in specific sectors (e.g. the Department of Trade and Industry is responsible for the ESPRIT programme). The government has initiated a major programme to disseminate information and advice on the latest framework programme, Framework 4 (1994-1998), through the OST.⁴⁸

2.6.2 Framework programmes

Framework programmes are designed to contribute to the achievement of other Community objectives and to promote economic and social cohesion. The broad aims of Framework 4 are: to enhance the competitiveness of European industry; to improve the quality of life in Europe; and to promote the use of new technologies in society.⁴⁹ Most programmes are for pre-competitive research projects involving industry and research institutions in at least two member states.⁵⁰

The budget for Framework 4 is 12.3 billion Ecu (approximately £9.6 billion).⁵¹ Table 2.2 shows how this money is allocated. Most of the funds will be used to finance R&D programmes on a shared cost basis (the EU providing up to 50% of total costs), concentrating on information technology, the life sciences and technology. However, money is also set aside for the training and mobility of researchers, the dissemination of results and cooperation with third countries and international organisations.

The UK government expects to contribute £300 million to European Union R&D programmes in 1994-95.⁵² Under the third Framework programme 1990-94, the UK has received a proportionally greater share of the grants awarded than expected from its financial contribution.⁵³ The cost of financing EU research and development is considered against the budgets of the relevant UK government departments and in some cases spending on national schemes is reduced to compensate for European expenditure. A study carried out in 1992 calculated that, assuming a return equal to the UK's contribution, about 50% of the EU funds received represent a net increase in public expenditure on R&D.⁵⁴

Table 2.2

Funding allocations for the activities of the Framework 4 programme

Activity	Expenditure (billion Ecu)
Activity 1: Research, technological development and demonstration programmes	
Information technologies	1,932
Telematics	843
Communications technologies	630
Industrial and materials technologies	1,707
Measurement and testing	288
Environment and climate	852
Marine science and technology	228
Biotechnology	552
Biomedicine and health	336
Agriculture and fisheries	684
Non-nuclear energy	1,002
Nuclear safety	414
Controlled thermonuclear fusion	840
Transport	240
Socioeconomic research	138
Activity 2: Cooperation with non-member countries and international organisations	540
Activity 3: Dissemination and application of research findings	330
Activity 4: Stimulation of the training and mobility of researchers	744
Total	12,300

Source: Commission of the European Communities, Directorate-General XIII. *Community research and technological development policy*, 1994, p. 32

2.6.3 Other European support

Other European research programmes include COST (European Cooperation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research) and EUREKA, the European High Technology Programme. COST initiates the exchange of research results between nationally funded projects undertaken in 25 European countries. EUREKA provides support and advice through national bodies for collaborative projects, generally concentrating on research which has direct market application. These schemes are intended to run alongside, and link with, Framework 4 programmes (e.g. EUREKA projects may use basic research results from the framework programmes).

European Union structural funds are designed to reduce regional disparities across Europe. Investment is targeted at less well-off regions, primarily through public sector bodies including higher education institutions. Projects which "support research and development and training facilities to overcome skills and manpower shortages"⁵⁵ are among those receiving assistance.

Innovation and the exploitation and transfer of new technology between companies is the focus of EU programmes for business and industry. Some of the schemes, such as CRAFT (European Cooperative Research Action for Technology Programme) and IMPACT II (Information Market Policy Actions) can involve universities,⁵⁶ e.g. CRAFT helps SMEs without their own research facilities to pool their resources and commission research through other institutions.

European education and training programmes stress the importance of a skilled workforce and the benefits of partnerships across national boundaries. These programmes encourage the mobility and exchange of research workers between universities and the establishment of European university networks in particular disciplines. The new Socrates programme (1995-1999) covers staff and student mobility in higher education plus the exchange of information through study visits and networks.

The European Union provides a significant amount of development aid, principally to the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, Central and Eastern Europe and the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union (NIS). Experts in higher education

institutions can provide consultancy or technical assistance to these countries through schemes such as PHARE (Poland and Hungary Assistance for Economic Restructuring). Specific initiatives exist for joint research between the EU and Central and Eastern Europe and the NIS, including INTAS (International Association for the Promotion of Cooperation with Scientists in the New Independent States of the Soviet Union).⁵⁷

27 International agencies

UK government policy is to:

develop close mutually beneficial links with major scientific partners in Europe and across the world, on both a bilateral and multilateral basis where it is sensible and cost effective to do so.⁵⁸

Some projects are best carried out at an international level because they have global objectives, such as environmental initiatives, or because they require large and expensive facilities. The UK is involved with the follow-up from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Megascience Forum. This set out "to identify areas where scientific communities, and their governments, might agree to pool resources, divide specialised labour and develop joint programmes".⁵⁹

A number of areas are covered by UK government initiatives for international research collaboration, including attracting international facilities such as the new European Bioinformatics Institute in Cambridge. The Overseas Development Administration commissions research at higher education institutions concerning, or in cooperation with, developing countries. Links with particular countries include the agreement on future scientific and technological relations established between the UK and Japan in 1994. Exchange schemes are coordinated by the Royal Society, the British Academy and the British Council.

The British Council exists to promote an understanding of Britain and its potential as an international partner.⁶⁰ The Council is partly financed by the UK government and manages funds on behalf of the Overseas Development Administration, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the World Bank. Higher education institutions may obtain funds for collaborative research, travel grants to develop international links, and academic exchange schemes.

There are a number of organisations outside the UK which support research, although this may not be their primary purpose. The World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank finance economic and social development in less-developed countries. University researchers are needed to carry out feasibility studies and provide consultancy and training services for these projects.

NATO has set up a science programme to promote international scientific cooperation. This programme supports science fellowships, reciprocal visits between researchers in different countries, and study meetings to disseminate advanced knowledge. Activities may include researchers from some countries in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union which are designated as Cooperation Partners.⁶¹ In total, research income earned by universities from non-UK sources has increased in real terms by 20% between 1990-91 and 1993-94.⁶²

The next chapter reviews the types of information available regarding the funding bodies and their research schemes.

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Chapter 3 Information sources

3.1 Information provision

To make effective bids for funding researchers need a range of information. This is particularly true when trying to obtain funds from a source not previously applied to. Experience in dealing with an organisation's application procedures and familiarity with the selection criteria can confer an advantage when submitting project proposals.

This chapter will examine the information available concerning the funding bodies. Each type of organisation will be examined in turn, looking at the material produced by the body itself and the information disseminated by other organisations. Information services which cover several types of funding institution will be considered separately.

Most information will come directly from the funding body concerned. This includes the policy of the organisation, its general objectives and purpose. These details are important in deciding whether it is appropriate to apply for a grant and in drawing up proposals which target the priorities of the organisation. Some funding bodies may also distribute more detailed information explaining the criteria for specific awards and application procedures.

Other organisations connected in some way with funding bodies also provide information on funding opportunities and policy through their publications, e.g. UK government publications may touch upon the activities of several government departments and the research councils. The media is another source of current information and comment concerning research ventures.

Organisations with a specific remit to disseminate information on research funding include groups based in universities, consultants and bodies supported through subscription. The information produced ranges from detailed annual (or infrequent) publications covering all openings, to targeted news sheets highlighting recent opportunities in a certain area.

The External Relations Office (ERO) has an extensive selection of information on funding opportunities. The material obtained comes directly from the funding bodies and a number of information services. Materials are chosen to cover as many potential sources as possible while minimizing overlap. The majority of sources covered in this review are used by the

ERO and, taken as a whole, they provide a representative picture of the total information available in the research funding field.

32 General funding information

A small selection of materials covers the funding process in general. These materials advise institutions on suitable strategies for obtaining funds, covering the pros and cons of various methods, e.g. *The income generation handbook: a practical guide for educational institutions*.¹ Preston² suggests a method for carrying out an audit of the research expertise already available in an institution. Guides to information sources, although often focused on the funds available in one sector, are a useful starting point for developing a funding policy, e.g. *Finance from Europe*.³

33 UK sources

33.1 Research councils

The research priorities and current projects undertaken by the research councils are publicised in a number of forms; however, there is no current general guide to the activities of all the research councils. The councils each publish a corporate plan, an annual report and a number of newsletters. The corporate plan in particular includes long term and future strategies, e.g. the *Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) 1994 Corporate Plan*⁴ includes the NERC mission statement; a checklist of corporate objectives and how these are being met; an indication of foresight activities used to determine future priorities; details of collaboration with other funding bodies; past and proposed studentships/fellowships; and financial information. Some of this general information on research aims and activities is available through the World Wide Web as well as in hard copy.⁵

Newsletters are published on a more frequent basis, usually quarterly, and incorporate information about new schemes and calls for research proposals. The January 1995 issue of *EPSRC Newslines*,⁶ the journal of the new Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), gives details of the two bodies responsible for advising EPSRC on the needs of research users and research providers. Newsletters are also used to advertise other council publications such as EPSRC's *Shedding light on manufacturing management*⁷ which features past projects requiring industrial/academic collaboration. Different groups within EPSRC also publish their own occasional newsletters describing work in sectors such as

design and integrated production,⁸ or specific programmes such as the Innovative Manufacturing Initiative.⁹

The Registrar and some other members of the University are on research council mailing lists and are sent details of new research schemes. These letters outline the procedures and timescale for applications and are accompanied by the relevant forms. Annual handbooks on studentships and other schemes contain comprehensive regulations for all programmes. Several of the research councils also produce handouts or short guides on making applications, e.g. EPSRC's *Notes for guidance for use when completing a research proposal*.¹⁰

Research council activities are also included in a number of other publications. As the research councils were (until July 1995) funded by and responsible to the Office of Science and Technology, the mission statement and policy outline for each council has been published in the government's annual *Forward look of government funded science, engineering and technology*.¹¹ Schemes which involve all the councils and/or other government departments produce their own literature and are publicised through the collaborating bodies, e.g. press releases from the Office of Public Service and Science announce the extension of the Realising Our Potential Awards to all research councils.¹² The LINK collaborative scheme with industry produces its own newsletter including a current list of programmes, and guidelines for applications.¹³

3.3.2 Higher Education Funding Councils (HEFCs)

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) *Annual report*¹⁴ and introductory leaflet¹⁵ explains the council's priorities and funding objectives. The *Annual report*¹⁶ also outlines the methods used to allocate funds to each institution. The dual-support system (see section 2.2.2), on which the activities of the HEFCs are based, is briefly outlined in the *Forward look of government funded science, engineering and technology*¹⁷ and the HEFCE *Annual report*.¹⁸ The future role of this system and the HEFCs is discussed in government sponsored publications such as *Review of allocation, management and use of government expenditure on science and technology*¹⁹ and the specialist press for the education sector.

The *Annual report*²⁰ provides information on the total funds received by each university, allowing a broad comparison of the university's position. HEFCE newsletters²¹ keep institutions up to date with the requirements for obtaining support and proposed modifications to the research budget.

3.3.3 Government departments

The Office of Science and Technology (OST) has responsibility for coordinating the research and development activities of the government departments. This involves publishing information on government research policy in general, primarily through the *Forward look of government funded science, engineering and technology*²² and information leaflets on initiatives such as the Technology Foresight programme.²³ Individual departments are responsible for providing details of particular research projects and collaborative schemes, (see section 3.3.1).

The government requires each department to produce a mission statement on science and technology and define its particular aims for sponsoring research. This is published in the *Forward look of government funded science, engineering and technology*²⁴ along with details of the areas targeted and the bodies involved. The *Statistical supplement to the Forward look of government funded science, engineering and technology*²⁵ gives details of current research projects and expenditure on these schemes.

Information disseminated by the government departments varies considerably depending on the extent to which they are active in research. Some departments publish a guide to all their research activities with contact information. The Home Office *Research programme*²⁶ describes current projects and lists projects completed in the previous year with the external bodies involved. In contrast, the Department of the Environment (DOE) *Research Market*²⁷ concentrates on future research plans, including key goals for the next five to ten years.

Both the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the DOE distribute frequent newsletters incorporating relatively detailed information on their current research initiatives. These newsletters generally relate to one sector, e.g. *90s news*²⁸ covers the DTI's links with industry, and the DOE produces separate bulletins for environmental protection²⁹ and

countryside programmes.³⁰ Newsletters are a particularly important source of information on government policies and funding opportunities which tend to change quite rapidly.

Other departmental publications supply background information on schemes and lists of contacts within government and collaborative bodies, including the European Community. These publications include press releases, reports and guides, e.g.: the DOE produced an *Environment News Release*³¹ concerning new money for housing research; the DTI carried out a study on the performance of UK-based companies in innovation and research.³² The DTI also provides information through regional offices; the East Midlands office publishes a quarterly calendar of events,³³ including local meetings about national initiatives. Local service networks (NEARNET), supported by the DTI, are being established to promote the exchange of information and ideas between businesses, higher education institutions and other local organisations.

Current background information on the work of some government departments can be obtained through the government pages on the World Wide Web.³⁴ Data available include the objectives of the department, ministerial speeches and press releases on recent activities. The DTI supplies an extensive list of contacts for their different responsibilities.

Calls for proposals or expressions of interest in different research projects are often advertised in the national press, e.g. a call for tenders from the Department of Health and the National Health Service in *The Guardian*.³⁵ The media are also a source of unofficial information and comment on the research activities of the government departments. The *Financial Times* report,³⁶ revealing that DTI spending is at its lowest level for a decade, is typical of the information supplied by the news media and journals.

3.3.4 Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering

These bodies both use one or more booklets to provide standard information on the funds available, the objectives of various schemes and the application process.³⁷ Newsletters³⁸ are also published supplying wider information on the academies' activities, such as cooperation between the Royal Society and equivalent organisations in Europe. Loose sheets are used to detail particular opportunities such as the Royal Society Leverhulme Trust Senior Research Fellowships.³⁹

The Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering are funded through the Office of Science and Technology. This means their objectives and priorities are included in the annual *Forward look of government funded science, engineering and technology*.⁴⁰ The media publishes budget allocations and other information relating to the OST and its dependent bodies.⁴¹

33.5 Research in the humanities and social sciences: British Academy

The British Academy publishes a booklet⁴² outlining the types of grants available and disciplines covered. Several leaflets provide details of the operations of the newly established Humanities Research Board (HRB) of the British Academy. These mention the Board's responsibility to "disseminate information about its schemes as widely and as effectively as possible".⁴³ The HRB newsletter⁴⁴ includes deadlines for applications, and background information on the number of applications and awards made in the preceding year.

34 Industry

Research projects which involve collaboration with industry are usually developed from individual contacts between the departments and companies concerned. Personal communications (by letter, e-mail, or telephone) are the main form of information exchange. This information generally relates to specific projects or research interests in certain areas. A few companies such as British Telecom⁴⁵ produce leaflets publicising their research interests. *The industry file*⁴⁶ list of companies which promote their research interests gives details of the type of collaborative links considered and the research contact to approach with proposals.

Large companies offering postgraduate studentships often advertise in the national press. The press also provide background information on the current funding situation, e.g. the *Financial Times* article looking at the increasing number of companies using external sources for research and development.⁴⁷ Professional and academic journals present research reports, enabling academics and industrialists to determine who has expertise in a particular area.

The Department of Trade and Industry helps companies establish links with academic institutions, particularly at a regional level. Government departments, the research councils and other funding bodies distribute details of schemes requiring industrial collaboration.

3.5 Charitable bodies

Most charities publish short information sheets giving details of their schemes and funding criteria. Advertisements of particular funding opportunities are published in the educational press, e.g. the *Times Higher Education Supplement* has carried details of awards offered by the Nuffield Foundation.⁴⁸ The press also covers the general activities of charities, such as the recent sale of the Wellcome Trust's shares to Glaxo.⁴⁹

Charities which are responsible for several different schemes, such as the Fulbright Commission and the Leverhulme Trust, produce more complete guides to their initiatives.^{50,51} These guides cover funding priorities, application procedures and sometimes grants allocated in previous years. Annual reports and magazines, published by some bodies, supply similar information, e.g. *Search*,⁵² the quarterly magazine of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, gives a general overview of the Foundation's work, including reviews of various projects.

The activities of charitable bodies are very diverse and there are few publications which provide an overview of their schemes. The *Directory of grant-making trusts*,⁵³ published by the Charities Aid Foundation, is the most comprehensive guide. This gives brief details of the charity itself, the grants available and eligibility criteria. The Research Services Unit at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne has produced a short article giving general advice on applying to charities.⁵⁴

3.6 European Union

3.6.1 General Information

As Krickau-Richter and Von Schwerin point out, in the European field as in other funding areas, "the key to success is the right information at the right time".⁵⁵ The Commission has been criticised under previous R&D programmes, when it was felt those not 'in the know' were failing to achieve funding. In response there have been considerable efforts to simplify the information on Framework 4 programmes and make it more widely available.

"At European Community (EC) level, responsibility for initiating the process whereby information is supplied by the EC to would-be applicants rests with the applicants and not with the EC authorities".⁵⁶ In order to find out what information is available and request specific programme information packs it can be necessary to consult the catalogue of publications issued by the Office of Official Publications.⁵⁷

There are a number of publications which outline the policy and basic structure of European Union (EU) research and development programmes. The Commission's booklet, *Community research and technological development policy*,⁵⁸ gives the background to the Framework 4 programme, including its passage through the European Parliament and Council and a brief summary of the different research areas. Similar booklets, with details of the application process, are published by the UK Office of Science and Technology.⁵⁹ Other publications provide details of: education, training and research programmes;⁶⁰ of all sources of finance from Europe;⁶¹ or of programmes suitable for specific applicants, e.g. academic researchers.⁶²

General advice and tactics for applying to the EU are included in many of the publications on the Framework 4 programme. One consultancy service has produced a guide to forming European partnerships. This publication aims

to bring together... information on identifying potential partners, advice on how to initiate partnerships for the purpose of submitting proposals under Framework 4 and a list of over 4000 potential partners in all Member States of the European Union, split by sector and country.⁶³

3.6.2 Commission publications

The *Official Journal of the European Communities*⁶⁴ publishes information relating to research programmes on a daily basis. This is available in paper or microfiche versions, on CD-ROM, or online via CELEX. Series L, *Legislation*, publishes the final approved versions and contents of the research programmes; Series C, *Information and news*, contains calls for proposals and expressions of interest, and the *Supplement*, S, has invitations to tender for public works and supply contracts. Information and consultancy services summarize the relevant information obtained from the *Official Journal of the European Communities*.⁶⁵

Details of a specific research programme can be obtained by registering an expression of interest with the appropriate programme manager. This person provides information on the current progress of the programme, early warning of calls for proposals, copies of newsletters and a regular list of others who have expressed interest in the programmes. Some of the Directorates-General (DG) also produce newsletters giving information on current developments, conferences and publications in their field, e.g. DG XIII's *Innovation and Technology Transfer*,⁶⁶ a bi-monthly magazine covering R&D with an emphasis on technology transfer.

Information concerning specific projects can also be obtained through the national offices of the Commission. The remit of these offices includes providing a public information service, giving advice on individual research schemes and providing copies of relevant publications. Government departments are responsible for links with EU programmes in their field and will assist potential applicants, e.g. industrial research programmes are coordinated by the Department of Trade and Industry.

At a regional level, European Documentation Centres provide access to the *Official Journal of the European Communities*⁶⁷ and other publications on the workings of the Commission. This provision includes reports on the Community's activities such as the monthly *Bulletin of the European Communities*⁶⁸ giving an indication of policy developments in all areas and statistics on past initiatives. European Information Centres and regional offices of the DTI offer advice primarily to industry, but can be useful sources of information for establishing collaborative projects.

3.6.3 Consultancy services

Consultancy services use a number of different methods to supply information including: visits to institutions or attendance at conferences/information days; assistance with the preparation of proposals; advance information and updates on current programmes. UKRHEEO, the UK Research and Higher Education European Office, is a Brussels-based organisation established to provide the research councils, the British Council and subscribing universities with information about European programmes in research, education and training. It disseminates current information through an e-mail bulletin⁶⁹ (available to all members of subscribing institutions) sent out once or twice a week. This is complemented by a monthly

printed bulletin⁷⁰ looking at recent activities in the Commission and giving factual information on current programmes. Annual visits to subscribing institutions are used to present information about new programmes and procedures and give researchers a chance to ask questions.⁷¹ The Brussels office also deals with requests for specific information and holds information days.

Other consultancy services also produce regular publications in order to disseminate information quickly. EEDS, European Economic Development Services, uses news sheets (sent by fax) and e-mail, to supply customers with information about the latest developments in the Commission a couple of times each week. These news sheets cover calls for proposals and deadlines for tenders, and provide a contact in the Commission from which further information can be obtained. The service also produces a monthly checklist⁷² of the current status of all programmes, including proposal deadlines and dates for the next round of applications.

The *EC Information Service*⁷³, put together at Coventry University, is a monthly publication incorporating copies of the Community Documents (Com-docs), programme information packs, application forms and information from the *Official Journal of the European Communities*⁷⁴ and the CORDIS database⁷⁵. In addition to this bulletin, the Service publishes a number of documents and holds occasional seminars on European Commission opportunities such as the *Socrates* education and training programme.

The media and publications of some of the consultancy services supply critical rather than factual information on EU programmes, e.g. an article in *The Guardian*⁷⁶ comments on the additionality and complementarity of programmes, asking whether they do bring benefits to the UK.

3.6.4 Databases

The Commission offers free access to more than twenty online databases in all community languages. Since the launch of *I'm Europe* in 1994, many of these can be accessed through the European Commission Host Organisation's (ECHO) World Wide Web server.⁷⁷ The databases cover four main areas: user guidance, Community R&D, industry and economy, and the language industry. Information available includes *I'm guide*, a directory of electronic

products and information sources available in Europe, and general material about the European Union, and the Framework 4 Programme.

CORDIS, the Community Research and Development Information Service,⁷⁸ is the main focus for information relating to research and development. It consists of ten RTD (Research, Training and Development) databases. *RTD News* is updated daily, providing all the latest news on calls for proposals, tenders, events and publications. Further details of individual programmes and projects are held in *RTD Programmes* and *RTD Projects*. Together these databases also provide bibliographic details of publications, results of past research projects and contacts for finding partners for collaborative projects. Schemes outside the Framework programmes, e.g. EUREKA,⁷⁹ have their own databases, which can be accessed through ECHO.

3.7 International sources

Information relating to international opportunities is generally supplied by the funding institutions themselves. The British Council supplies the widest range of information, covering its own activities and the programmes it manages on behalf of the Overseas Development Administration and other bodies. The Council's *Annual Report*⁸⁰ and information leaflet⁸¹ outline the main activities and objectives. Separate information sheets give details of the grants available in specific areas.

Other institutions, including the World Bank and NATO, publish leaflets^{82,83} explaining the role of the organisation and introducing current programmes. The Inter-American Development Bank produces a more comprehensive guide for consultants,⁸⁴ giving details of the departments within the bank which can be contacted for information on various schemes.

International funding opportunities offered through the European Union are publicised in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*,⁸⁵ e.g. invitations for expressions of interest from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Schemes established between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries are described in *The Courier* magazine.⁸⁶ This magazine includes a summary of the status of current projects as well as features on completed schemes.

Background information on international organisations is available from the national press. This can show the funding position of organisations, e.g. the reduced finances of the British Council.⁸⁷

3.8 Information services

These services make available information on a range of funding schemes, either in printed form or through more extensive consultancy provision.

3.8.1 *Research Fortnight*⁸⁸

This bi-weekly journal covers research opportunities and programmes from the research councils, the funding councils, government departments, companies, the European Union, NATO and charities. Articles on the strategy and politics of funding opportunities and commentary on research policy form the main part of the journal. An insert provides factual information on research schemes and a summary of deadlines over the next three months. Some items from the journal can also be sent to subscribers by e-mail.

3.8.2 *SPIN Science Policy Information News*⁸⁹

This is a short news sheet published weekly, summarizing news which is relevant to bio-medical science policy. It provides the title and a short abstract of news items published in the *Financial Times*, *New Scientist*, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, and *The Lancet*. The abstracts can also be searched using *Wellcome Wisdom*, the Wellcome Information Service database on medicine.⁹⁰

3.8.3 NEFIS National Education Funding Information Service

This service publishes *NEFIS Deadlines*,⁹¹ a three month rolling diary of deadlines and events relating to government organisations, the European Commission, and 500 companies and charitable trusts. The monthly diary consists of brief items outlining funding opportunities, with a few longer articles on new initiatives such as the European Commission's *Leonardo da Vinci* vocational training programme. A weekly fax service publicises recent research news and activities with short deadlines. Both the diary and the fax service contain follow-up references for further information. NEFIS also operates a telephone helpline for subscribers' queries about funding schemes.

3.8.4 REFUND⁹²

The University of Newcastle upon Tyne produces a monthly *Research Funds Information Newsletter (REFUND)* which is available to other universities and research organisations on subscription. It covers new initiatives from the research councils, government departments, the European Union, major charities, industry and other sources. The newsletter provides basic details of opportunities with contacts for further information, available either from the University of Newcastle upon Tyne or the funding bodies. E-mail is used to supply copies of the newsletter and occasional mailings of information, with short deadlines due before the next newsletter.

The Newcastle office also produces special bulletins summarising the funds available for a particular type of research activity, e.g. funds for academic/industrial research collaboration.⁹³ These bulletins include comments about the different research schemes as well as factual information.

The next chapter outlines externally funded research activities at Loughborough University and the way the External Relations Office uses the information sources described above to distribute information to researchers.

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Chapter 4 Research and Information provision at Loughborough University

This chapter considers research activities at Loughborough, placing the University's research objectives and mission in the context of United Kingdom research policy. Obtaining information to support externally funded research is one of the responsibilities of the External Relations Office, and this chapter will include an outline of the information service provided by this Office.

4.1 External research at Loughborough

4.1.1 Research Income

Direct government support for research at the University comes from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The HEFCE grant for 1994-95 totals £29,779,000, of which £8,408,000 is allocated to research, the remainder going mainly to teaching.¹ At a national level 20% of total funding goes to research. At Loughborough the proportion of the University's grant devoted to research is higher, nearly 30%. Loughborough's allocations will remain broadly the same for the 1995-96 academic year.²

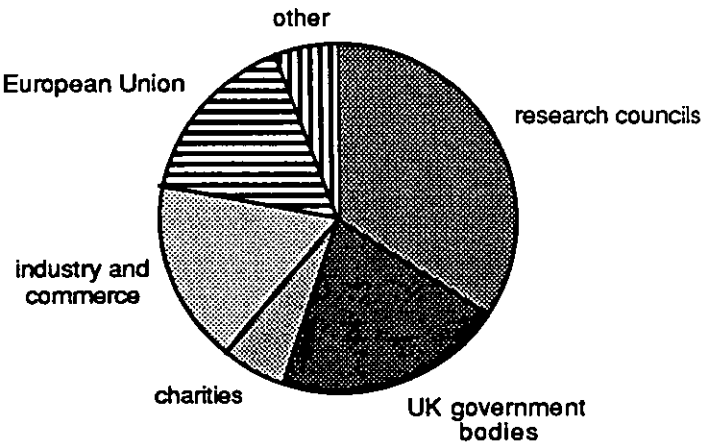
An increasing proportion of Loughborough's research income comes from other funding bodies. The *University Accounts* for 1993-94 show that £16,728,000 was obtained from various sources, nearly double the research grant from the HEFCE. This figure reaches £18,900,000 when consultancy income administered through Loughborough Consultants Limited is included, in comparison with £16,790,000 in 1992-93. Table 4.1 shows the amounts received from the different funding bodies in 1993-94 and Figure 4.1 demonstrates the proportions obtained from outside bodies. Over half the income comes from the government, the research councils and other government bodies. Industry, charities and the European Union account for most of the remainder. Funding from the research councils and charitable bodies has particularly increased over the period 1991-92 to 1993-94. European support has been a significant and gradually growing source of support since 1988-89, when certain departments started to seek funds in this area.

Table 4.1
External support for research at Loughborough University

Funding body	Research income 1993-94 (£)
Research councils	5,770,000
UK government bodies	3,485,000
Charitable bodies	1,006,000
Industry and commerce	2,802,000
European Union	2,710,000
Other	955,000
Total	16,728,000

Source: Loughborough University of Technology. *University Accounts 1993-94*, 1994, p. 34-5

Figure 4.1
External research income 1993-94



4.1.2 University objectives

In June 1995 the University put together a new strategic plan, considering the mission and objectives of the University for the period up to 1998-99.³ The University's overall research objectives are to foster high quality research through the work of interdisciplinary research teams and individual researchers. Improving the ratings given to the University in the 1996 HEFCE Research Assessment Exercise has been made a priority in order to maintain funding council support.⁴ The intention to double research income received from non-HEFCE sources within the next 10 years reflects the significance of this form of support.⁵

The University's plans emphasize basic and strategic research, building on current collaboration with industry and commerce. This is in line with government priorities that universities work closely with research users to support wealth creation and enhance the quality of life. The present strength of Loughborough's involvement with industry is indicated by its position among the top ten recipients of generic research funding* from the HEFCE⁶ and the recent award of the Queen's Anniversary prize for partnership with the UK aerospace industry.

The University also aims to develop its international standing and exert more influence at a European level. It intends to "establish one or more major collaborative international links in both teaching and research with prestigious universities in continental Europe."⁷ In addition to collaborative links, staff are encouraged to consider European aspects of their research subjects and/or pursue research concerning Europe.

Efforts to achieve University research objectives are the responsibility of individual departments. School directorates evaluate and coordinate departmental aims in order to develop a school-wide strategy. Each School has an Associate Dean for Research to oversee research activities and respond to multidisciplinary initiatives such as the recent findings of the Technology Foresight Programme. The strategic plan proposes to strengthen research across the University "by encouraging a strong research presence in every department and by concentrating research resources in areas where excellence exists or where there is potential for development."⁸

* Generic research funding is allocated according to an institution's ability to attract external sponsors and contract research income.

The departments target different research openings according to their areas of expertise and the disciplines studied, e.g. the engineering departments receive considerable support from the research councils and industry, while the Department of Social Sciences obtains most of its finance from government and other public bodies. Several departments have established research institutes which concentrate on research and support for postgraduate programmes, e.g. the Engineering Design Institute.⁹ The School of Engineering are in the process of appointing an Engineering School European Project Developer to assist the School in raising funds from European programmes.¹⁰

42 The role of the funding information service within the External Relations Office

42.1 The External Relations Office

The External Relations Office (ERO) furthers the University's research strategy by helping staff to obtain external research funding. The University Research Committee and individual departments are responsible for obtaining research grants from the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The incoming Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, Professor Clyde Williams, is keen to use the ERO's expertise and contacts to develop collaborative research initiatives.¹¹

The objective of the ERO is to support the University by providing up-to-date and comprehensive information on external funding sources. The Office has a pro-active role, collecting information received in the University, then disseminating this information regularly to staff and encouraging them to take up the opportunities available. The ERO also collaborates with the Finance Office in the administration of research funding applications.

42.2 The Funding Information Bulletin

Information is distributed through a *Funding Information Bulletin (FIB)* sent to 175 members of staff throughout the University, both academics and senior management. A copy of this bulletin is also placed on the Campus-Wide Information Network allowing any member of staff access to the material. The *FIB* is produced approximately three times a month, giving brief details of all types of funding opportunities. The ERO acts as an enquiry point for further information on these opportunities and advises staff on seeking the most appropriate funding sources for a particular project.

Although the ERO holds details of the full range of funding bodies, there is particular emphasis on information from the European Union and other bodies which are relevant to more than one discipline. Contacts with the research councils and industry are primarily the responsibility of the appropriate department, although, as the activities of the research councils have changed, the ERO is increasingly providing details of programmes such as the Innovative Manufacturing Initiative and the Realising Our Potential Awards.

Information obtained from the funding bodies, discussed in the previous chapter, is used by the ERO in a number of ways. The *Funding Information Bulletin* consists of brief details of present opportunities and calls for proposals, with closing dates and sources for application forms, taken from the literature produced by the funding bodies. The ERO encourages researchers to make direct contact with the funding bodies where possible, but also keeps copies of guides for applicants etc. for consultation. The editorial and a short section of the *FIB* is devoted to news and policy about research in general, including selected material from *Research Fortnight*.¹² This section also includes summaries of the latest government initiatives, such as the Technology Foresight Programme and the recent White Paper on *Competitiveness: forging ahead*.¹³

The *FIB* includes details of relevant newsletters and other publications allowing staff to locate background information about organisations and their future funding priorities. The ERO maintains file copies of these materials and information packages in order to answer queries. The Office also holds some information on the research activities of different departments and records previous enquiries. This enables information on specific opportunities, particularly those with short deadlines, to be sent directly to the researchers concerned. Material disseminated in this way includes newspaper advertisements for research grants applicable to one particular department or research group.

4.2.3 Other services

Information held by the ERO can also be used to advise staff preparing proposals for research funding,¹⁴ e.g. some publications incorporate selection criteria and funding objectives which help proposers target their application. The ERO may know of researchers within the University who have previously applied to a certain funding body and who can

share their expertise. Using the information obtained from the funding bodies and their knowledge of research funding policy, the ERO runs occasional seminars and presentations for groups of academic staff and departments. These have included a Staff Training and Development Session on External Funding¹⁵ and a briefing on the European Commission's (EC) Framework 4 programme.¹⁶ The Framework 4 briefing covered the advantages and disadvantages of EC programmes and included inside information on European activities from the European Economic Development Services (EEDS) consultant who works with the University.

The consultancy services used by the ERO provide advance warning of new programmes at a European level and give guidance on EC policies and procedures in general. These services also process information from the *Official Journal of the European Communities*¹⁷ and other European documents, allowing the ERO to select the information most relevant to the University. Through the UK Research and Higher Education European Office, researchers can be put in contact with officials in the European Commission who can give personal advice on funding applications.¹⁸ Staff at the ERO and the EEDS consultant also assist academics with proposal preparation. Access to the CORDIS database¹⁹ enables the ERO to select potential partners for European programmes.

The next chapter describes the methods used to evaluate the information service provided by the External Relations Office.

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Chapter 5 Survey methodology

5.1 Objectives

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the acquisition and dissemination of research funding information by the External Relations Office at Loughborough University, and to set this within the context of research funding in the UK in general and at selected other universities in particular. This chapter describes the methods used to perform this evaluation.

It was originally intended to carry out case studies of funding information provision within four departments of the University. Interviews with departmental research coordinators would have been used to examine present information-seeking strategies and discuss the future development of the ERO's services. However, it was decided that it was not feasible to ask research coordinators for the factual information about all externally funded projects in the department required to back up these interviews. The results of the study have since shown that many departments do not have a research coordinator with responsibility for external funding and that not all departments compile a list of research projects. After discussion with a member of staff involved in obtaining research funding information in the Department of Information and Library Studies, it was decided to send a questionnaire to a greater number of individual researchers, rather than limit the study to research coordinators.

5.2 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was designed to obtain details of the broad pattern of funding information provision in relation to the activities of the External Relations Office. It was beyond the scope of this study to undertake an exhaustive survey of research activities at the University which could be subject to statistical analysis. Questions were drawn up in consultation with staff at the ERO and discussed with academic staff in the Department of Information and Library Studies. Questionnaires had to be distributed before the end of term, which did not provide enough time to carry out a pilot study.

Questionnaires were sent through the internal mail service to four researchers in each department: two who were on the mailing list for the *Funding Information Bulletin (FIB)* produced by the ERO, and two who did not receive this bulletin. In total, 99 questionnaires

were distributed - in one department there is only one member of staff who receives the *FIB*, (see Appendix 1 for a list of departments and Schools). Those surveyed were assured of confidentiality, although the name and department of each respondent were recorded in case it was necessary to follow up some of the issues raised in the questionnaire.

Recipients of the *Funding Information Bulletin* chosen to receive the questionnaire were selected from the *FIB* mailing list and included a number of Heads of Department. It was decided to send the other half of the questionnaires to members of staff involved in externally funded research, as they would have reason to use the ERO's services and would be in a position to comment on their value. The list of externally funded projects compiled by the Finance Office was used to obtain the names of staff who have secured external funding.^{1,2} Efforts were made to select a range of researchers, not just senior staff and research coordinators. Researchers were selected from different departmental research groups where possible, using information from the postgraduate prospectus.³

The questionnaire (Appendix 2) surveyed researchers' individual involvement in external research using 16 multi-part questions. The topics covered were introduced by closed questions asking for factual information. Each closed question was followed by an open question asking for further details or inviting comment on the issue raised. Tables were used for some questions (e.g. question 5) prompting researchers to consider a number of variables and allowing them quickly to tick the relevant boxes.

The main objective of the questionnaire was to examine the type of funding information required by individuals and the strategies used to obtain this information. Respondents were asked to consider both the information services offered by the External Relations Office and other forms of information provision. A more detailed version of question 13 (Appendix 3) concerning the value of the *Funding Information Bulletin* was sent to those who receive this bulletin. Specific questions about European Commission programmes were included because the ERO places particular emphasis on obtaining information about European opportunities. The final part of the questionnaire was designed to allow researchers to express their opinions about the possible development of services offered by the ERO.

53 Analysis

Tabulation of questionnaire returns allowed comparison of the responses given by recipients and non-recipients of the *Funding Information Bulletin*. For some questions, particularly those relating to departmental structures, responses from the same department were grouped together. Results were also sorted in order to consider differences between the Schools. The next chapter summarizes the responses to each question.

In order to obtain a comparison with the information activities carried out by the ERO, an approach was made to the equivalent offices at four other local universities. Staff at two of these, Leicester and Nottingham, were willing to participate in an informal interview describing their activities. A visit was also made to the University of Newcastle upon Tyne where the Research Services Unit produces an information bulletin which is distributed to other universities. The activities of these universities are described in chapter 7. Chapter 8 discusses the main issues raised by the questionnaire survey in the context of information provision at other universities.

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Chapter 6 Survey results

6.1 Survey responses

This chapter gives details of the questionnaire survey results. Questionnaires were sent to four researchers in each of the University's 25 departments. The overall response rate was 57%, and returns were received from all but one department. There was little difference in the response rate between recipients of the *Funding Information Bulletin* (55%) and those who did not receive this bulletin (58%).

At the end of the questionnaire respondents were asked whether they would answer further questions if it proved necessary to follow-up some issues. Many respondents expressed their willingness to receive more questions, but time constraints did not allow responses to be taken further.

A considerable number of researchers omitted to respond to one or more questions. Blank returns for open questions suggest researchers were unable or unwilling to spend time providing the details requested. For closed questions, the majority of blank returns probably indicate negative responses. Blank returns were recorded in a separate category for all questions. The category 'not applicable' was also used when responses to previous questions showed that further enquiry was not relevant or appropriate.

6.2 Responses for each question

6.2.1 Question 1: The position of respondents within their department

Nearly one third of respondents described themselves as research coordinators (Figure 6.1), although there was no standard definition for a research coordinator or a research committee across the University. Individual respondents interpreted these terms in a variety of ways, reflecting the differences in departmental administration within the University. Some staff noted that they were part of a research team or research group rather than a research committee.

6.2.2 Question 2: Departmental responsibility

Overall, 40% of the departments identified members of staff who have responsibility for obtaining information about external research opportunities (Figure 6.2b). The person with

Figure 6.1
The position of respondents within their department

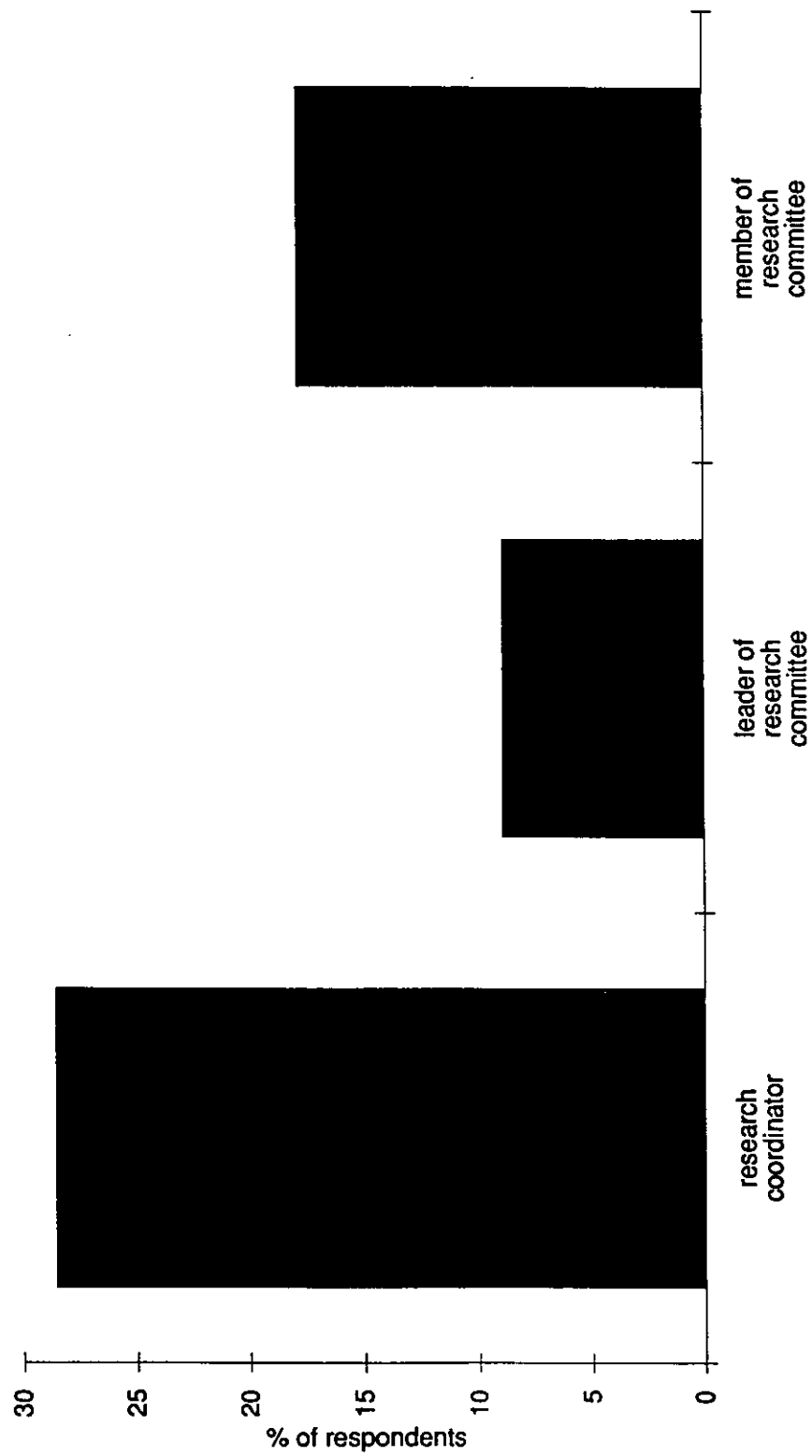


Figure 6.2a

Departmental responsibilities
Does any member of the department have responsibility for obtaining information about external research opportunities?

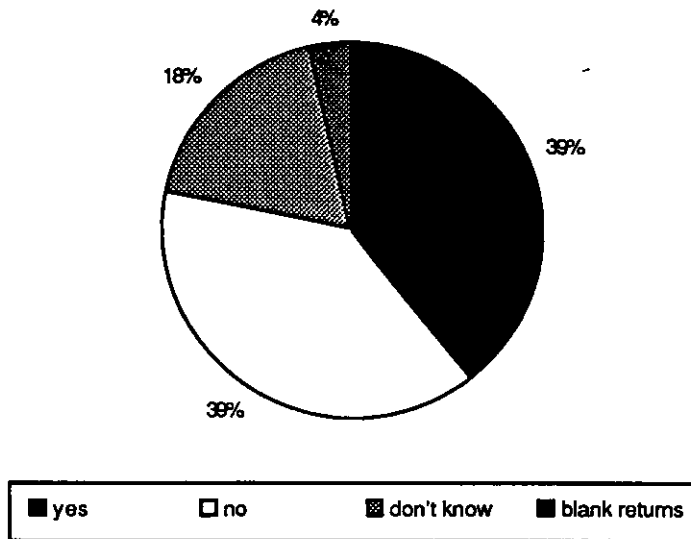
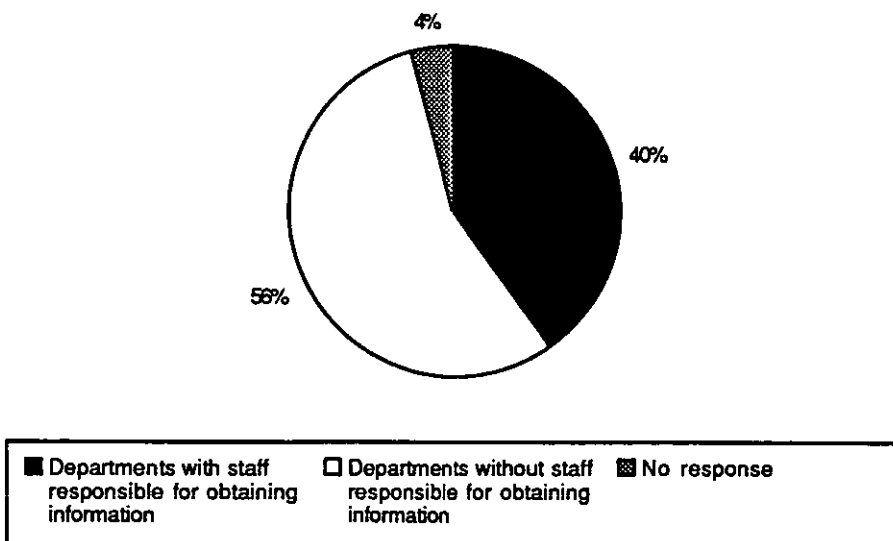


Figure 6.2b

The proportion of departments where one or more members of staff has responsibility for obtaining information about external research opportunities



this role was not necessarily a research coordinator. In many cases respondents who identified themselves as a research coordinator did not consider this their responsibility. One respondent remarked that the title of research coordinator related to his duties concerning postgraduate students rather than external funding opportunities. In two departments research coordinators stated that they did not have responsibility for obtaining information about external research opportunities, but were viewed by other respondents from the same department as carrying out this activity.

Departments where no members of staff have specific responsibility for obtaining funding information are concentrated in the School of Engineering. Some respondents commented that gathering information about external funding opportunities is the duty of all (senior) staff. A significant percentage of respondents (18%) felt unable to say whether or not any member of their department has responsibility for obtaining information concerning external research (Figure 6.2a). Only one department mentioned that administrative/secretarial staff undertake this activity.

6.2.3 Question 3: European responsibilities

This question produced very diverse responses (Figure 6.3a), with little agreement between members of the same department. In fifteen departments one or more respondents identified particular members of staff with some responsibility for European programmes (Figure 6.3b). Two-thirds of these are involved in the teaching programmes, i.e. Erasmus and/or Socrates, and the remainder did not specify. In some cases, European responsibilities are included in the duties of research coordinator.

6.2.4 Question 4: Externally funded research

Most respondents (82%) have been involved in externally funded research projects. As the questionnaire was targeted at those likely to be undertaking external research, this response does not provide a true picture of the extent of research activity in the University. There were no obvious differences in the amount or type of research carried out between those who receive the *Funding Information Bulletin* and those who do not. The pattern of externally funded research across the University described by respondents corresponds with the list of externally funded contracts maintained by the Finance Office.¹

Figure 6.3a

European responsibilities
Does any member of the department have responsibility for European contacts in research or teaching?

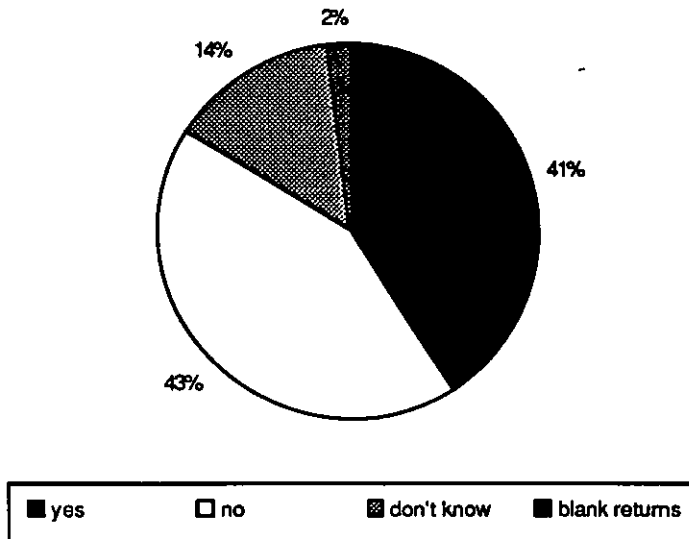
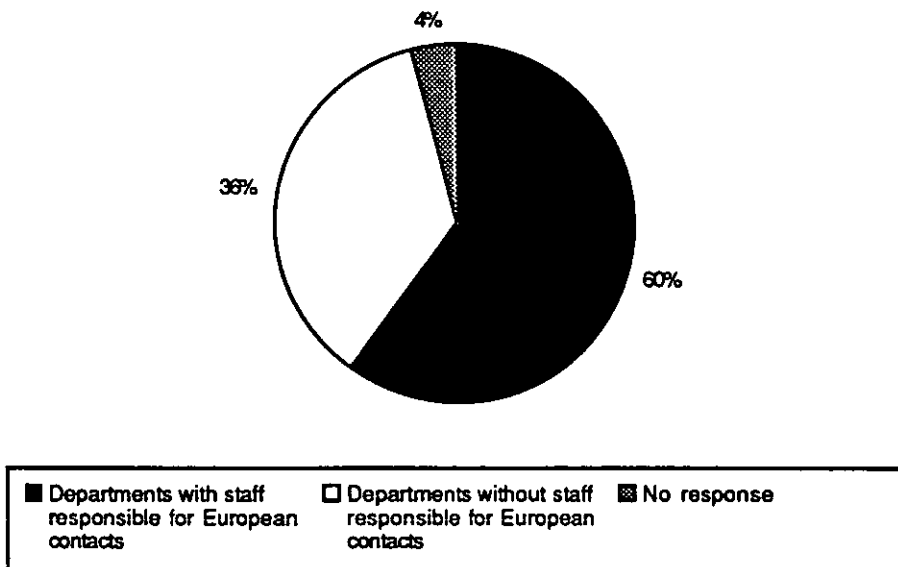


Figure 6.3b

The proportion of departments where one or more members of staff has responsibility for European contacts in research or teaching



Questionnaire returns suggest that the research councils and the European Union support the greatest number of research projects in the University: 45% of respondents were involved in research council or European Commission schemes, 23% were involved in both. The research councils are also the most significant sponsors of research in the University in monetary terms.² European Union grants appear to be smaller, possibly due to the collaborative nature and shared cost aspect of many programmes.

Funding received from the research councils is directed at science and technology, primarily in the Schools of Engineering and Pure and Applied Science, but also in the School of Human and Environmental Studies. Projects involving industry and collaboration between research councils and government departments are also concentrated in these three Schools. Each of the departments in the Schools of Engineering and Pure and Applied Science receive some support from the European Commission, along with several departments in the other two Schools. Departments in the Schools of Education and Humanities and Human and Environmental Studies are the main beneficiaries of funds from charitable bodies and other sources, including government agencies.

One in six respondents has not been involved in externally funded research during the last two years. More than two-thirds of this group of respondents would like to be supported by outside funding bodies. Two researchers who were unsure about this type of support are in the English and Drama department which currently has no external contracts. Staff in the School of Education and Humanities were least likely to have external research contracts.

6.2.5 Question 5: Sources of information

In general, staff received information from a wider range of funding sources than the bodies for whom they are currently undertaking research. Question 4 showed that 45% of respondents were undertaking research supported by the research councils or the European Commission, while data from question 5 indicates that over 80% of staff received information from one or other of these funding bodies, 75% from both.

The most popular ways of obtaining information about all types of funding bodies are directly from the body concerned and from elsewhere in the University (Table 6.1). For most funding bodies over half the researchers who receive information do so by one or both of these

Table 6.1
Information received by respondents from the funding bodies

Question 5. Do you receive details of research opportunities from any of the following funding bodies?
Please indicate who supplies this information (number of respondents)

	Direct from funding body	From other members of the department	From elsewhere in the University	From the press	Other	Unspecified
Research councils	32	20	20	8	0	2
Government departments	17	10	15	5	1	1
European Commission	20	10	31	1	3	1
Charitable bodies	12	5	9	4	1	0
Industry	10	6	8	2	2	1
International agencies	7	2	7	3	1	0

methods. A large proportion of staff (43%) accessed information about the research councils through other members of the department in addition to the two methods mentioned above. Information about the European Commission is the only topic on which more researchers obtained details from elsewhere in the University (63%), rather than directly (41%). Information on the European Commission (EC) is obtained from elsewhere in the University by 92% of the recipients of the *Funding Information Bulletin* (FIB) and only 33% of other staff. A few staff also received details of EC schemes through the UK Research and Higher Education European Office's e-mail service.

Information on government department opportunities was consulted by about half the staff surveyed. Fewer staff obtain information about other bodies: details relating to charitable bodies and industry were both received by approximately one third of staff; information about international agencies by a quarter.

Recipients of the *Funding Information Bulletin* acquire information from a wider range of sources than non-recipients. Those receiving the FIB obtained information from a median of four different types of funding bodies (research councils, government departments etc.) in comparison with a median of three for non-recipients.

6.26 Question 6: Distributing Information

A significant number of respondents (nearly 80%) pass on information to other members of the department (Figure 6.4a). This figure was high for both the group of researchers who receive the FIB (all but four respondents pass on information) and amongst the other staff surveyed.

Nearly a third of researchers, mostly recipients of the *Funding Information Bulletin*, pass on information to other members of the University (Figure 6.4b). Of the staff surveyed, members of the Schools of Human and Environmental Studies and Education and Humanities were slightly more likely to pass on information outside their department.

Figure 6.4a

Information about funding opportunities passed on by respondents to other members of the department

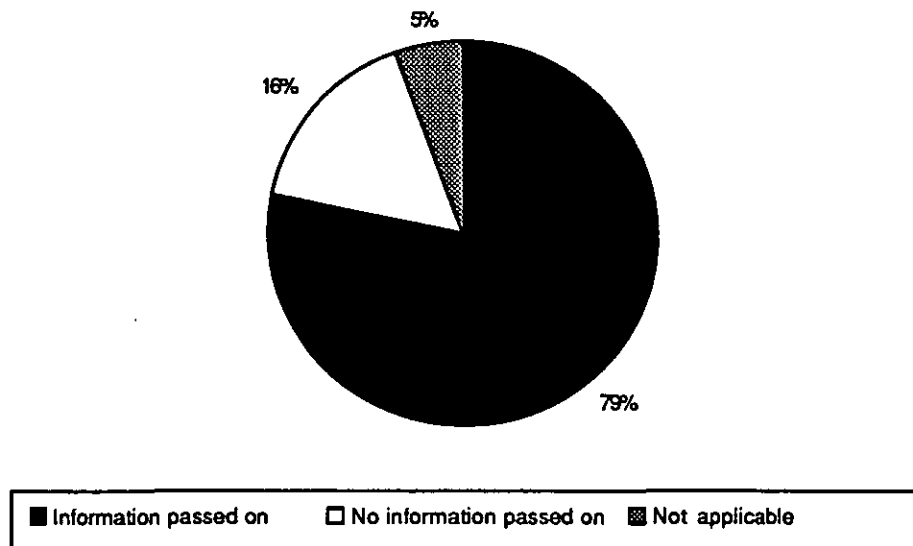
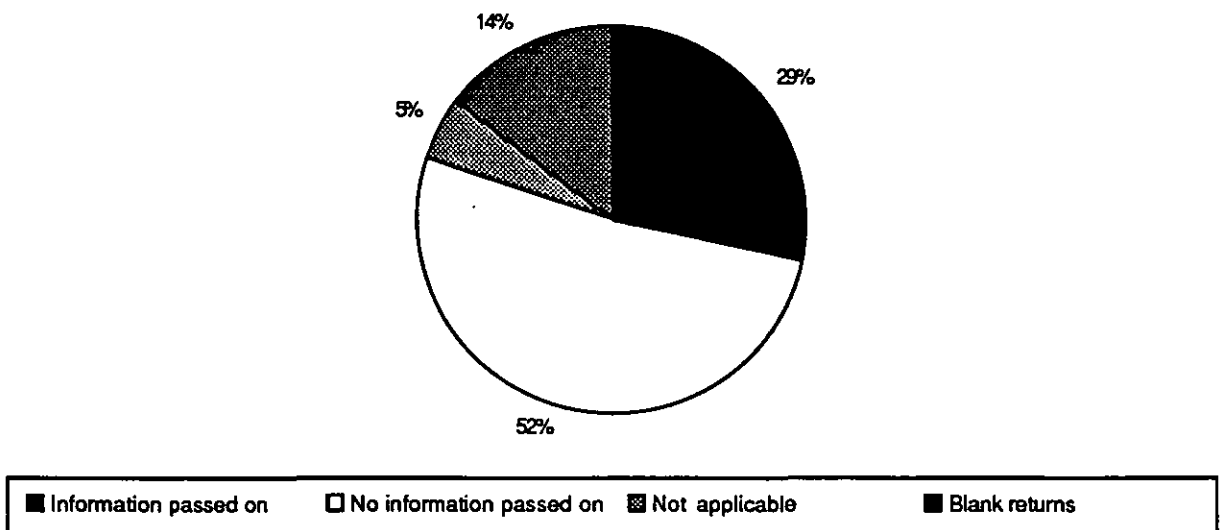


Figure 6.4b

Information about funding opportunities passed on by respondents to other members of the University



6.2.7 Question 7: Further Information

Researchers were divided on the issue of receiving more information about funding opportunities. In total, just over half the staff surveyed requested more information (Figure 6.5). Nearly two-thirds of those not receiving the *Funding Information Bulletin* wanted information, compared with 44% of *FIB* recipients.

Most respondents requesting information were interested in anything relating to their subject field, rather than details of particular types of funding bodies. There was little difference in response between the disciplines; researchers in the School of Human and Environmental Studies were most averse to receiving further information, one member of staff commented that they "get too much as it is".

6.2.8 Question 8: European research

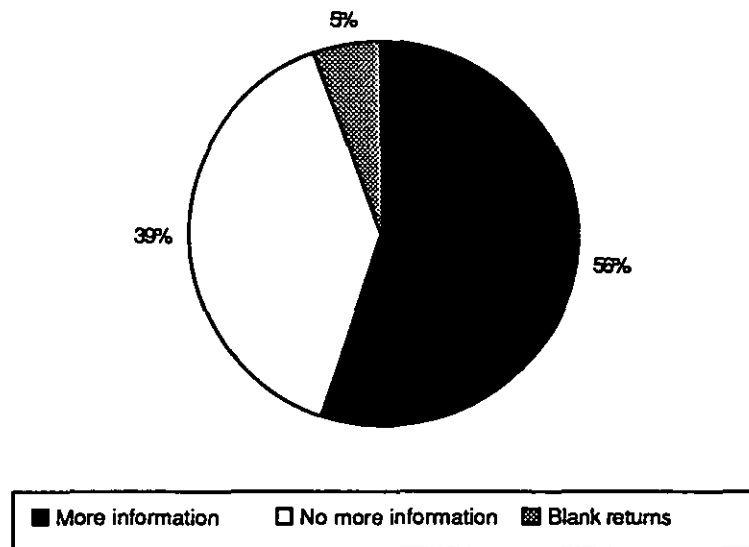
In 18 departments at least one respondent was or has been involved in European Commission financed research. The list of external contracts compiled by the Finance Office shows that several of the other seven departments have participated in European teaching schemes.³ Seven respondents have been involved in more than one programme and a number of projects in different departments have been financed under the BRITE/EURAM initiative for industrial research and the ESPRIT scheme for information technology.

Among individual researchers just over half (55%) had personal involvement in European programmes. The School of Pure and Applied Science had the highest proportion of respondents working on European funded research. A smaller proportion of respondents receiving the *FIB* were involved in European programmes than those not taking the *FIB*. One researcher declared that she was not interested in Commission schemes because she had heard there was too much paperwork. This is an attitude likely to be shared by other staff due to the collaborative nature and complex application procedure of many schemes.

Over two-thirds of the researchers who have participated in EC research mentioned that one or more projects had been initiated by other institutions. The majority of these institutions were universities, research centres or industries in the most developed countries of the European Union.

Figure 6.5

The proportion of respondents who would like to receive more information about external funding opportunities



629 Questions 9-11: Assessment activities

Over 70% of the researchers surveyed were involved in the peer review of research proposals and selection decisions for various funding bodies. Most are connected with the research councils; a few also assist other funding bodies, particularly charities and government departments. One in five staff has other forms of input to the policy-making process of the funding bodies, often through involvement with subject-related professional bodies. Some are members of advisory groups within the main funding bodies such as the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

Participation in the peer review process of the funding bodies provides many researchers with information relating to research opportunities. The material obtained is felt to be of value to other members of the department by nearly 60% of those involved in this process, and of value to other members of the University by 37% (Figures 6.6a and 6.6b).

Nearly two-thirds of staff participating in assessment activities for the funding bodies considered that this has a positive effect on the department's ability to obtain external research funding. Those not involved in the peer review process or policy development generally felt unable to comment on this question (Figure 6.7).

Assessment activities were viewed by most researchers as providing an insight into a funding body's application procedure and funding criteria. As one researcher pointed out this should "improve the quality of one's own application". However, as another researcher commented "one can only take the horses to water!". Other perceived benefits include gaining an awareness of current research areas and the opportunity to develop contacts for collaborative schemes.

Staff who considered that the department's ability to obtain external funds is not influenced by participation in assessment activities gave little further explanation of their response. Some commented on the Higher Education Funding Council's research assessment exercise which was not the object of the question.

Figure 6.6a

Assessment activities
Does participation in assessment activities provide you with any information about research opportunities which is of value to other members of the department?

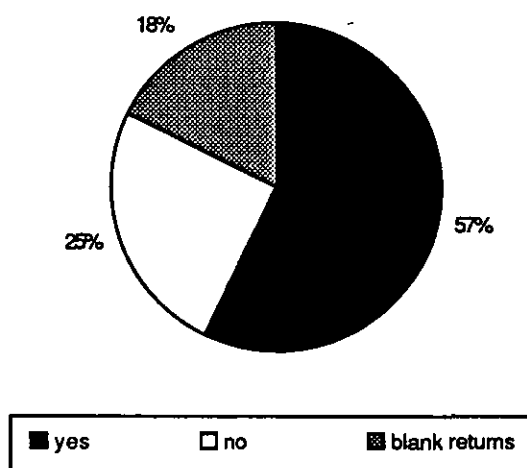


Figure 6.6b

Assessment activities
Does participation in assessment activities you with any information about research opportunities which is of value to other members of the University?

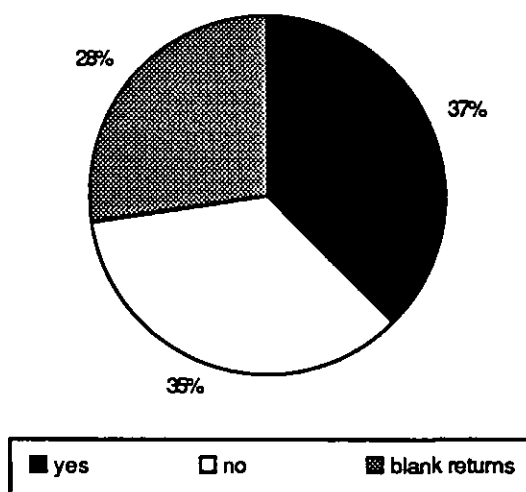


Figure 6.7

Assessment activities
Do you feel participation in assessment activities has any bearing on the department's ability to obtain external research funding?

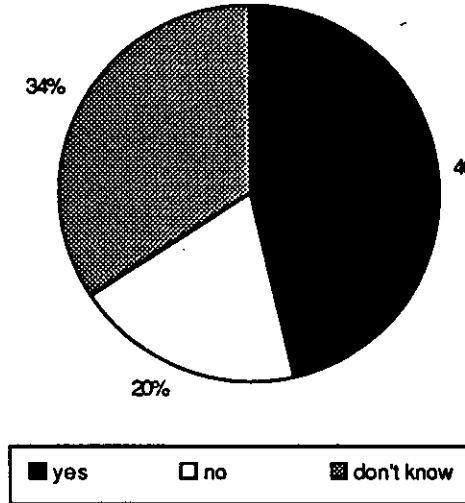
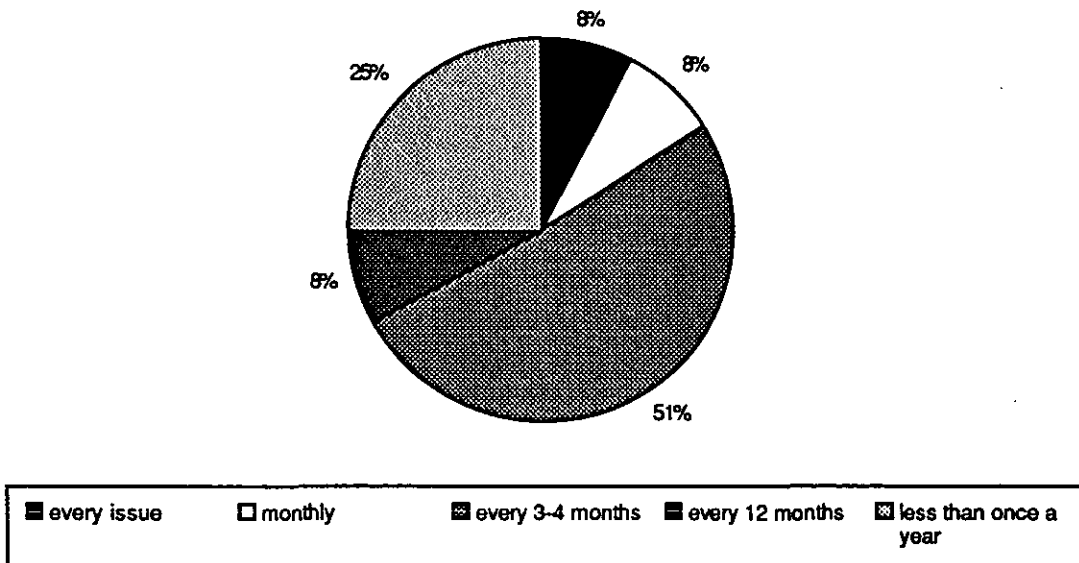


Figure 6.8

Respondents who do not receive the Funding Information Bulletin:
How frequently these respondents see this bulletin



62.10 Question 12: The role of the External Relations Office

The role of the External Relations Office relating to the provision of information and advice on external research funding was recognised by 84% of respondents. All but two of the researchers who receive the *Funding Information Bulletin* knew about the ERO's activities - one of these claims not to be sent the *FIB*.

62.11 Question 13: Survey of researchers not receiving the *Funding Information Bulletin*

This question applied only to those who are not on the mailing list for the External Relations Office *Funding Information Bulletin*. Among these respondents 45% were aware of the existence of this bulletin, and all but one of these has seen a copy. A particularly high proportion of respondents from the School of Pure and Applied Science see the *FIB*. Apart from one department where the *FIB* is circulated, most members of staff see the *FIB* occasionally, about once every 3-4 months or less frequently (Figure 6.8). One respondent in another department also mentioned the circulation of the *FIB* by the Head of Department, but a second respondent from the same department was unaware of the bulletin's existence.

62.12 Question 13: The value of *Funding Information Bulletin*

The *Funding Information Bulletin* was generally perceived as useful. In the four categories of information that respondents were asked to consider, 60% or more in each category found the material useful or very useful (Table 6.2). All but two respondents valued the information about the research councils and government departments. The *FIB* was the sole source of some information for a quarter of its recipients. Most did not identify the type(s) of information concerned.

Researchers use the *Funding Information Bulletin* infrequently, only 5 out of 27 respondents were able to recall using information from the last *FIB*. The majority of researchers request follow-up information from an item in the *FIB* every 3-4 months (Figure 6.9a and 6.9b).

Although, in total, over half the staff contact the ERO and outside bodies every 3-4 months or more often, there is considerable variation between researchers. Some contact both the ERO and outside bodies frequently, while others tend to request further information from either one or the other. The small sample size (for *FIB* recipients alone) means it is not possible to identify variations between Schools.

Table 6.2
The value of the Funding Information Bulletin

Question13a. You should receive the Funding Information Bulletin (FIB), produced by the External Relations Office about every 10 days.
Which parts of the Funding Information Bulletin do you find most useful?
(percentage of respondents)

	Editorial and notes on research funding in general	Research councils and government department news	European Commission news	Other, e.g. charities, international agencies, newsletters
Very useful	19	44	33	30
Useful	48	48	37	30
Slightly useful	22	4	15	11
Not useful	7	0	8	15
Blank return	4	4	7	14

Question13f. In relation to your requirements, how do you rate the following characteristics of the FIB?
(percentage of respondents)

	Detail of information	Clarity of information	Range of information	Timeliness of information
Excellent	15	7	0	0
Good	33	41	48	30
Satisfactory	37	37	37	48
Poor	7	7	7	11
Blank return	8	8	8	11

Figure 6.9a

The frequency of requests from respondents to the External Relations Office in connection with items from the Funding Information Bulletin

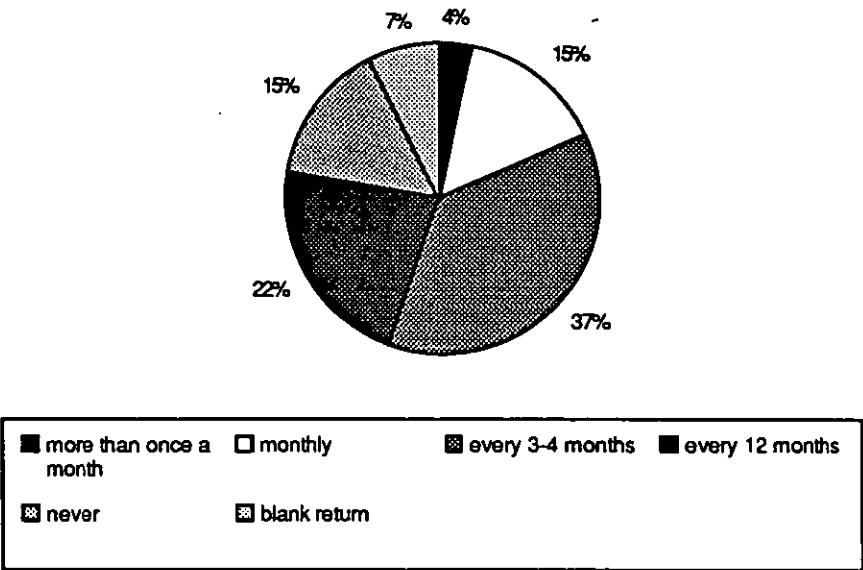
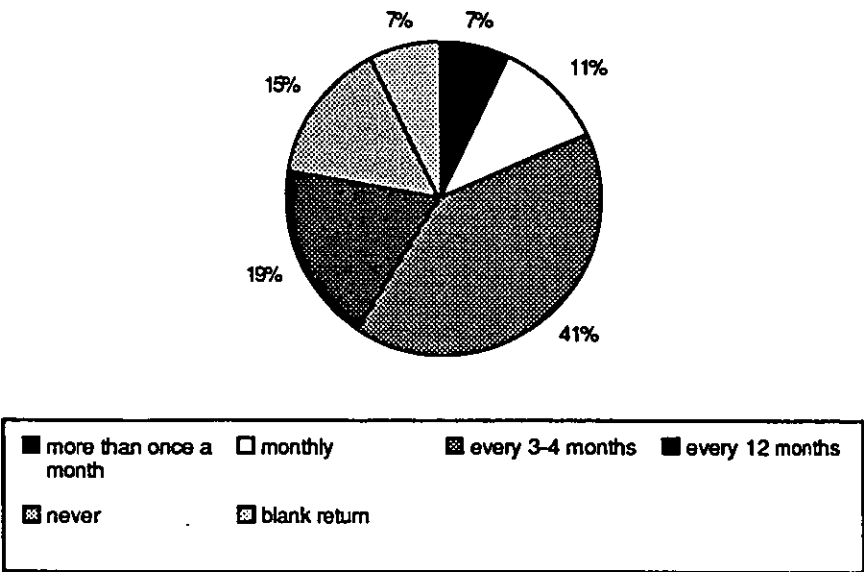


Figure 6.9b

The frequency of requests from respondents to outside bodies in connection with items from the Funding Information Bulletin



Almost half of the respondents (48%) felt that the *FIB* was good or excellent with regard to the detail, clarity and range of information (Table 6.2). Timeliness was viewed as more of a problem - only 30% of staff rated this as good or excellent. Overall, most respondents described all aspects of the *FIB* as either good or satisfactory, few selected the terms poor or excellent. Staff who commented on means of improving the *FIB* expressed a desire for a more targeted information service. This would "send only relevant information to any particular person" and offer "more direct informed advice on producing proposals".

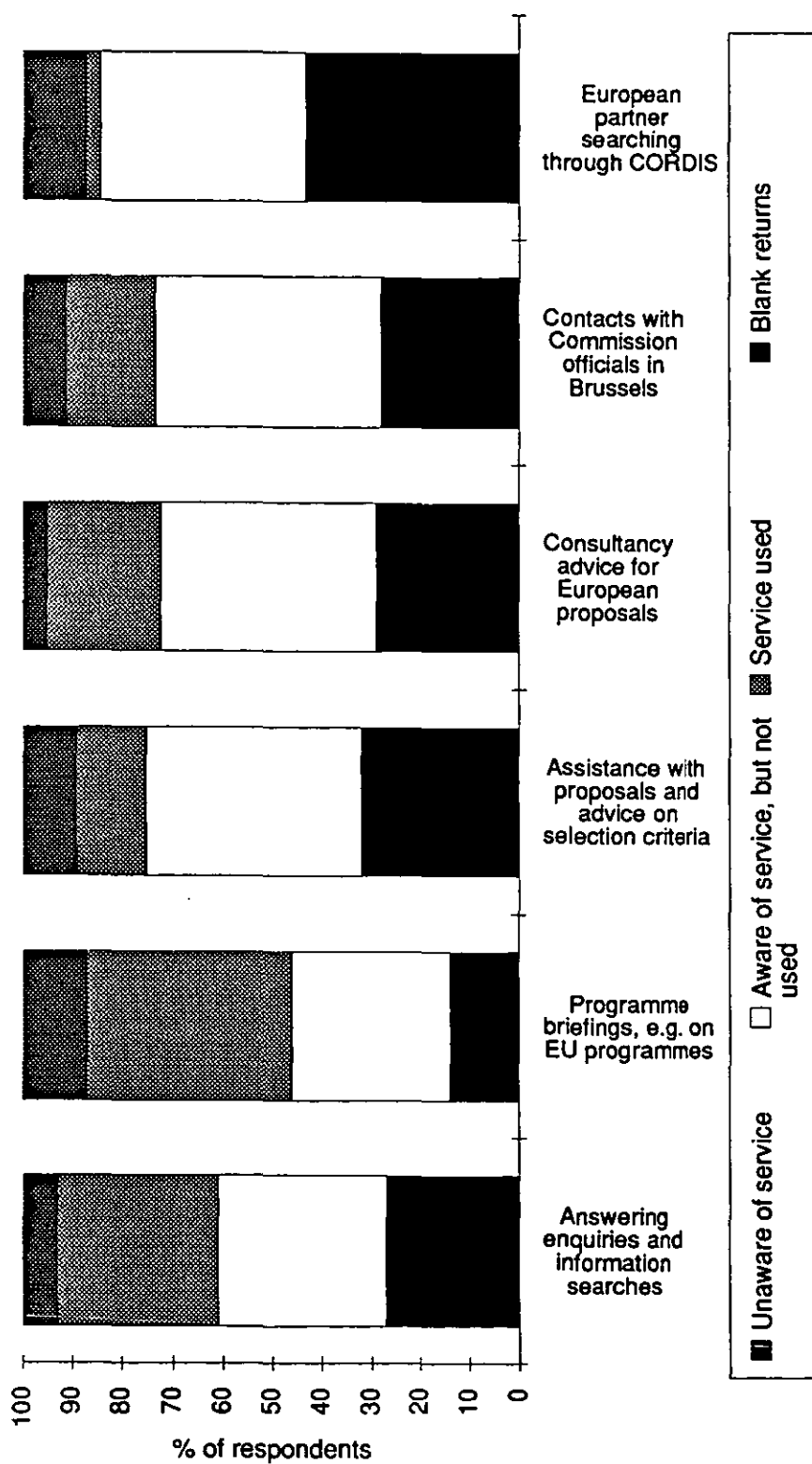
6.2.13 Question 14: External Relations Office services

For each of the services offered by the External Relations Office, staff receiving the *Funding Information Bulletin* are more likely to be aware of, or have used, the service than those not taking this bulletin, e.g. 55% of *FIB* recipients have attended programme briefings compared with 28% of other staff. Among staff not receiving the *FIB* there were several services for which over a third of staff were unaware of the facility offered. There were no significant differences between Schools in awareness/use of services.

The enquiry service has been used by almost one third of respondents, and another third know this service exists (Figure 6.10). A greater number of staff registered an interest in the future use of this facility than registered an interest in using any other service. However, it is difficult to draw precise conclusions about future practice as only a quarter of the researchers surveyed gave any indication of their intentions to start or continue using the various services. In several cases, researchers expressed an interest in the future use of all services, both those they were unaware of and those consulted before.

Programme briefings have been attended by 41% of the staff surveyed, the highest usage of any of the services considered. More respondents were aware of this service than the other activities carried out by the ERO. Awareness of the other services (assistance with proposals, consultancy advice for European proposals, contacts with Commission officials and partner searching through the CORDIS database) was just over 40% in each case. Few respondents have made use of the opportunities for assistance with proposals (14%) or partner searching through the CORDIS database (3%). The number of respondents unaware of the benefits of the CORDIS database (43%) was particularly high and only slightly less than the number who were aware of or had made use of the service.

Figure 6.10
Awareness of External Relations Office services



A number of researchers commented on the services they had used. All but two of the comments were positive, describing the service as “good”, “useful”, “helpful” and “fast”. Two researchers suggested the ERO could provide them with more assistance by following up on briefings and giving further help with proposals.

6.2.14 Question 15: Other services

Other services which might be carried out by the ERO were generally perceived by researchers as useful (Figure 6.11). No more than ten respondents considered any one of the services “not useful”: collaboration with the library attracted three ratings of “not useful” plus seven non-responses. There were no obvious differences in responses between Schools or between recipients/non-recipients of the *FIB*.

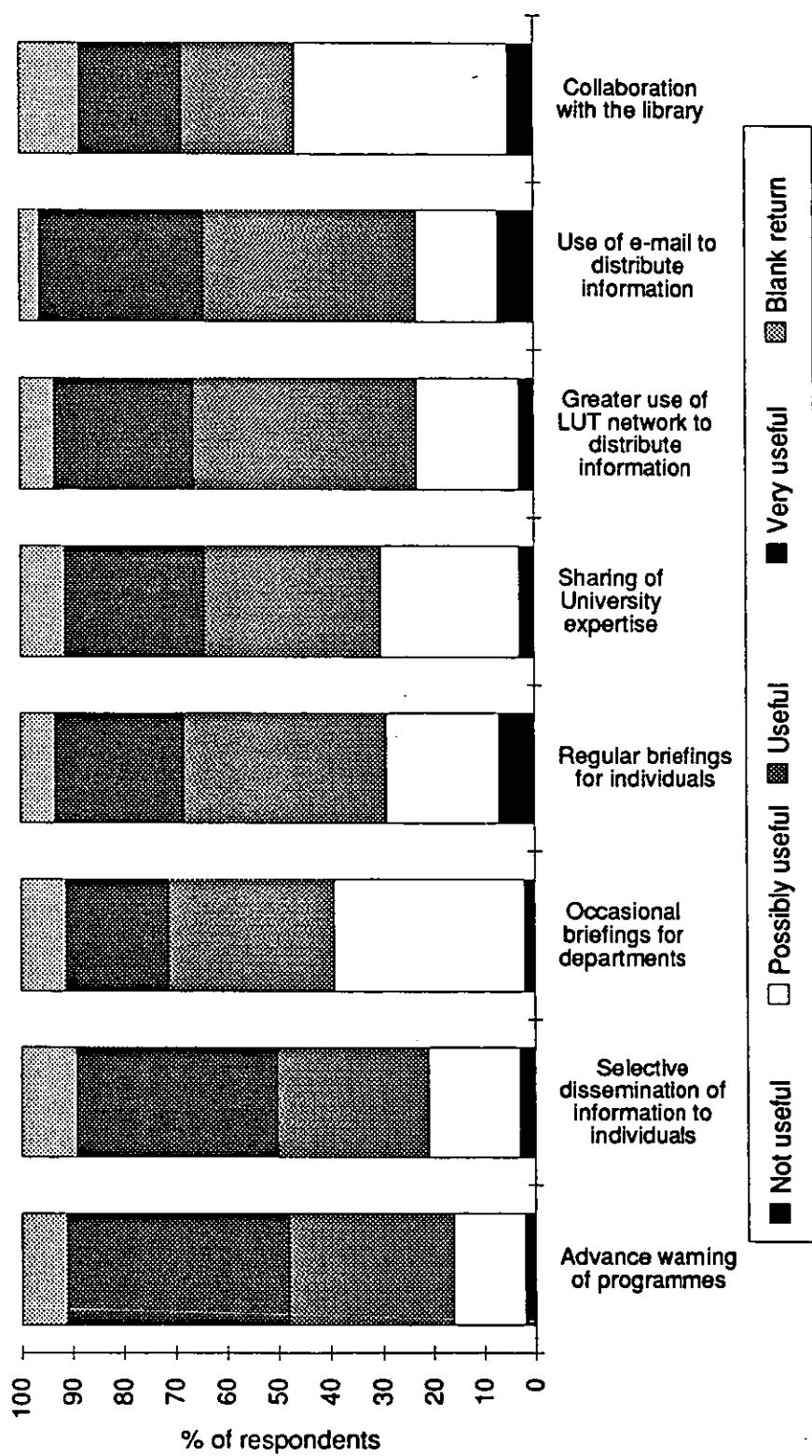
The most positive response received concerned advance warning of programmes, 75% of staff would find this service useful or very useful. Staff are also attracted by the possibility of more selective dissemination of information, 39% of respondents ranked this as very useful and another 29% ranked it as useful.

There is considerable interest in the distribution of information through the LUT network and e-mail: 70% of researchers indicated that they would find use of the LUT network useful or very useful, the figure for e-mail was 73%. However, for both these forms of electronic information provision, more respondents chose the description useful, rather than very useful.

Sharing of expertise in the University was felt by most researchers to be valuable, 61% of researchers surveyed said this would be useful or very useful. Briefings for individuals or heads of research groups were perceived as more beneficial than occasional briefings for departments; these services were rated as useful or very useful by 64% and 52% of researchers respectively. Collaboration with the library was the only service where the number of staff considering it not useful or possibly useful (46%) was greater than the numbers ranking it as useful or very useful (41%).

A few respondents had ideas for other services which could be carried out by the ERO. One researcher put in another plea for targeted information “relevant to particular projects”. Other researchers suggested that the ERO could assist with the costing of proposals and

Figure 6.11
Interest in other services which could be carried out by the External Relations Office



help develop “contacts in overseas universities and research establishments”. It was also felt that it would be helpful if someone from the University could “wave our flag when proposals are scrutinised” by the European Commission.

6.2.15 Question 16: The role of a central body

Almost half the researchers surveyed (46%) felt there was a need for a central body to coordinate the University's efforts to obtain external research funding (Figure 6.12a).

Researchers envisage that a centralisation of some activities would allow more efficient use of resources. These activities include building up links with the funding bodies, and raising awareness of present and proposed research initiatives in the University. Staff also mentioned that a central body would be able to comment on the success of research proposals and identify the strengths and weakness of University research.

Although only 12% of respondents were definitely against establishing a central body, many of the other respondents expressed reservations. A few researchers felt there was “already too much ‘top slicing’ to fund non-productive bureaucracy” and suggested that a centralised body might damage “initiative and speed of response” or become “a quality control mechanism infringing academic autonomy”. Many objections concerned the practical problems of central coordination of information and activities.

Many respondents (45%) did not know whether the department would be able to produce a quarterly update of research interests (Figure 6.12b). Some staff felt that only the Head of Department or research coordinator could comment on this question. Researchers able to give a definite answer were divided: 29% were prepared to provide details of research interests; 20% were unwilling to do so. Half of the staff who were positive about the idea of a central body were unsure whether they could support this body by producing information on departmental research interests.

Some staff would be prepared to compile information on research interests annually or every six months, rather than quarterly. Others said they could provide brief information, and mentioned the amount of work involved in gathering information to meet present requests. One researcher offered to send the ERO a copy of research proposals and contracts, with the proviso that this did not generate any more paperwork.

Figure 6.12a

The proportion of respondents who feel a central body is needed to coordinate the University's efforts to obtain research funding

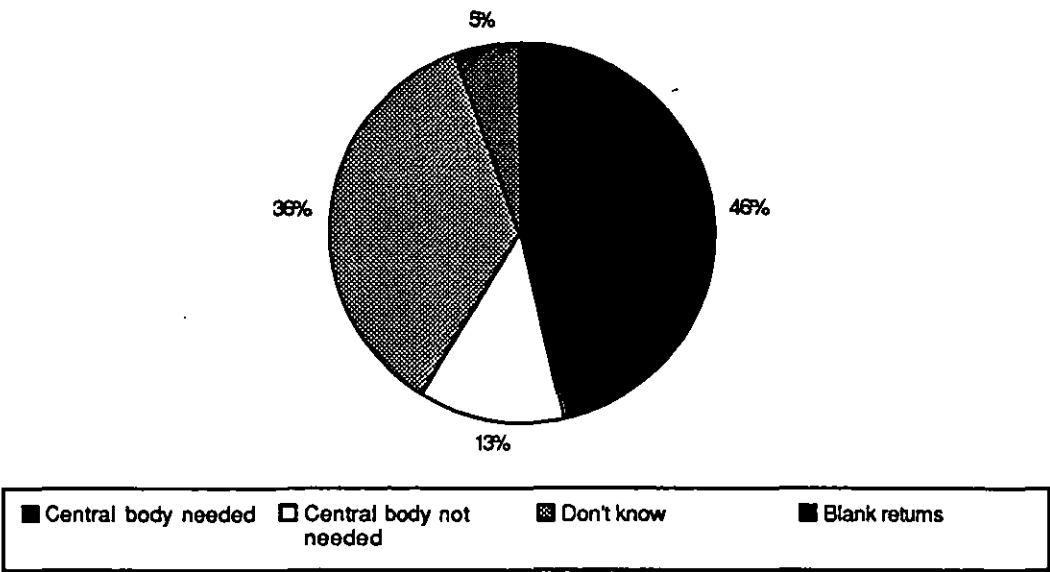
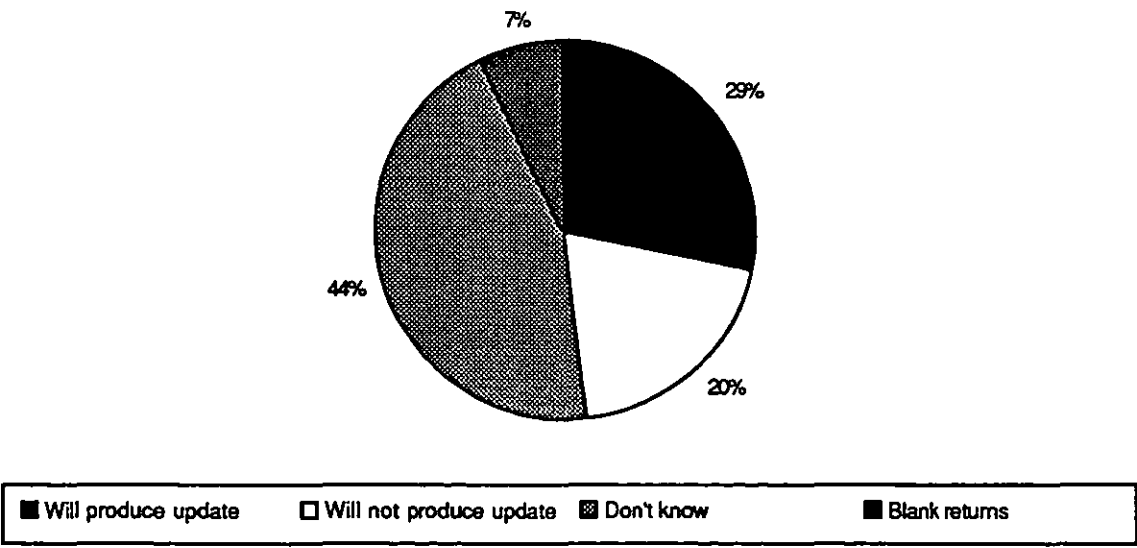


Figure 6.12b

The proportion of respondents who think their department would be prepared to produce a quarterly update of research interests for a central body



62.16 Question 17: University objectives

Opinions regarding the establishment of university-wide objectives for research funding were split three ways (Figure 6.13). Researchers who favoured establishing objectives suggested that the formation of a “coherent group” of researchers with a coordinated approach to funding bodies would be “likely to achieve more than a set of individuals”. Those who felt such objectives would be beneficial included the three respondents who are also members of the University Research Committee.

However, many respondents mentioned the diverse research interests of University staff and the fact that different departments target different types of funding body. Global objectives, such as the Vice-Chancellor’s desire to double research funding in the next five years, were perceived as ineffective and more specific objectives viewed as restrictive. One researcher suggested that setting objectives at the departmental level would be more valuable.

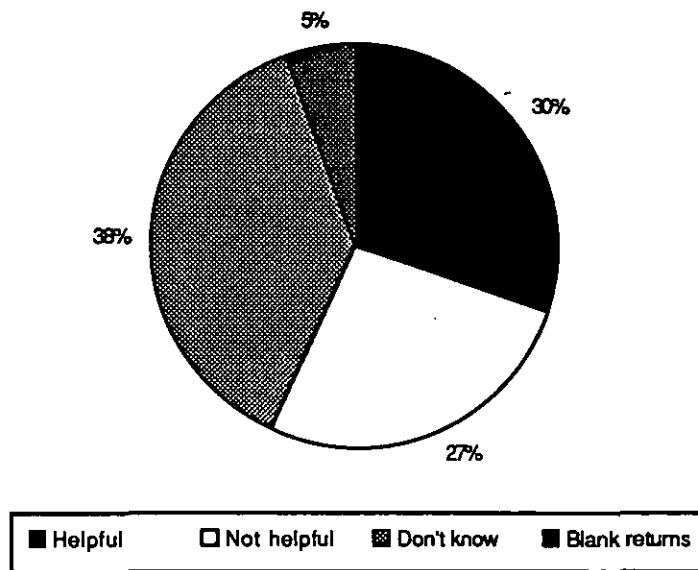
62.17 Question 18: Other comments

Most other comments focused on the role of a central body, particularly concerns about the bureaucracy connected with central administration. Some researchers recommended centralised information provision, but that apart from this money should be given to departments “to enable them to undertake their own research funding coordination exercises and initiatives”. Respondents who favoured a central body suggested that this body could arrange meetings to bring potential partners together and coordinate a “centre of ‘experience’” for funding submissions. One researcher remarked on the particular need for financial support when making applications which involve more than one department.

The results of this survey provide an indication of the situation at Loughborough University regarding research funding information. The next chapter compares this situation with the information provision activities carried out at other universities.

Figure 6.13

The proportion of respondents who feel establishing University-wide objectives for research funding would be helpful



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1. **Loughborough University of Technology Finance Department.** *Projects (by department, supervisor, sponsor, title)* [List of externally funded projects: internal document *m5121*], 23 December 1994.
2. **Loughborough University of Technology.** *University accounts 1993-94*, 1994, p. 34-35.
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Chapter 7 Information provision in other universities

This chapter looks at the provision of research funding information at three other universities: Leicester, Nottingham and Newcastle upon Tyne. Information about the strategies and activities of each university was obtained from interviews with staff in the appropriate office^{1,2,3}. The structure and responsibilities of these research offices are outlined below and compared with the activities of the External Relations Office at Loughborough.

7.1 Administrative structure and position of the research office

At Loughborough the External Relations Office has responsibility for the provision of information and advice concerning external research funding opportunities. The Finance Office approves the actual applications for funding and administers the grants received. The University's Intellectual Property Rights and contracts arising from the further development of the products of research are handled by the Industrial Liaison Office.

Each of the other universities visited has some form of 'research office' which supports researchers interested in obtaining external research funding. At all three universities, despite different administrative structures, there is a close relationship between the provision of funding information and the management of applications and awards. At Leicester the new Research Office was established in Summer 1994, next to the Finance Office. The two offices maintain a joint database of all applications for research funding. The Office of Research and Business Services at Nottingham has responsibility for all the financial aspects of external research funding, including pre-award costings and the commercial development of research. The Research Services Unit at Newcastle carries out three functions: the provision of information about external funding opportunities, assistance with the development of research proposals, and financial administration. Funding applications at all three universities require the signature of a member of the research office.

There are few differences in the areas of research covered by the three research offices. At Leicester a separate body has responsibility for developing links with industry. The Research Services Unit at Newcastle has limited responsibilities for research studentships and does not cover teaching initiatives such as the European Commission's Erasmus and Tempus programmes.

72 Gathering information

All the universities, including Loughborough, receive similar information about research opportunities from the main funding bodies. The 'core funders' who circulate information to all higher education institutions include the research councils, the Royal Society and major charities such as the Nuffield Foundation. In addition to leaflets about specific research opportunities, Leicester and Nottingham universities also obtain annual reports and newsletters from many funding bodies.

Leicester University sent out 250 forms requesting information about research funding from bodies which have previously funded research at the University. This project has allowed the Research Office to update information held on the funding bodies and encouraged some 'core funders' to send information to this Office rather than to the Vice-Chancellor or the Registry. As a result the Research Office now has details and contact names of some bodies which do not automatically send out information.

Newcastle University uses the press to obtain details of research openings in charitable bodies and government departments, consulting the *Financial Times*, *Times Higher Education Supplement* and *New Scientist*. Articles and advertisements sometimes include contacts for mailing lists. The research office at Nottingham has an European Union Officer, whose role includes keeping abreast of European research opportunities. Other methods of obtaining information include scanning newspapers/newsletters and making contact with visitors to the University, especially members of the funding bodies.

Both Loughborough and Newcastle universities use the *Research Fortnight*⁴ newsletter to provide a summary of current research policy issues such as the Technology Foresight Programme. Staff at Nottingham University mentioned reading the government White Paper *Competitiveness: forging ahead*⁵ in order to stay up to date with government priorities.

73 Use of information services

Newcastle and Leicester Universities, like Loughborough, both subscribe to the European information service provided by the UK Research and Higher Education European Office (UKRHEEO) in Brussels (see section 3.6.3). Researchers at Leicester can consult a copy of the UKRHEEO bulletin⁶ held by the Research Office. At Newcastle academic staff are

encouraged to use the UKRHEEO e-mail service⁷ and access the CORDIS database⁸ (and other databases) for themselves. The Nottingham Campus-Wide Information Server contains a list of electronic sources of research information, including the Wellcome database on medicine.

Leicester University uses NJM Consultants who provide a European consultancy service similar to the European Economic Development Services employed by Loughborough. This service includes a weekly bulletin giving details of calls for proposals and advice on individual applications. The Leicester Research Office also receives faxes covering developments in the European Commission from the East Midlands European Information Office.

7.4 Contacts with Industry

In all the universities, contacts with industry are generally established by individual researchers. During 1995 the Office of Research and Business Services at Nottingham has set up a computer database of research expertise. This is used to identify researchers working in a particular area when the University is approached by companies. Once the interface is improved it is intended to make this database accessible to academic staff. A database containing staff research interests is also being set up at Leicester, primarily for industrial liaison purposes. Newcastle University produces a research directory, indexed by research topic and updated every two years. This is sent to 400 companies to encourage them to utilise the research expertise of the University. The company names are selected from an annual publication which shows spending on research and development.

7.5 Dissemination of Information

The university research offices distribute three different types of information: i) background information, particularly on the policies of the funding bodies; ii) details of current funding opportunities; and iii) advice on funding applications.

At Loughborough, the External Relations Office keeps copies of newsletters and corporate plans which provide background information. Appropriate material from these and details of current funding opportunities are disseminated through the *Funding Information Bulletin*. The External Relations Office also sends some information directly to individual researchers and provides advice on funding applications, (for more details of these activities see section 4.2).

7.5.1 Background information

The Research Office at Leicester University are compiling a research handbook to be sent to all academic staff. This will provide background information on the major funding bodies, describing the areas of research supported and the application process. The same information will also be displayed on the Campus-Wide Information Network.

Nottingham Office of Research and Business Services makes extensive use of its Campus-Wide Information Server. Background information concerning the structure of the research councils and charitable bodies is provided in some detail, along with contact names for particular schemes to enable researchers to obtain further information themselves. The general University newsletter includes articles covering research policy issues and the work of the University Research Committee.

Newcastle University is considering placing background information relating to the funding bodies on the World Wide Web (e.g. annual calls for proposals from the research councils). The Research Services Unit has produced a number of summary sheets covering 'commonly asked questions' about research funding. Topics include: industrial collaboration, research studentships, and links with Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

7.5.2 Current opportunities

The main form of information distribution at Newcastle University is through *REFUND* (*Research Funds Information Newsletter*)⁹ and a number of follow-up information sheets. This monthly bulletin is also available on subscription to other universities and is currently sent to 50 institutions, including Loughborough. Internal copies of *REFUND* are sent to research correspondents - staff nominated by their department to display the bulletin and inform colleagues of items of particular interest. There are up to six correspondents in each department, depending on its size, location and the number of research groups.

From 1992 *REFUND* has been distributed by e-mail - currently to 400 staff within the University. Since March 1995 external subscribers have also been able to receive information by this method. Details of opportunities with deadlines too short for the main *REFUND* bulletin are sent by e-mail. At Newcastle mailbase is used to split e-mail

recipients into seven groups (e.g. arts, science, social science, engineering etc.) allowing mail to be targeted at specific faculties.

Nottingham University sends a copy of *REFUND* to all heads of department and displays the text of the two most recent copies on the Information Server. Details of research openings obtained ahead of the *REFUND* bulletin and internal grants allocated by the Research Committee are added to the Information Server, making this the main focus for information on funding opportunities. The research office sometimes uses e-mail to inform researchers of grants relating specifically to their area. Some departments heavily involved in external research (e.g. the medical departments) have a research coordinator who liaises between the department and the research office.

At Leicester University the Research Office distributes details of funding opportunities to the appropriate Heads of Department, or to individual researchers known to be working in a particular area. Some departments have nominated a member of staff, other than the Head of Department, to receive and pass on research information. Details of research schemes of general interest and advance notice of projects are included in the University's monthly news bulletin, from which researchers can request further information.

7.5.3 Advice on funding applications

The research offices of Newcastle and Nottingham universities are responsible for approving research funding applications. This process involves considering the implications of the proposed research for the department/university and giving advice on the formulation of the research proposal. At both these universities and also Leicester the research office maintains a database giving details of the research grants awarded by external organisations. This enables research office staff to assess the history of previous applications, monitor which applications have been successful and look at the number of awards obtained by particular departments. At Loughborough this information is compiled by the Finance Office and published by the Communications and Publicity Office every six months.

Nottingham University produces a bulletin, on the Information Server and in printed form, giving details of the response of organisations to previous funding applications and an outline of problems experienced with various schemes. At Newcastle University a few discussion

groups have been set up on e-mail to enable researchers to share their expertise, e.g. an interdisciplinary group linking departments developing a proposal for the European Commission Sustainable Cities programme.

7.6 Other services

The research offices of all the universities visited and the External Relations Office at Loughborough deal with individual researchers' requests for funding information. At Newcastle Research Services Unit approximately 10% of staff time is spent answering enquiries from the departments. The Director of the Office of Research and Business Services at Nottingham University views informal contacts with staff as the best method of determining information needs and obtaining feedback on the research office.

At Nottingham University, several departments have held research 'away days' to consider past strategies and future plans for research. Some of these have included a presentation by the research office on the current research funding situation and a summary of present government and research council policy based on the *Forward look of government funded science, engineering and technology*.¹⁰ Departments may also request briefings on particular subject-related concerns. Each year the Director of the Office of Research and Business Services gives a presentation on an issue of general interest to researchers, e.g. the costing of research council applications. The Research Committee also holds seminars and informal meetings, inviting external speakers to consider topics such as interdisciplinary research.

Newcastle University runs approximately six seminars each year for research staff. Some are put together by the Research Services Unit staff, e.g. a seminar on the European Commission's Framework 4 programme outlining the administrative procedure within the University. Outside speakers have included the head of the training board of the Medical Research Council describing the activities of this body.

7.7 Electronic Information provision

The Research Services Unit have recently held an open meeting for academic staff considering the distribution of information through the World Wide Web, replacing the present e-mail system. It is envisaged that information displayed on the World Wide Web would take two forms: general information on funding bodies and their activities; and a

REFUND type bulletin to supply details of special opportunities and application deadlines. It is likely that *REFUND* will continue to be produced in printed form, not just for staff who are unhappy with new technology, but because this is a more practical method of distributing some information, e.g. photocopies of follow up items.

Nottingham University are encouraging researchers to use the World Wide Web to find information about funding bodies, e.g. the research councils provide some information in this format. Research information on the University's Information Server is currently accessed 40-50 times each week, which amounts to 1-2 accesses per item. Although the Office of Research and Business Services is keen to promote the use of the Information Server, information will also be distributed in printed form.

The provision of research funding information at Loughborough is broadly similar to the systems in operation at Leicester, Nottingham and Newcastle. Consideration of the strategies used at other universities could help the External Relations Office to improve some aspects of the service provided to researchers. However, an activity which is successful at one university may not suit Loughborough which has a different structure and distribution of resources. In the next chapter information concerning funding information provision at other universities will be used as a background for a discussion of the service provided at Loughborough.

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Chapter 8 Discussion of results and conclusion

This chapter considers the results of the survey carried out at Loughborough University (chapter 6) in the context of activities at the other universities visited and the provision of information for research funding in general.

8.1 Acquisition of Information

At Loughborough the structure for acquiring information about external research funding varies considerably across the University. Questionnaire responses showed that less than half the departments (40%) have members of staff who are responsible for coordinating information about external research opportunities. In many departments the role of the research coordinator is ambiguous and not clearly understood by other members of staff. Nearly a third of those who considered themselves research coordinators did not receive the *Funding Information Bulletin* produced by the External Relations Office (ERO).

These results imply that, at the departmental level, few departments undertake the acquisition and dissemination of research funding information in a structured way. Instead, research activities and information provision may be arranged by research groups or individuals. The departments of the School of Engineering have a high percentage of semi-autonomous research groups and few members of staff appear to have specific responsibility for obtaining funding information at the departmental level.

The variation in information acquisition strategies between departments suggests that the ERO (and other funding bodies) should continue to send information to several members of each department. This form of information distribution is also practised at Newcastle University where sending material solely to Heads of Departments proved ineffective.

8.2 Information distribution within departments

In general, there is good communication and exchange of information within departments about research opportunities despite the fact that there are few designated research coordinators. Staff seem to be familiar with one another's research interests and some recipients of the *Funding Information Bulletin (FIB)*, possibly Heads of Department, appear to circulate information from this bulletin to other staff. Communication between researchers

in some departments could be improved by giving *FIB* recipients specific responsibilities to distribute the information received to other members of their department or research group. Nominated research correspondents at Newcastle and Leicester universities undertake such duties.

There is also some collaboration over research activities between departments and possibly between Schools. One respondent mentioned a joint project with a department in another School. It is not clear whether or not this collaboration is sufficient to promote inter-department cooperation and prevent the development of competing research bids. The distribution of information between departments should only be fostered if it supplements direct information provision. It is most efficient to obtain details of schemes from the funding bodies themselves.

8.3 Funding Information

For each of the types of funding bodies (research councils, government departments, etc.) a greater proportion of staff received information about research opportunities than were involved in externally funded research for that type of body. This shows that information from the funding bodies can be obtained (either directly or indirectly) by all researchers, not only current or past participants in funding body schemes.

The pattern of externally funded research in the University highlights the differences between the funding bodies. Researchers in many disciplines receive information about or participate in research council and European Commission schemes. By contrast, few members of staff obtain information from industry or charitable bodies reflecting the fact that funds from these bodies are usually directed at specific projects or certain disciplines. Charitable bodies tend to receive many requests for funds and only a minority actively promote their funding schemes. Much research support for industry is obtained through personal contacts rather than advertised programmes.

A high proportion of researchers (between 40-65% depending on the type of funding body) received information from parts of the University outside their own department. This suggests that staff consult annual reports and other material about the funding bodies held by the External Relations Office in addition to obtaining application forms directly. It would

have been interesting to evaluate the type and frequency of publications staff received about funding opportunities. However, it was considered that asking questions on this area would place an undue burden on staff as information at this level of detail is unlikely to be readily available.

The External Relations Office could consider making background information about funding organisations available to staff in other ways. Leicester University have circulated a guide giving details of the main funding bodies to all researchers, while Newcastle and Nottingham Universities are making increasing use of Campus-Wide Information Servers to display this type of information.

84 The *Funding Information Bulletin*

The main purpose of the *Funding Information Bulletin* is to provide information on current funding opportunities, supplemented with some material on external research in general. The other universities visited also make the distribution of material about current opportunities a priority, although information is supplied in different formats and at various levels of detail.

Researchers at Loughborough use the *FIB* to obtain a range of information about research funding. In response to question 5 of the survey many researchers indicated that they obtained information "from elsewhere in the University" - probably through the *FIB* or by direct contact with the ERO. The *FIB* appears to provide information on research opportunities which staff would not otherwise access, particularly material about the European Commission (see sections 6.2.5 and 6.2.12). The nature of the information required probably determines whether requests for follow-up information are made to the External Relations Office or outside organisations.

Overall, the evaluation of the *FIB* by its recipients was positive. Information about the research councils and government departments was considered particularly useful despite the fact that many staff are in direct contact with these funding bodies. The more diverse responses concerning the value of material about the European Commission and other funding bodies is likely to reflect the differences in information requirements and funding opportunities between disciplines.

Researchers were particularly critical of only one aspect of the *Funding Information Bulletin* - the timeliness of information provision. This aspect of the ERO's service was also highlighted in responses to question 15, where 75% of researchers rated advance warning of programmes as useful or very useful. The ERO already attempts to inform researchers of calls for proposals as far in advance as possible. The methods of information acquisition and dissemination practised at other universities do not appear to be noticeably quicker, e.g. Newcastle University distributes most information on a monthly basis through the *REFUND* bulletin, supplemented with targeted e-mail.

Researchers will probably always desire more time to prepare proposals. However, if it can be demonstrated that information can be obtained further in advance then it might be worth devoting more resources to this activity. This may involve improving contacts with the Vice-Chancellor and the Registry to ensure that information sent to these offices is passed on promptly. Researchers could also be encouraged to discuss areas of research interest with the ERO before calls for proposals are announced.

8.5 Acquiring more information

Satisfaction with the amount of information received about external funding opportunities was greatest among recipients of the *Funding Information Bulletin*. This suggests that this bulletin meets, in part or fully, the information requirements of some members of staff. It does not mean that researchers obtain information from all potential funding bodies, but rather that they maybe receive details from the most likely sponsors, or obtain as much material as they have time to deal with.

Those staff who wish to receive more information need to identify suitable funding bodies and methods of obtaining information. Strategies for identifying research opportunities at other universities include: scanning newspaper articles/advertisements; making informal contact with visitors to the University; and requesting information from organisations that have funded previous research. The External Relations Office should consider whether increasing the use of these or any other strategies could supply them with new details of funding initiatives, in particular international or collaborative schemes which are stressed in the University's research objectives.¹ Obtaining further information about funding opportunities could help staff not presently funded by outside organisations to attract support. However, in some

departments (e.g. Mathematical Sciences, and English and Drama) research is generally basic rather than applied and there are few external awards available.

8.6 European programmes

There is high level of awareness and of involvement in European programmes across the University. Many departments participate in European teaching programmes and have a member of staff who is responsible for this area. If the staff involved in the Erasmus/Socrates programmes wish to share expertise this would be fairly straightforward because the procedures for setting up these projects are similar for all disciplines.

Nearly all the staff surveyed obtained some information on European research schemes and it appears that non-participation in these programmes is due more to concerns about application procedures than a lack of information about the projects themselves. The External Relations Office has provided general information on the characteristics of European teaching and research programmes through the *Funding Information Bulletin* and presentations such as that on the Framework 4 programme². Increasing levels of involvement in European programmes may improve the University's ratings in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's research assessment exercise as departments need international links to be awarded the top rating.³

Staff who have participated in European programmes (including collaborative projects initiated by outside institutions) could share their experience and assist others approaching the Commission for funding. Staff at Newcastle University are reportedly more enthusiastic about applying for European Commission funding than they were 3-5 years ago having seen the success of previous applicants.⁴ Promotion of the services offered by the ERO to all academic staff might prompt further participation in European programmes. The European Project Developer in the School of Engineering and the External Relations Office offer consultancy advice and can help researchers prepare suitable bids in the face of increasing competition for European funding.

8.7 The peer review process

A high proportion of staff (71%) take part in the peer review of applications for different funding bodies, especially the research councils. This activity supplies staff with information

about the funding bodies' selection criteria, supplementing printed or electronic material. One respondent highlighted the fact that it is not possible to quantify the extent to which an application may be affected by a researcher's involvement in assessment activities; selection decisions are based on a number of factors, primarily the expertise of the research group and the quality of the application. However, many researchers felt that information concerning selection decisions could be of value to other members of the department and has the potential to improve the quality of their own applications.

Researchers involved in the peer review process for the research councils are generally at the top of their field. This involvement may enable them to promote the standing of their research area and attract continued funding. The European Commission does not invite researchers who have submitted proposals under a particular programme to participate in the selection process.⁵

Ensuring that the information acquired through peer review activities is passed on to appropriate members of the department/University should help the University maintain its income from the research councils. Dissemination of information between departments could be promoted by a central body (such as the External Relations Office) which maintains a list of researchers involved with funding bodies.

8.8 External Relations Office Services

8.8.1 Present services

Most researchers had a broad awareness of the services provided by the External Relations Office in helping the University obtain external research funding. Comments from staff indicated that the services provide useful and worthwhile assistance. However, responses to question 14 (section 6.2.13) showed that the ERO needs to promote its services in more detail to members of staff who do not receive the *Funding Information Bulletin*. Although not all staff will ever need to use these services, many of those surveyed are actively involved in or seeking externally funded research and could benefit from the support offered.

Increasing the utilisation of the ERO's services, especially consultancy advice and other assistance with proposals, could improve the quality and success rate of applications to funding bodies. Making staff aware of the basic enquiry service may encourage staff who

have not previously been involved in externally funded research to investigate opportunities and so broaden the base of research at the University. Information concerning programme briefings appears to have reached the majority of staff. Details of these briefings are sent for circulation within the departments to those on the *FIB* mailing list, which includes Heads of Departments and Associate Deans for Research. Distributing more information through the same channels might help raise awareness of the ERO's other services.

8.8.2 Future service provision

Researchers highlighted the value of selective dissemination of information about research funding to individuals. At present, the External Relations Office distributes most information through the *Funding Information Bulletin*. This is a particularly useful method of circulating generic information about major funding bodies (e.g. the European Commission) and research openings which are applicable to more than one department. Some details of specific research opportunities are sent to individual researchers as they arise.

Continued circulation of the *FIB*, supplemented with more targeted information, is likely to be the most efficient and practical method of informing researchers of funding opportunities. Extending selective dissemination of information depends in part on the availability of a comprehensive list of individuals' and groups' research interests across the University.

Many researchers felt that briefings for individuals would be useful, again, reflecting the interest in targeted information distribution. The University needs to consider whether the benefits of supplying individual researchers with a more targeted information service would be worth further investment in centralised resources at the ERO. Briefings at a departmental level were also considered valuable and it may prove more efficient and cost-effective to operate services at this level, or concentrate service provision in research areas with particular potential for development.

There were no strong objections to the dissemination of information by electronic means (e-mail and the LUT network) implying that the External Relations Office could make further use of these methods if desired. Funding information displayed on the Campus-Wide Information Network, as at Nottingham University, could be accessed by all staff. However, an earlier survey of *FIB* recipients showed that they preferred to receive the printed form of

the bulletin rather than use the version displayed on the Network.⁶ Electronic information provision should only be used alongside other forms of information provision, not as a substitute for it. As Douglas Robertson of Nottingham University pointed out you cannot force researchers to use either printed or electronic methods of information provision and it is worth maintaining both forms to ensure researchers receive information promptly.⁷

Researchers were less enthusiastic about collaboration with the Pilkington Library than other services which the ERO could offer. The Library is a European Documentation Centre and holds copies of many of the documents produced by the European Commission relating to European support for research. The ERO has suggested that this information would be easier for researchers to use if it were held in one part of the library and supervised by a member of staff familiar with the subject.⁸ Further investigation is necessary to determine whether researchers would be more likely to use information arranged in this way.

8.9 The role of a central body

8.9.1 Information provision

Nearly half (46%) of the researchers surveyed felt that a central body which collates the details of research interests and coordinates the University's efforts to obtain funding would be valuable. However, unless this body receives information and support from the majority of departments, its activities and the benefits to researchers would be limited. For the External Relations Office to carry out some services suggested by researchers, e.g. the evaluation of proposal costings, it would be necessary for the staff concerned to provide the ERO with copies of their applications and/or detailed descriptions of the intended research. Many researchers, including those who favour a central body, would not be prepared to compile comprehensive information about research interests for the ERO, or are concerned about the time taken to do this.

At the other universities visited the provision of research funding information is closely linked with the financial administration of applications. Each research office maintains a database giving details of the research grants awarded by external organisations. This database enables research office staff to provide advice about funding bodies based on the outcome of previous applications, and give researchers the contact names of others with experience of particular schemes.

At Loughborough, the Communications and Publicity Office produces a list of the awards made to researchers and directories of research groups and media contacts.^{9,10} Staff at the External Relations Office would be in a better position to advise researchers on funding applications if they were able to obtain up-to-date, detailed information on current research activities, either from this Office, the Finance Office or individual departments.

8.9.2 University objectives for research funding

The researchers surveyed had mixed feelings about the practical value of establishing University-wide objectives for obtaining research funding. The majority of researchers who favoured or disliked the idea of a central body held similar opinions on the value of University-wide objectives. Over half the respondents (52%) gave the same answer to questions 16a (concerning a central body) and 17 (concerning University objectives), i.e. they responded "yes", "no", or "don't know" to both questions. One fifth of the staff surveyed, who replied "don't know" to both questions, did not appear to have considered the implications of developing central support for research or were unsure about this prospect.

The predominant view was that the University should provide support for research, but not control departmental or individual research activities. Building on current connections between the ERO and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research or other senior staff is probably the most effective method of fostering externally funded research and meeting the objectives set out in the University's strategic plan (section 4.1.2).

8.10 Conclusion

The External Relations Office has established effective strategies for the acquisition and distribution of a broad range of information concerning external research funding. Most researchers find the *Funding Information Bulletin* useful and the material it contains complements information received from other sources. There is considerable variation in the extent of externally funded research and the utilisation of ERO's services across the University.

The services offered by the ERO could be developed and extended to encourage more staff to apply for external funds and to provide greater support for researchers already involved in this activity. Particular attention should be given to: increasing selective

dissemination of information and advance warning of programmes; developing a list of staff research interests/areas of expertise; extending use of the Campus-Wide Information Network; and establishing a database giving details of the outcome of previous funding applications. The structure of the University would make some of the strategies adopted by other universities more appropriate than others and different approaches may need to be developed for each department. Developing communication between the ERO and academic staff is essential in order to build up a service which meets researchers requirements.

8.11 Further study

This study has provided a basic overview of the use of information relating to external research funding at Loughborough University. Further investigation is needed in order to assess the feasibility and value of suggestions made in this report. Obviously, substantially increasing the use of services would have staffing and other resource implications for the ERO. These would need to be set against the value of improved services to researchers and the increased potential of the University to obtain external funds for research.

This survey was limited to those likely to be involved in externally funded research. Further efforts should be made to obtain a more complete picture of research activities and information needs at the University. Such study would allow the External Relations Office to establish priorities for improvements to its information and advice services.

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2. **Reed, B. et al.** *European Commission's Framework 4 programme: briefing*, 15/12/94, 1994.
3. Discussion with Edward Hughes, External Relations Office, Loughborough University of Technology, 24 May 1995.
4. Interview with Dr David Williams, Research Services Unit, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 26 June 1995.
5. Discussion with Edward Hughes, External Relations Office, Loughborough University of Technology, 31 May 1995.
6. Discussion with Edward Hughes, External Relations Office, Loughborough University of Technology, 11 August 1995.
7. Interview with Dr Douglas Robertson, Director, Office of Research and Business Services, Nottingham University, 26 June 1995.
8. Discussion with Edward Hughes and Jon Walker, External Relations Office, Loughborough University of Technology, 11 August 1995.
9. **Loughborough University of Technology Communications and Publicity Office.** *Directory of research groups*, 1994.
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Appendix 1

Loughborough University: Schools and departments

School	Department
Engineering	Aeronautical and Automotive Engineering and Transport Studies Electronic and Electrical Engineering Civil and Building Engineering Mechanical Engineering Manufacturing Engineering
Pure and Applied Science	Chemical Engineering Chemistry Computer Studies Institute of Polymer Technology and Materials Engineering Mathematical Sciences Physics
Human and Environmental Studies	Economics European Studies Geography Human Sciences Human Sciences and Advanced Technology Research Institute Institute of Consumer Ergonomics Loughborough University Business School Physical Education, Sports Science and Recreation Management Social Sciences
Education and Humanities	Centre for Hazard and Risk Management Design and Technology Education English and Drama Information and Library Studies

Appendix 2
Questionnaire survey form

Name

Department

Information provision for externally funded research at Loughborough University

I am currently undertaking a MA/MSc dissertation in the Department of Information and Library Studies on the provision of information in the university relating to externally funded research. This involves looking at present information provision on funding opportunities and how this might be improved. I would like to build up a picture of information requirements across the whole university and would be grateful if you could spare the time to fill in this questionnaire even if you are not currently involved in externally funded research. All information will remain confidential; I intend to present results by school.

Please return this questionnaire to Deborah Lass, Department of Information and Library Studies, by Friday 7 July 1995. Thank you

Please tick the appropriate boxes

1. What is your position in the department? *Please tick all those that apply.*

research coordinator []
leader of research committee []
member of research committee []
none of the above []

2. Does any member of the department have responsibility for obtaining information about external research opportunities?

Yes [] No [] Don't know []

If yes, please give details:

3. Does any member of the department have specific responsibility for European contacts in research and/or teaching?

Yes [] No [] Don't know []

If yes, please give details:

4. Have you personally been involved in externally funded research during the past two years?

Yes [] No []

If yes, please give project title(s) and funding body(bodies):

If no, would you like to be involved in externally funded research?

Yes [] No [] Don't know []

5. Do you receive details of research opportunities from any of the following funding bodies?

In the first column please tick which funding bodies information is received from. Where information is received, please indicate the supplier in the remaining columns.

If no information is received, please go to question 7.

	information received	direct from funding body	from other members of department	from elsewhere in the university	from the press	other (please specify)
research councils						
government departments						
European Commission						
charitable bodies						
industry						
international agencies						
other (please specify)						

6. Do you pass any information received about funding opportunities to:

a. other members of the department? Yes ☐ No ☐

b. other members of the university? Yes ☐ No ☐

7. Would you like to receive (more) information about external funding opportunities?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, from which funding bodies?

8a. Have you personally had any involvement in European Commission programmes?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please give project title(s) and programme:

b. Were any of the above project(s) initiated by other institutions?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please give details:

9a. The funding bodies often involve researchers in peer review of research proposals and selection decisions.

Are you involved in this process? Yes [] No []

If yes, please give the name of the funding body concerned:

b. Do you have any other input to research policies formulated by funding bodies?

Yes [] No []

If yes, please give details:

10. If you participate in the activities mentioned in question 9, do they provide you with any information about research opportunities which is of value to:

a. other members of the department? Yes [] No []

b. other members of the university? Yes [] No []

11. Do you feel participation in assessment activities has any bearing on the department's ability to obtain external research funding?

Yes [] No [] Don't know []

Please explain:

12. The remit of the External Relations Office includes providing information and advice in order to help the university obtain external research funding.

Are you aware that the External Relations Office has this role?

Yes [] No []

13a. Did you know that the External Relations Office publishes a Funding Information Bulletin?

Yes [] No []

If *no*, please go to question 14.

b. Have you seen a copy?

Yes [] No []

If yes, how did you obtain this bulletin? If *no*, please go to question 14.

c. How often do you see the Funding Information Bulletin? *please select the closest answer*

every issue [] monthly [] every 3-4 months []

every 12 months [] less than once a year []

14a. Are you aware of the following services which the External Relations Office offers to staff?

Please tick which services you are aware of, which you have used and which you would be interested in using in the future.

	Unaware of service	Aware of service, but not used	Service used	Interested in future use
Answering enquiries and information searches on funding opportunities				
Programme briefings, eg on EU programmes				
Assistance with proposals, including advice on selection criteria				
Consultancy advice for European proposals				
Contacts with European Commission officials in Brussels				
European partner searching through CORDIS database				

b. If you have used any of the above services, please comment on the usefulness, relevance and speed of service provision. Were there any ways the service could be improved?

15a. Some of the following services might also be carried out by the External Relations Office.

Please indicate how useful each of these might be to you by ticking the appropriate section.

	not useful	possibly useful	useful	very useful
advance warning of programmes				
selective dissemination of information to individuals				
occasional briefings for departments				
regular briefings for interested individuals or heads of research groups				
sharing of University expertise, eg contact names, project experience				
greater use of the LUT Network to distribute information				
use of e-mail to distribute information				
collaboration with the library, in particular the European Documentation Centre				

b. Are there any other services you would like the External Relations Office to provide?

Yes [] No []

If yes, please give details

16. A central body, such as the External Relations Office, could build up a picture of activities within LUT and keep details of successful applications, current research interests and future plans. This body could then coordinate the university's efforts to obtain research funding, comment on failure to achieve support and investigate new funding opportunities.

a. Do you feel such a body is needed?

Yes [] No [] Don't know []

Please explain:

b. Do you think your department would be prepared to produce a quarterly update of research interests for this central body?

Yes [] No [] Don't know []

Please explain:

17. Do you feel establishing university-wide objectives for obtaining external research funding would be helpful?

Yes [] No [] Don't know []

Please explain:

18. Any other comments on the role of a central body, or other issues raised in this questionnaire:

If I find it necessary to follow up some the issues raised in this questionnaire, would you be willing to:

a. participate in an informal interview (max. 30 mins)? Yes [] No []
b. receive a few further questions by e-mail? Yes [] No []

If yes, please give your e-mail address

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Please return this questionnaire to Deborah Lass, Department of Information and Library Studies, by Friday 7 July 1995

Appendix 3

Questionnaire survey form: Question 13 for recipients of the *Funding Information Bulletin*

13. You should receive the Funding Information Bulletin (FIB), produced by the External Relations Office about every 10 days.

a. Which parts of the Funding Information Bulletin do you find useful?

Please tick the appropriate section.

	not useful	slightly useful	useful	very useful
editorial and notes on research funding in general				
research council and government department news				
European Commission news				
other, eg charities, international agencies, newsletters				

b. Is the FIB your sole source of information for any of the above topics?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please list the topics

c. Did you use any information from the last FIB?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what topic(s) did these items cover?

d. How often do you contact the External Relations Office in connection with items from the FIB?

Please select the closest answer

more than once a month ☐ monthly ☐ every 3-4 months ☐
every 12 months ☐ never ☐

e. How often do you request further information from outside contacts given in the FIB?

Please select the closest answer

more than once a month ☐ monthly ☐ every 3-4 months ☐
every 12 months ☐ never ☐

f. In relation to your requirements, how do you rate the following characteristics of the FIB?
Please tick the appropriate section.

	poor	satisfactory	good	excellent
detail of information				
clarity of information				
range of information				
timeliness of information				

g. Please add any comments on the value of the FIB, or how it could be improved:

