

SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL

Public Accountability, Ministerial Direction
and Authority to undertake commitments

Note by the Chairman

Under Clause 2 of the Science and Technology Act the Secretary of State for Education and Science may, with the consent of the Treasury, pay to the Council the sums of money he considers necessary to support their activities. This Clause also permits the Secretary of State to issue directions to the Council on the use of the funds provided.

2. The Council's funds will be provided through separate annual grants in aid from the Vote of the Department of Education and Science for:

	1965/66
(a) Science Research Council	£23.53 million
(b) Subscription to CERN	£2.9 million
(c) Subscription to ESRO	£1.75 million
(d) Contribution to NATO Scientific Scheme	£0.3 million

A requirement of the Exchequer and Audit Acts is that no expenditure may properly be charged to a public account unless it has been approved by the Treasury. In practice the Treasury only retain their right of approval on transactions which are either large or unusual; they delegate the power to authorise and charge to the account individual items of expenditure below defined limits. I, as the head of the permanent staff of the Council, shall be appointed Accounting Officer, in which capacity I am personally accountable to Parliament for the prudence and propriety of all the Council's transactions which have financial consequences. The delegation which will be made to me has not yet been settled but it seems likely to be £100,000 for any one item of capital expenditure, and any research grants and any extra-mural contracts. On staff, the delegation is likely to be the power to create new staff posts up to the level of Principal Scientific Officer (£2174-£3002 a year) or perhaps Senior Principal Scientific Officer (£3050-£3475 a year) within a total number approved by the Secretary of State (or the D.E.S. on his behalf) and the Treasury. Above the levels of authority delegated, specific Treasury approval will be required in each individual case.

4. These delegated powers will cover the overwhelming proportions of the Council's transactions and will, of course, be exercised only with the agreement of the Council. However, to make possible the efficient despatch of business I propose to delegate to other Senior officers of the Council the power to approve, with the agreement of the appropriate Board or Committee and the Finance and Establishments Division, transactions up to specified limits so that each Division can deal with most of the normal research grants or extra-mural research contracts and with capital expenditure at the Establishments in accordance with the approved programme.

5. For the same reason I propose that my powers to create posts and the Council's powers to appoint staff, pay them, and to provide pensions for them, should normally be exercised through the Establishment Officer subject to my specific approval of appointments above the P.S.O. level. However, I should propose to consult the Council formally on proposals to create and fill posts at or above the level of Chief Scientific Officer or at lower levels if these apply to Directors of Establishments. My immediate proposals for such senior posts are made in Paper No. 6.

6. There will be a number of other small delegated powers (e.g. to write off losses, waive claims, make ex-gratia payments, etc.) which, unless they raise matters of special importance I propose should be handled by the office without reference to the Council or its Boards.

7. The details of the various internal financial delegations cannot be settled until the committee structure and method of working of the Boards have been decided but meanwhile I ask the Council to agree that in making the arrangements for internal delegation I should proceed on the general lines described above.