

Wellcome reveals plans for research funding

The Wellcome Trust has announced plans to increase its research budget by about £50 million (US\$80 million) following the £2.54 billion disposal of its stake in the Wellcome drug company. The sale, to Glaxo, created the world's largest pharmaceutical company and at the same time established the Trust as the richest charity in the world.

As a result of the Glaxo-Wellcome deal, the Trust's income will increase by around 20 per cent, and its total assets, (which include a 4.7 per cent stake in the new Glaxo-Wellcome company) will rise to £6.7 billion (US\$10.5 billion). The second largest charity, the Howard Hughes, has assets of around \$7.5 billion.

With its annual income up from £250 million to £300 million the Trust will also become a larger sponsor of medical research than the UK government's Medical Research Council, which has a grant portfolio of £278 million for the current fiscal year. However, with international research singled out as one of the beneficiaries of the Trust's extra money, the two bodies will be spending about the same amount in the UK.

At present the Trust spends 2 per cent of its money overseas. It is currently reassessing its portfolio of grant giving in countries outside the UK with the aim of developing a more international perspective. David Gordon, the Trust's programme director,

says there are opportunities to build on existing work. "The move to be more international will involve organic growth," he says, meaning building on programmes that are in place, rather than initiating new ones.

For example, the Trust wants to support expatriate scientists in the UK and the US who wish to return to their native South Africa and participate in the rebuilding of the country's scientific establishment. The Trust will also expand its support for Eastern Europe and the Soviet Republics, where it already provides scientists with grants to come and refresh their skills in the UK and money to update their laboratories when they return home.

The push to become more international is also reflected in a new research programme that will look into problems that result from the growth of human populations, to which the Trust will commit £50 million during the next five years. Spurred on by the International Conference on Population and Development, which was held in Cairo last September, the Trust organized a workshop in January to identify important areas of research in this field. Areas singled out include contraceptive research, an area where pharmaceutical companies are investing very little in research and development, and behavioural studies, which are usually too sensitive to be funded from the public purse. As yet, no specific grants have been awarded.

Some of the Trust's new money will be spent making sure it gets value for its money. This involves further development of its unit for policy research in science and medicine set up in 1992 to conduct a systematic study of effective means of funding science. The unit has developed an advanced system for quantifying research results. "This involves looking at what has gone before and analysing what was cost-effective and what was not," says Gordon.

The Trust also plans to become more active in commercializing research that it sponsors by setting up an industrial liaison office to help researchers register patents and negotiate licences. But Gordon stresses that the aim is not commercial exploitation by the Trust. "Research that is useful must be fed through to health care," he says. Intellectual property rights will be vested in the university or institution where the research is carried out.

Despite the commitment to increase overseas spending the Trust will be in a position to sponsor 1,000 more scientists in the UK, bringing the number it supports to just over 4,000. It will also provide an increasing proportion of these researchers with support for five years, rather than the traditional three. But Gordon is resolute that the Trust will not spend its new money by increasing its contribution to university overhead costs. "No doubt the universities are under strong pressure to get a higher and higher proportion of costs from external partnerships. The Trust wants to signal that it won't increase its share of funding."

Although the focus of the Trust's support will remain firmly on the individual researcher, it will continue its programme, begun in October 1992, of giving universities money for equipment and buildings. At the start of April the Trust announced an award of £11.5 million to University College London towards the development of a new teaching and medical research centre, almost matching the £14.5 million of public funding the centre has received.

The Trust also plans to undertake more joint sponsorship of research with the Medical Research Council — the two are already jointly funding the new Sanger Centre for Genetics Research (Cambridge, UK) to carry out genome sequencing in humans, the nematode worm *Caenorhabditis elegans* and yeast, and the European Bioinformatics Institute (Cambridge, UK).

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Asset Values: Comparison with major US Foundations

All in US\$ millions – 1994 data



Source: The Chronicle of Philanthropy, 9 February 1995 and other published data