R&D ANALYSIS
OF THE FP7 EX-POST EVALUATION

The DG of the JRC has invited staff representatives and Trade Unions to comment on the findings of the "Ex-post evaluation of the direct actions of the Joint Research Centre under the seventh framework programme 2007-2013" (Cunningham Report). R&D has analised the report to provide priorities linked to the recommendations of the Panel of external experts. R&D embraces the opportunity given to share its views on the ex-post evaluation.

R&D acknowledges the competences of the evaluation panel and sees the report as very valuable input to the quick development and deployment of a mid- and long-term strategy for the JRC. R&D sees the JRC as centre of (applied) research delivering key scientific services. Such a mission includes access to intelligence derived from independent and highly qualified measurement and testing facilities to other parts of the Commission, the EU Institutions and relevant international organisations. The purpose of which is to ensure a targeted and evidence-based input to the conception, deployment and monitoring of EU-policies.

The broadly positive assessment of the performance of the JRC as the Commission Science Service made by the panel, however, cannot hide that further improvements, many of which touching on the very structure of the JRC, are needed. Being a science service requires us to be open-minded and ready for changes. R&D embraces its societal responsibility to contribute and promote such a culture while protecting at the same time staff individual rights in all relevant areas.

R&D shares most of the analyses done by the evaluation panel, and we invite Senior and Middle Management to have the courage to address the implied changes in the right priority and as part of a strategy endorsed and agreed by the entire Commission. In some cases, R&D disagrees with conclusions made. To engage in a dialogue based on constructive criticism, R&D wishes to share its comments and conclusions hereafter.

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Comments to Chapter 1 - Introduction

It is worth to highlight that **the assessment excludes an in-depth analysis of the important work conducted in the context of the FP7 consortia**.

A significant shortcoming of the report is due to the fact that **it focuses exclusively on the seven scientific institutes, thus excluding an evaluation of the resources allocated to non-work programme specific tasks**. This is a severe limitation and does not allow to fully appreciate the efficiency and effectiveness of resources allocated to "overheads".

R&D agrees with the panel's analysis that JRC has no competitor which could be used as comparator. It is noteworthy that among the sectorial comparators listed, some important institutions and organisations have not been considered. These are in particular IAEA Laboratories in Seibersdorf and Monaco, the CERN as well as the Italian ENEA, all of them traditionally being very close to the JRC. The selected comparators have also a strong disciplinary bias for nuclear activities and engineering/experimental physics. Comparators for life sciences and socio-economics are only partially reflected e.g. via Fraunhofer and Helmholtz.

R&D agrees to the pinpointed similarities with the Information and Technical Solutions services of the World Bank Group (not used as a comparator).

As regards the assessment of the nuclear vs the non-nuclear portfolio, the evaluation panel has an inconsistent approach leading to contradictory statements. R&D challenges hence some of the respective annotations made.

Chapter 2 – Broad Observations

The evaluation panel repeatedly highlights the importance and quality of the JRC scientific output through scientific publications. Although JRC cannot reach the same levels of academic institutions, JRC excels if compared to the selected sectorial comparators. The panel also acknowledges the paramount contribution of the JRC to areas of standardisation of measurement and testing in both the nuclear and non-nuclear fields.

R&D shares also the observations made on the role of the JRC as for training and education. R&D is looking forward to seeing how the proposed measures are integrated in the strategy. **R&D also fully endorses the need to enhance and even invest into JRC research facilities**, but we are concerned by opening access to industry via a full-cost access as this may jeopardise JRC's independence. In return, R&D favors a much stronger citizen engagement and dialogue. A possible innovation could be for instance the provision of a Citizen Observation Board, which could complement the view formulated by the

Board of Governors and which could ensure a better acceptance in the general public.

R&D agrees on the need for a scientific committee, but underlines that the current structure is unsuitable because of a perceived lack of independence of this body from the JRC Management. In fact, the majority of the current scientific committee is appointed by the JRC Management itself, and the rest is elected by an electoral body composed also by staff without a scientific formation or background. **The Cunningham Report's suggestion to implement an External Scientific Committee or Board, in return, deserves further consideration, as it could solve this shortcoming.**

The famous "silos" are also of concern to R&D and current ongoing re-structuring is possibly leading to a strengthening of some silo's walls. **R&D is particularly concerned about the promotion a culture of over-identification in some institutes and sites undermining the idea of "One JRC".**

As regards the identification of "negative" priorities, which are no longer in line with the JRC mission, the evaluation remains fuzzy and very generic.

The conclusion made on resources and on the improvement of the ratio between administrative vs. operational resources from 1:3 to 1:4 is probably based on wrong figures since the evaluation panel doesn't seem to have considered that many administrative tasks and functions have been allocated as additional duties to scientific staff.

Human resources development is also analysed in view of recent reductions, but the related statements are clearly outside the mandated evaluation period 2007-2013.

R&D shares the assessment made on gender balance and the need for a systematic rotation of Middle Managers. R&D believes that this is the most important priority to bring the organisation in shape and urges the DG to tackle this issue fiercely and immediately.

R&D believes that the systematic rotation of middle managers after 5 years – as common practice in all other Commission services – will not only promote the idea of ONE JRC, but will set a positive example for staff, thus promoting a culture of renewal and continuous development and learning. R&D and staff are disappointed – if not even frustrated - by the pseudo-rotation exercises done so far, usually limited to renaming single units and shifting some dossiers between units. This is neither credible nor transparent.

The panel recommends to promote the appointment of women and nationals from new Member States, obviously selecting always the most

qualified candidates. The pending decision on the vacant post of the JRC Director of Programme Management will set for R&D a light-house example of the importance given by JRC management to this recommendation. R&D also fully endorses the statements made on the need to implement a sound, lean and straightforward corporate policy on management of Conflict-of-Interest at all levels, including staff representation.

R&D agrees to improve JRC's recognition as the "Commission Science Service" (CSS).

Having said this, R&D does not fully agree with the assessments and conclusions made on communication. Although the JRC Science Hub can be seen as a single place to retrieve JRC related information, it fails to improve our visibility. The JRC Science Hub is a largely static webpage unfit for modern communication on social networks or from mobile devices. JRC is practically inexistent on Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin, Tumblr, Instagram or Youtube. In addition, JRC reports are usually done and managed by the Office for Publications in Luxembourg and are made available through the EU Bookshop. Duplicated dissemination creates waste of resources. Furthermore, JRC's attempt to implement an in-house social network is based on good intention but failed in improving internal communication due to the unavailability of the tool outside the working environment and lack of friendliness of its user interface.

Moreover, **R&D feels that a major flaw in science communication lies in the fact that knowledge should be communicated where it is generated. To this purpose, communication skills in the scientific units have to be improved. This refers partially to an urgently needed of sensibilisation and training of scientific staff, but even more to the way communication officers ("co-coms") are operating.** Despite the huge size of many units, communication is dealt with in an amateurish manner. Either co-coms are executing this important task on top of other duties, or it is expected that project leaders are also ensuring this communication on top of all project management tasks. This has not been recognized by the panel, but a due consideration of the issue would lead to a significantly improved communication.

Lastly, **ICT infrastructure of the JRC would require a careful assessment by external peers. Scientific staff perceives our ICT environment as overregulated, inflexible and not state-of-the art for an efficient science service.**

Chapter 3 – Direct Actions 7th EC FP

It is noteworthy that during the evaluation period the JRC has experienced three major changes in the way its priority themes were organized. Under

these circumstances it is remarkable that JRC performed so well in the assessment. The panel addresses in this chapter the need to differentiate between core business, improvement of core business and exploratory research. **It emphasizes in its assessment the pivotal importance in maintaining exploratory and "blue-sky" research, which should be limited to 10% of resources but allow for almost complete freedom in order to generate creative ideas. R&D strongly agrees to both, i.e. the amount of resources to be allocated as well as the need for "blue-sky" research.** The successfulness of such an approach has for instance been demonstrated also in the private sector (e.g. Google). However, R&D is concerned about the current practice at the JRC where a Scientific Committee of questionable independence decides on exploratory proposals. A voting mechanism by staff or even by the public on exploratory proposals would be for instance a better guarantee to achieve ownership and visibility. **Current practice, additionally, has led to situations where commitments in H2020 consortia cannot be maintained or earned income cannot be spent, whereas "exploratory" projects awarded allow for recruitment. R&D considers this as poor management and urges the DG to review these decisions in order to ensure that such situations are avoided.** Similarly, R&D identifies a large potential for conflict-of-interest within the Scientific Committee evaluating exploratory proposals.

R&D agrees on the importance of cross-fertilisation between teams and sites: rotation of middle managers is seen as key to success. Additional measures, as for instance the fostering of video-conference solutions or the introduction of temporary stages of short duration at a site different than the place of employment, may also be considered. On the contrary, **R&D objects strongly the physical movement of laboratories and activities between sites in lack of consensus and a transparent cost-benefit analysis.** R&D calls for more incentives and less hierarchical constraints to work across institutes. **Bundling of activities of similar characteristics on each site could foster collaboration, and a vision for a new governance is needed.**

The Cunningham-panel reiterates at several occasions in the assessment the need to create either a Unit for Social Sciences or to create the competence for social science in each Unit. R&D believes that such competence is already available within the JRC and should be brought closer to the Scientific Institutes.

Chapter 4 - Direct Actions 7th EURATOM FP

R&D shares the panel's view on the orientation and focus of JRC's nuclear activities and agrees with its assessment that although improvements have been made, measures to ensure better coordination and alignment are still insufficient. Analysing carefully all comments, R&D raises the question

whether for instance IRMM should maintain a mixed profile, i.e. combining nuclear and non-nuclear activities. While its nuclear activities are very well in shape, many of its non-nuclear activities, e.g. work on the aviation security sector, are recommended to be reallocated. The same applies to reference materials production, largely part of commercial collaborations, e.g. with private companies such as LGC Promochem or Sigma-Aldrich. The latter have to be carefully analysed because of the commercial character in view of the Conflict-of-Interest Policies.

Interestingly, as stated by the evaluation panel, customers of JRC's nuclear activities are largely outside the Commission. This raises perplexity on how this fits with the role of the JRC as the CSS (Commission in-house Science Service). R&D observes that for nuclear activities the JRC maintains deliberately a strong fragmentation. Furthermore, the aforementioned importance to integrate aspects of social sciences in the non-nuclear portfolio is completely missing in the assessment of nuclear activities. R&D recognises here a strong incongruence of the assessment of the panel in comparison to non-nuclear activities.

Chapter 5 - Strategic development

The panel rightfully concludes that, within its mission, several JRC activities appeared as the result of a combination of historical legacy mixed with reaction to shifting demand. The absence of a clear and agreed strategy within the Commission is threatening to the very future of the JRC.

R&D emphasises the importance of the JRC to be a science service endowed with experimental facilities and a certain level of freedom for anticipatory "blue-sky" research.

R&D shares the panel's opinion on the need for good (i.e. better) governance and the stimulation of cross-institute collaboration and interdisciplinary research. It is our opinion though that a policy favoring a "one site – one institute" approach is detrimental to this goal. The physical isolation of Institutes providing horizontal activities (IRMM, IPTS) contributes to the shortcomings identified by the report.

Indeed, R&D agrees with the analysis that current Institutes and Units structure is the result of historical, geographical and culture developments rather than the outcome of managerial sound strategy. Experimental infrastructure and laboratories often follow the same logic. Lack of vision and ideas for new governance structures, e.g. putting all chemical laboratories or biological laboratories present in a certain site under a unique governance structure, is accompanied by an almost selfish and individualistic way of thinking and acting.

R&D does not see any other solution to this situation than a courageous reorganisation including a forced rotation of middle managers.

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Much has been said in the assessment about the need for a sound strategy and the consequent means by which this strategy has to be implemented (commonly called tactics).

At a fundamental level, all strategies boil down to two very broad options: Do what everyone else is doing (but spend less money doing it), or do something no one else can do (and money becomes a secondary issue). Having said this, the Cunningham Panel correctly identifies the uniqueness of the JRC. In the light of the findings commented in detail above, R&D proposes to consider the following suggestions for priority actions.

Priority Action 1

Gender balance and rotation of middle management

Training and stimulation for application to middle management positions are certainly useful tools. Aim at a fair, equal and gender-neutral approach for any recruitment, so that the consequence is a gender and national-balanced staff distribution. The currently vacant director position in Directorate A immediately provides a tremendous opportunity for JRC management to show if and how seriously the panel's recommendations are taken. Likewise, rotation for middle managers has to be immediately enforced for all positions that have been occupied longer than 5 years within the same directorate. No fake rotations!

Priority Action 2

Re-design Institutes' structure based on assets and functional competence oriented towards societal challenges

The current mix between vertical and horizontal institute mandates (e.g. environment vs measurement) is nonsense and has to be abandoned. Likewise, a policy of "one-site – one competence - one-institute" is detrimental for an interdisciplinary approach and leads only to maintaining if not even reinforcing silos. On the contrary, R&D welcomes overcoming unnecessary fragmentation of laboratories at a single site.

Priority Action 3

Directors at HQ, HQ structure, customers portfolio

Creation of a slimmer and smarter JRC HQ, with the physical move of Institute Directors to the HQ. Political liaison work with customers, which should not be done exclusively within the Commission, but also cover other European

Institutions including the European Central Bank and the European Investment Bank.

Priority Action 4
"Blue-Sky" Research and participation to H2020 projects

Follow the Panel's recommendation to push for the 10% of our activities to be run freely and creatively, in order to anticipate future issues in a visionary way.

Revise decisions concerning JRC's participation to H2020 projects, which currently is set to no participation or participation without possibility for staff recruitment. This is not in line with the recommendations from the Panel (which aim at the establishment of a Conflict-of-Interest policy, and not to blocking JRC's participation to H2020 consortia).

Priority Action 5
Scientific Committee

Introduce a really independent scientific committee, stemming purely from legitimisation by scientists. If not possible by election, base it on impact factors or citation indexes.

Priority Action 6
Creation of mobility market and incentives for temporary staff exchange

Foster a true mobility culture, aimed at valuing JRC's internal competences providing enhanced flexibility to respond to reorganisation requirements as well as increasing staff satisfaction and productivity. Foster cross-fertilisation by means of temporary mobility on a voluntary basis.

Priority Action 7
Creation of a standard Unit design with ceilings in staff number and identification of standard job profiles

Respect established guidance for standard unit size and composition at the Commission level. Together with a ceiling in total staff numbers, this also includes a clear definition of duties for Head of Unit, Deputy Head of Unit, Communication Officer, Secretarial and Administrative support, Quality Manager and Project Managers.

Priority Action 8
Creation of a unified structure for infrastructure management

Concentrate all JRC Infrastructure management into a unified structure across all JRC sites.

Priority Action 9
Communication & Scientific ICT

Establish a true Unit-based network of co-coms, benefit of existing infrastructure (e.g. EU Bookshop and OPOCE) to avoid unnecessary duplications. Improve JRC presence on social media. Review the CONNECTED pilot in light of its limited availability and fuzzy interface. Review the current ICT environment to introduce cutting-edge technologies and practices (e.g., introduction of a BYOD policy) aiming at reducing the current feeling of overregulation, lack of flexibility and lack of efficiency. Consider the opportunities stemming from state-of-the-art social network already widely used such as LINKEDIN and ResearchGate.

Priority Action 10
Citizen engagement

Creation of a Citizen Observation Board with laymen observing JRC work. Ideally such a board should contain also journalists, NGOs and person of public interest. It would complement the work of the BoG and guarantee public acceptance and visibility of our work.

R&D Ispra
14th September 2015