

Research Fund for Coal and Steel: research programme, multiannual technical guidelines

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In accordance with Council Decision 2008/376/EC, the Commission presented a summary report on the monitoring and assessment exercise of the research programme of the Research Fund for Coal and Steel (RFCS).

The RFCS was established in 2002 to support the competitiveness of the European Coal and Steel sectors. In its 11 years of activity, the RFCS has co-funded research, pilot and demonstration projects with **total funding in the order of EUR 600 million** (typically EUR 55 million per year) granted to industries, universities and research centres.

The Commission has recently completed a Monitoring exercise of the research programme and an Assessment of the expected benefits. The Assessment exercise was carried out on completion of projects co-financed by the RFCS between 2003 and 2010.

Results of the monitoring exercise: the main recommendation of the Monitoring exercise was to maintain the general approach adopted since the creation of the Research Fund for Coal and Steel in 2002 and revised in 2008. More specifically, the programme should:

- keep the **research programme as an industry-oriented sectorial programme** and keep the research objectives unchanged;
- **maintain the current main processes** for implementation, such as the rules for allocation of budget to the sectors, the share of allowable actions (research projects, pilot and demonstration projects, accompanying measures) and the participation rules. The practice that non-EU partners can take part in projects but cannot receive funding should be maintained;

Amongst the recommendations were: (i) a possible better harmonisation of the technical sub-fields of the programme (Technical Groups), (ii) the improvement of the criteria used for the evaluation of submitted proposals, a more extensive use of electronic tools (e.g., for submission and remote evaluation of proposals), (iii) the strengthening of dissemination actions both during the lifetime of projects and after the production of the final report, the encouraging of pilot and demonstration projects.

In response to these recommendations, **specific actions were undertaken** including:

- the full introduction in 2013 of an electronic submission system of proposals;
- a review of the evaluation criteria carried out with the assistance of the Coal and Steel Advisory Groups (CAG and SAG);
- a review of the scope and of the evaluation criteria for the Accompanying Measures action of the programme;
- a draft proposal to harmonise scope and size of some critical technical groups.

Main conclusions: the Commission considered that from this analysis, the **Research Fund for Coal and Steel appears fully in line with its mandate** defined by Council Decision 2008/376/ EC according to which it shall be an instrument to support the competitiveness of the Community sectors related to the coal and steel industry and delivering innovation.

Main outcomes can be summarised as follows.

- **The programme does not require fundamental changes;** its industry-oriented nature and main operating rules should be maintained.
- **Qualitative benefits:** for the coal and steel sectors and for the society and mainly consist in new knowledge, new processes and products, financial returns and improved working conditions.
- **Quantitative benefits:** these have been estimated in detail for 23 selected projects, showing that every euro used as RFCS co-funding has resulted in EUR 3.3/year of financial benefits for the beneficiaries.
- **Exploitation of the technical and scientific achievements:** projections across the coal and steel sectors indicated that, if widely applied at European scale, these achievements could lead to financial benefits of EUR 684 million/year. Considering a typical annual RFCS budget of approximately EUR 55 million/year, this corresponds to a potential multiplying factor of 12.4.