EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE FWF SURVEY 2002

DESIGN OF THE SURVEY

To improve its service, the FWF commissioned a wide-ranging survey among persons engaged in scientific activities. The contract to perform the study was awarded to the opinion research institute SPECTRA (Linz, Upper Austria) and the work was performed in November-December 2002. The survey was carried out via the Internet.

To ensure the most complete coverage possible, the survey was targeted at three distinct groups: scientific staff at universities and other research institutions; people who in the past five years have submitted at least one funding application to the FWF; people whose work in FWF projects has been or is being financed by the FWF. Of the 12,887 scientists contacted, 3,147 took part in the survey. This figure corresponds to a response rate of 24%.

Similar surveys were performed by the German Research Foundation (DFG) in 1997 and by the Swiss National Fund (SNF) in 2001. Where the questions are comparable, the results from these surveys are briefly mentioned in the present summary.

This report was prepared by the FWF with support from SPECTRA. It presents the results the FWF feels are most important.

The complete information obtained by SPECTRA is available on the FWF's Web page in both short and long versions together with a collection of data.

Please address any questions relating to the survey to:
Dr Falk Reckling
Tel. +43-1-5056740 ext. 43
e-mail reckling@fwf.ac.at

THE FWF AND ITS FUNDING CATEGORIES

HOW WIDELY KNOWN IS THE FWF?

As a first step the extent to which responders were aware of the various research funding organizations was assessed (by means of the question, "Which of the following are known to you as research funding institutions?"). **Overall, the European Union and the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) were the most widely known research funding organizations.** The European Union, with an awareness level of 96%, was the best known; and the FWF, with a rating of 95%, followed closely behind. The mid-table positions were occupied by the Austrian National Bank's "Jubiläumsfonds" (85%), the Austrian Academy of Sciences (82%) and the Federal Ministries (77%). The Industrial Research Promotion Fund and research institutions in other German-speaking countries followed, with awareness levels of 70% and 71%, respectively.

HOW WIDELY KNOWN ARE THE FWF'S FUNDING PROGRAMMES?

The most widely known funding programme is that for **research projects**: 98% of those aware of the FWF know of the existence of this type of funding. Also well known are the **Erwin Schrödinger Fellowships** (86%), the **Wittgenstein Prize** (83%), the **Hertha Firnberg Programme** (79%) and the **START Programme** (72%). Approximately two-thirds of those aware of the FWF have at least heard about support for printing costs (69%), the Lise Meitner Programme and support for Special Research Programmes (SFBs). The remaining funding programmes are known to fewer than half of those who indicated that they knew the FWF.

It is hardly surprising that programmes especially tailored to women, such as the Hertha Firnberg and Charlotte Bühler programmes, are particularly well known among female scientists.

As is the case for funding institutions in general, biologists, natural scientists, those in managerial positions and applicants for FWF funding are better informed than average about the FWF's various funding categories.

HOW ARE THE FWF'S FUNDING PROGRAMMES RATED?

The analysis shows conclusively that the best known funding programmes are rated as most valuable: 81% of respondents awarded the highest mark of "very valuable" to the most widely known funding programme, that for **research projects**. Three-quarters evaluated the next best-known programme, for Erwin Schrödinger Fellowships, as very valuable. The rather poorly known programmes to support Impulse Projects and Graduate Research Programmes were awarded the top mark by only about a third of respondents. The only case where a broad awareness of a programme was not reflected in an especially good rating was the Wittgenstein Prize: of the 83% aware of the programme only 48% were of the opinion that it is particularly valuable.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING PROGRAMMES

Half of those aware of the FWF feel that its range of research programmes is sufficient, with only one in five stating explicitly that other areas should be supported. The remaining respondents do not feel able to pass judgement on the FWF's spectrum of research programmes. Above all, the groups who are best informed of the FWF's funding categories and of other research funding institutions – namely those in managerial positions and applicants for FWF funding – are of the opinion that the existing funding categories are sufficient. Nevertheless, a wide range of suggestions for additional programmes could be found in the answers to the "open questions". The most frequent wishes are for "small project" financing (including costs for meetings or conferences and for preparation of applications as well as for small or short-term projects) and for support for PhD students.

44% of respondents were satisfied with the programmes offered by the DFG, 28% were not satisfied and 28% did not give their opinion.
The most common wish communicated to the SNF was for PhD fellowships.

BOTTOM-UP OR TOP-DOWN?

In contrast to other funding institutions the FWF does not define research topics to be supported and treats all scientific disciplines in the same way. **The majority of respondents believe that this practice should be maintained: four-fifths (78%) of them are of the opinion that the FWF should continue not to define topics for funding**. Only a minority of the scientists surveyed feel that a high priority should be accorded to establishing transdisciplinary research areas (17%), to promoting research in topics relevant to societal needs (9%) or to programmatically defined research (5%).

RESEARCH PROJECTS

Funding of research projects is not only the FWF's most widely known funding category but is also the one most often requested: **55% of the respondents who are aware of the FWF's existence have either submitted at least one application for funding of a research project or have collaborated on the preparation of an application.** The FWF's other funding categories, such as those concerned with supporting young scientists, with funding research networks or with making contributions to printing costs, have been applied for by only about one in ten of those who know of the FWF.
A further finding is that groups who have submitted significantly more applications for research projects – biologists, natural scientists and persons in managerial positions – are better informed about research funding institutions and about the FWF's funding categories.

REASONS FOR NON-APPLICATION

About half of those aware of the FWF have not submitted an application for a research project in the past five years. **One in three non-applicants (29%) felt that the risk of rejection was too high in relation to the effort involved in application.** A quarter of respondents (25%) indicated that their lack of experience or the fact that their supervisor submits applications was the reason why they did not do so. One in five respondents (18%)

was of the opinion that applications to other funding organizations have a higher chance of success. A similar proportion – 18% – do not apply for FWF funding because their research is too applied.

A more detailed analysis reveals that above all those working in the fields of social sciences, economics or medicine are reluctant to submit applications to the FWF because they feel that the effort involved is too large given the high risk of rejection. **Clearly, additional funding possibilities are available in these disciplines with different procedures and decision-making criteria and with a lower risk of rejection.**

Respondents to the DFG gave the high chance of rejection as the most common reason for non-application. Other reasons given were that there was "no appropriate funding programme"; that research funding "always goes to the same group of people"; that applications are reviewed by competitors who are not unbiased; and that it takes too long for a decision to be reached.

APPLICATIONS TO OTHER FUNDING ORGANIZATIONS

Scientists who have submitted applications to other funding organizations are clearly not necessarily those who do not feel that applications to the FWF stand a reasonable chance of success. Rather, they are more active than average in the attraction of third-party funding. Seven out of every ten respondents have previously submitted an application to another organization. Particularly well represented in this group are men, biologists, persons in managerial positions and those who have submitted at least one research project application to the FWF.

Apart from the FWF, which institutes are approached with requests for funding? The most frequent answers given are the Jubiläumsfonds of the Austrian National Bank (51%), the Federal Ministries (42%) and the EU (39%). In contrast, only 20% submit applications to the Austrian Academy of Sciences and a mere 12% to the Industrial Research Promotion Fund (FFF).

Scientists working in the field of medicine approach the Austrian National Bank (ÖAW) most frequently, while social scientists, economists and those working in the humanities submit applications to the Federal Ministries. Natural scientists and those in technical disciplines tend to approach the EU.

In Germany in 1997, ca. 36% of respondents had received funding for their research from Ministries, 24% from state governments, 24% from German foundations, 20% from the EU and 25% from research contracts.
In Switzerland two-thirds of respondents had submitted a request for funding from the SNF, almost 30% from the EU and more than 30% from other institutions. The reasons for application to other institutions are "primarily material: a better chance of success elsewhere; other sources of support; or the fact that the formal application criteria are not met."

The respondents who have submitted applications to the FWF and to another organization were asked to compare the two. **The FWF was assessed as somewhat better than the Jubiläumsfonds of the Austrian National Bank, the Federal Ministries and the EU. The ÖAW, the FFF and other institutions did not generally show any significant differences to the FWF.**

THE FWF'S IMAGE

THE FWF'S STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Respondents were given the opportunity in "open questions" to list the FWF's strengths and weaknesses. The richness and the unstructured nature of the answers make impossible a statistical treatment similar to that for the answers to the standardized questions. To enable some conclusions to be drawn, however, the various statements were grouped into categories. The results are summarized in the following paragraphs.

The FWF's main strengths were generally seen as support for basic research; unbureaucratic organization; fairness and objectivity; high quality standards; and the availability of funding to all. "Support for basic research" was interpreted to mean enabling scientists to perform research without a defined purpose or the pressure to produce industrially applicable results. Positive remarks under the heading of "unbureaucratic organization" include praise for the FWF's procedures for the submission and handling of applications as well as for its general effectiveness, efficiency, speed and flexibility. Included in the category "fairness and objectivity" are comments relating to fair review and evaluation procedures, objectivity, matter-of-factness and impartiality as well as to the clear structures and the transparency. Mention of the "high quality standards" related primarily to the guarantee of high scientific quality and the peer review procedure involving purely non-Austrian referees: this procedure is practically without parallel among other research funding organizations abroad. Finally, praise for the "availability of funding to all" included comments on the broad spectrum of funding programmes, the bottom-up principle for applications and the researchers' autonomy.

These strengths are offset by several weaknesses. **The points mentioned by the scientific community may be summarized under the following headings: poor transparency and communication; overly bureaucratic requirements; limited levels of funding; excessively long review periods; and the system of reviewers.** The heading "transparency and communication" includes criticisms of unclear, non-transparent and incomprehensible decisions and cost reductions, the incomplete transmission of reviews, the system of Reporters and of the lack of possibilities to comment on or appeal against reviews and decisions. "Bureaucratic requirements" gathers together general comments on the FWF's bureaucratic procedures, the effort required to submit applications and the poor service. The group of criticisms of "limited levels of funding" relates to points such as too low salaries, non-payment of overheads, inflexibility in the spending of funding and the lack of support for small-scale projects. The category of "excessively long review periods" is self explanatory. Criticisms of the "system of reviewers" relate to the selection of referees, to reviews from incompetent referees or to reviews that are biased and contain barely comprehensible arguments as well as to the general overrating of the peer review procedure coupled with the notion that ideas can be "stolen". (Criticisms of the peer review procedure are put into context by the praise for the procedure expressed in the answers to the standardized questions from 71% of the respondents. The discrepancy may be accounted for by the fact that a relatively small number of similar responses to "open questions" is

sufficient to cause an over-proportional amount of attention to be paid to such comments.)

Respondents in Switzerland listed the following as the main strengths of the SNF: support for basic research; the broad spectrum of funding possibilities; flexibility and efficiency in the administration of projects; and the peer review system. The major weaknesses were the lack of transparency in funding decisions; the excessive length of the decision process; the inflexible administration of projects; and the limited support for personnel and projects.

OPINIONS ABOUT THE FWF

To determine the FWF's reputation in the scientific community, respondents who indicated that they knew of the FWF's existence were confronted with a list of more or less negative statements and were requested to place them on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicated "I agree completely" and 5 indicated "I do not agree at all". **None of the negatively formulated statements received the complete agreement of more than 10% of respondents.** Thus only a minority felt that the FWF does too little to advance women in research (4%), does insufficient to support young scientists (9%) or does not do enough to increase transnational research (7%). The accusations that the FWF works in an ivory tower (2%), that applicants from universities receive preferential treatment (5%) and that the FWF is too subject to influence from the state or from politics (7%) received the complete agreement of only a few respondents. Only about one in ten agreed completely with criticisms of the high rejection rate (11%) and the focus on supposedly "useful" disciplines (11%).

Nevertheless, 24% of those addressed agreed completely with the idea that **people whose applications for FWF funding have been successful should receive some form of recognition from their research institutes**. This is a clear sign that the funding of a project by the FWF is seen as a matter of high prestige.

A more detailed examination of the results reveals that women and scientists working in the field of humanities are significantly more likely to agree fully and completely with the statements. Furthermore, they are noticeably more frequently of the opinion that the chance of a positive decision on applications should be increased ("funding should be distributed more widely so that more applicants receive support").

In Switzerland, about 12% of respondents felt the SNF is too largely confined to traditional paths in standard disciplines; 6% believed the system to be closed and too networked; 5% thought that not enough was done to promote the careers of women in science; and 2% thought the SNF worked in an ivory tower.

PUBLIC RELATIONS WORK

LEVEL OF INFORMATION

It was hoped that the present survey would also give indications on the direction the FWF's public relations work should take in future. To this end, the study assessed the information level of those who know the FWF: **two-thirds of those aware of the FWF indicated that they are sufficiently well informed of the various types of funding available from the FWF and of the FWF's procedures**.

About one-third (31%) of those aware of the FWF feel that they are not sufficiently well informed about it. **As a first approach to address this deficit the FWF should make increased use of its internet page (71%).** However, 58% of the respondents who feel they lack information would like to receive e-mails. Brochures and folders are an appropriate vehicle for 50% of the respondents to receive information about the FWF. **It is noteworthy in this context that women significantly more than men would like to receive information via presentations.**

Of the FWF's current public relations activities, the FWF Web page is the most widely known: 76% of those aware of the FWF state that they know of it. Closely behind follow the FWF's folders and brochures, with the folders known to 65% of respondents. The mid-table positions are occupied by the annual report (known to 41%), FWF posters (39%) and cooperation with the media (32%). The FWF's statistics brochure (24%) and the lectures of the "fwf forum" (15%) are known only to those especially familiar with the FWF and its activities.

EVALUATION OF PR ACTIVITIES

Those aware of the various PR activities were asked to assess them. The well known FWF Web page was accorded the mark "very good" by a quarter of respondents (25%). The next most widely known PR activity, FWF folders and brochures, was awarded the top mark by 22% of respondents.

There are many ways to inform the general public about scientific knowledge. **Those aware of the FWF feel that the cooperation with printed media (34%) and with television stations (31%) are among the most important and the most likely to bring rewards.** But about a quarter of those aware of the FWF rate work with schoolchildren and young people (27%), support for interactive transmission of science (25%) and lectures and discussions (23%) as very important.

An "open question" allowed respondents to offer suggestions for public relations work. A general feature of the answers was that **the FWF should do more to increase the general public's level of "awareness of science", paying particular attention to effective public presentation of projects funded by the FWF.** In addition to the activities previously mentioned, respondents felt that an increased **cooperation with the ORF** (Austrian Broadcasting Corporation) would be worthwhile.

PROCEDURES AND DECISION-MAKING CRITERIA

JUSTIFICATION FOR REJECTION OF APPLICATIONS

Only 8% of the respondents who have suffered at least one rejection always found the reasons understandable. Half of the respondents (54%) found the reasons for the rejection at least partially transparent. However, a third of those who had submitted at least one unsuccessful application were completely unable to understand why it had been rejected.

LEVEL OF FUNDING

Those who had submitted at least one successful application were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with the level of funding granted. **Three quarters of them are either very happy or at least happy with the amount of funding they had received, although in two thirds of the cases the level of funding granted was less than requested**. A certain tendency towards a tactical inflation of applications may be inferred from this apparent contradiction.

Half of the respondents (52%) whose most recent applications had received less funding than they had initially requested were of the opinion that the reasons for the reduction had not been conveyed to them. However, 40% indicated that justification for the cuts had been provided.

Even when reasons for reducing the amount of support granted were transmitted to applicants, the information given was found to be transparent only in one quarter of the cases.

DECISION-MAKING CRITERIA

Various criteria determine whether an application for funding from the FWF is successful. According to people who have previously submitted at least one successful application, the FWF places particular emphasis on applications' **scientific quality** when taking decisions: 58% of applicants felt that a high degree of importance is assigned to scientific quality. 41% of applications feel that internationally renowned publications are of decisive importance. One in three applicants believes that the FWF pays particular attention to successful preparatory work (35%), topicality of the research (32%), experience in submitting applications (30%), originality (30%) and good formal presentation of well written applications. Only one in ten applicants mention that personal contacts to FWF Reporters or to the FWF office are decisive in securing funding. The opinions of applicants who have experienced at least one rejection do not differ greatly. More than 47% believe that particular emphasis is placed on applications' scientific quality. Contacts to "insiders" are thought by less than one sixth of respondents to play a large part.

The following picture results from a comparison of the criteria on which the FWF places particular emphasis when reaching a decision with those on which more emphasis should be placed in future. **The FWF should in future pay more attention to the scientific quality of applications (28%). An even higher proportion – 33% – of applicants of whom the majority of applications have generally been rejected express this opinion.**

Respondents to the DFG survey believed experience in writing applications to be the most important reason behind a positive decision. Results from the SNF survey emphasized above all the topicality of the research, the reputation of the applicants and the quality of presentation.

REVIEW AND DECISION-MAKING PROCEDURES

Applicants were asked whether the anonymous, international peer review procedure employed by the FWF is appropriate. Almost three-quarters (71%) of them awarded one of the top values "I agree fully and completely" or "I agree". 61% of applicants feel that the Reporter system represents a good organizing principle. 35% of the respondents are persuaded of the comprehensibility and transparency of the review and decision-making procedures.

In 1997, 44% of respondents to the DFG survey said that evaluation by the referees was not sufficiently objective and 40% found the evaluation criteria insufficiently objective. On the other hand, the referees' anonymity was held by 70% to be important or very important.
Almost half of those who answered the SNF survey found the evaluation criteria insufficiently transparent. Ca. 30% were happy or very happy with the level of transparency.

Half of the respondents (49%) found the duration of the decision-making procedure appropriate. On the other hand, 42% of applicants feel that it takes the FWF too long to reach decisions on applications. **Instead of a perceived average wait of 7.68 months they hope that a decision can be reached 3.4 months after submission.**

The actual average length of time required to process an application for a research project (in the period from 15 March 2000 to 15 March 2002) from the date of submission until the decision on funding was 5 months (153 days). The average time taken by the DFG in the same period to reach a decision on applications submitted via its normal procedure was 6 months.

THE FWF'S ADMINISTRATION

The vast majority of applicants believe that the FWF's guidelines are understandable. 58% of them are of the opinion that the FWF offers good advice, 55% feel that running projects are followed and supported in an appropriate way and 54% believe that the FWF works efficiently. Finally, 48% of applicants are persuaded that the FWF is an unbureaucratic organization.

In Switzerland, three-quarters of respondents find the SNF efficient and one in five feel that it is bureaucratic. 45% evaluate the advice offered as very good.

The FWF assumes that the level of satisfaction of applicants with the guidelines will have increased as a result of the changes made from 1 January 2003.

REQUIREMENT FOR TRAINING

The question whether training in various areas of project work would be desirable met with some positive feedback. Thus 44% felt that training in "project management" would be "very worthwhile" while 27% rated training in "particular legal issues", 26% in "public relations

work" and 18% in "presentation techniques" as "very worthwhile". **Women and scientists in the fields of the humanities seem to have an especially strong desire for training.**

LESSONS FOR THE FWF

One of the aims of the survey was to compare the FWF's self-imposed demands, formulated in the Corporate Policy that appeared in 2002 and intended to serve as the cornerstones of the FWF's work, with researchers' perceptions of the organization. In addition, the FWF wished to examine the quality of its work. It was hoped that the survey and the suggestions made in connection with it would help identify criticisms and weaknesses as well as well established features.

THE FWF'S CORPORATE POLICY

RESPONSIBILITIES

- The promotion of high-quality scientific research, which represents a significant contribution to society, culture and the economy.
- Education and training through research, because support for young scientists represents one of the most important investments in the future.
- Knowledge transfer and the establishment of a science-friendly culture via an exchange between science and other areas of society.

AIMS

- A continued improvement of science in Austria and an increasing of its international competitiveness.
- An enhancement of the qualifications of young scientists.
- A strengthening of the awareness that science represents a significant aspect of our culture.

VALUES

- **Excellence**: progress in science requires the best minds. We thus concentrate our funds on projects that are of internationally recognized quality.
- **Independence**: creative research requires scientific independence. We provide the freedom to protect science from the direct influence of politics and vested interests.
- **Transparency and fairness**: trust in our working procedures is our most important commodity. We ensure that conflicts of interest are avoided and give clear information on our working procedures and the criteria on which our funding decisions are based.
- **Integration**: science is part of modern society. We facilitate cooperation across national borders and consider ourselves to be part of the international scientific community.

WORKING PROCEDURES

- Assessing the quality of research solely by means of international standards.
- Treating all scientific disciplines equally.
- Paying attention to the observance of the rules of good scientific practice and of internationally accepted ethical standards.
- Holding an open dialogue with all interested groups.
- Cooperating to help network different branches of society and to improve the cooperation with the economic sector.
- Applying a range of different funding instruments designed to take into account the varying requirements of research.
- Continuously monitoring our operating procedures and instruments and their developments.
- Handling the finances entrusted to us efficiently and unbureaucratically.

We see ourselves as a service organization and our work as directed to helping science in Austria.

STRENGTHS – WIDESPREAD AGREEMENT WITH THE CORNERSTONES OF THE FWF'S WORK

AUTONOMY

The promotion of basic research is one of the state's primary responsibilities. Private sponsors have hardly any interest in investment, both because of the long-term and unpredictable effects and because of the high level of risk associated ("market failure"). Since the war the increasing complexity of science has made it sensible to entrust the administration of research funding to institutions that are relatively independent and scientifically authorized. Politics and the national administrative bodies lack the expertise to evaluate high-quality research; an additional advantage is that basic research is thus removed from the short-term interests of the political business cycle.
It is gratifying for the FWF that Austrian scientists clearly believe the organization carries out its functions generally well or very well. Support for this statement comes from the high assessment of the FWF's autonomy, its image and its quality standards. It is worth emphasizing particularly that "scientific quality" is perceived as the most important and predominant criterion for the FWF's funding decisions; indeed, the importance of this criterion should even be increased in future.

REVIEW PROCEDURES

Funding decisions are not based primarily on the opinions of the FWF or its committees. Instead, the FWF organizes international peer review procedures to prepare the basis for decisions. Particular emphasis is placed on the word "international". The condition that review takes place exclusively outside of Austria by mainly English-speaking referees represents a novel aspect among funding organizations and has contributed significantly to the international perception of Austrian research in recent years. The positive assessment of the international peer review procedures, when taken together with the criteria perceived as most important for funding decisions (scientific quality, internationally renowned publications, successful preparatory work, topicality of the research), is evidence of the broad level of acceptance of the FWF's decisions.

PROMOTION OF BASIC RESEARCH

The applications of basic research are scarcely predictable and for this reason basic research can be very high-risk. Scientists engaged in basic research are generally not motivated by "relevance to societal needs" or "potential for application" but rather by curiosity and the desire to increase their reputation in the scientific community. Even so, basic research without a defined purpose or the pressure to produce industrially applicable results and performed in an area that has been freely chosen by the scientists concerned leads – paradoxically or maybe as a direct consequence – to the most surprising and innovative applications. **The fact that the FWF is able to offer its project leaders the freedom to perform research, without any earmarking for disciplines, was very favourably viewed.**

FUNDING SPECTRUM

Finally, there was a high level of satisfaction with the range of funding programmes offered by the FWF. The spectrum of programmes is clearly sufficient to meet the requirements of the majority of Austrian scientists. The most popular programmes were those to fund "research projects" and Erwin Schrödinger Fellowships.

WEAKNESSES – NEED FOR ADMINISTRATIVE PERFECTIONING

The main demands on its work that the FWF made in its Corporate Policy statement were not only underlined by the responses from the scientific community but have clearly already been satisfied. Nevertheless, in some areas the FWF has managed to meet its self-imposed targets only partially, or has not managed to convey the rationale for its apparent reluctance to do more. The primary area involved is that of administrative procedures.

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

Many of the respondents criticised the lack of transparency in the FWF's procedures and decisions. Surveys organized by the SNF and the DFG gave a similar result. **The main area of concern relates to the fact that decisions to reject applications or to reduce the funding awarded to "successful" applications are not sufficiently explained.** The FWF will – based on international experience – thus consider improvements in its review procedures and the transmission of more extensive passages from the reviews obtained. **However, the FWF does not intend to question the principle of peer review.** Despite all criticisms there is no practical or better alternative, so the peer review system is still applied by all comparable funding organizations. The fact that anonymity of referees is a cornerstone of the system imposes an inherent limit on the degree of transparency. Thus it is not possible, e.g. to transmit excerpts should the referees not so wish, to forward sections that would reveal the referee's identity, or to send applicants passages explicitly intended only for the FWF. The possibilities for improvement to the procedure relate rather to the concrete formulations used in correspondence.

BUREAUCRACY

Some – especially younger – respondents who know the FWF are unhappy with the amount of effort required to submit applications and to carry out the administration of projects. A certain level of "bureaucratic" effort is unavoidable but in comparison with that required by other funding organizations (especially the EU) the level of bureaucracy imposed by the FWF is limited. Some improvement will come with the introduction of the facility for submitting applications electronically, which should be implemented after an update to the FWF's computer system.

In addition, the survey was carried out a few weeks before the FWF announced dramatic simplifications to the handling of projects. The central aspect of the reform was the introduction of a global budget, which removed the requirement for requesting fund transfers

between different “cost categories”. These and other simplifications have in the meantime been introduced in the hope that some of the criticisms will have been addressed. Even so, it remains a challenge to the FWF to minimize the efforts involved in application for support and in the performance of projects, especially in the light of the increasingly complex environment (e.g. relating to the university reform).

DURATION OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCEDURE

Similar criticisms on the length of time required to reach funding decision were made in the surveys performed by the DFG and the SNF. The FWF is well aware of the problem and will thus continue its efforts to make improvements, for example by enabling electronic submission of applications.
However, there are fundamental limits to the extent to which the decision-making procedures can be accelerated. The FWF has obviously failed in the past to explain these sufficiently clearly. Research funding organizations are always faced with the need to make a trade-off between “guaranteeing scientific quality” and providing “customer-friendly procedures”. When doubt arises, all serious funding organizations are obliged to give priority to ensuring scientific quality. But guaranteeing scientific quality imposes limits on the speed of handling. The process starts with the careful selection of appropriate experts, who have limited amounts of free time but are contacted with requests for reviews by many other organizations. Suggestions such as offering financial incentives to increase the readiness to undertake reviews or to reduce the length of time taken to do so are at first sight attractive. However, more careful thought reveals a number of problems associated with them. Extensive discussions of the pros and cons will be required before any such system could be introduced.

CHOICE OF REFEREES

In contrast to the FWF’s review system, which received overwhelming support, the selection of referees and their anonymity and/or lack of expertise was criticised by too many respondents to be ignored. The operation of a fair and high-quality system of selection relates to the central area of the FWF’s responsibility. Any criticism must thus be taken seriously, even though it comes from a relatively small number of people. **The FWF’s Reporters are therefore requested to pay even more attention to the nomination of appropriate referees.**

INSUFFICIENT FUNDING

Although the level of satisfaction with the amount of funding awarded is generally high (*v.s.*), there are criticisms of the low salaries, of the lack of support for overheads, infrastructure costs and similar and of the insufficient flexibility in the way the allocated funding may be spent. The reforms introduced at the start of 2003 have already gone some way towards alleviating these concerns. Further improvements depend largely on the FWF’s financial situation. **It must be pointed out in this context that the FWF is less generously financed than all comparable funding institutions in Germany, Holland, Scandinavia and Switzerland.**

CONCLUSIONS

The quintessence of the survey may be summarized as follows. **The fundamental principles and the strategic organization given in the FWF's Corporate Policy meet with widespread support from the Austrian scientific community. Support comes from scientists of all disciplines, of all age groups and of both sexes. Nevertheless, the FWF's administrative procedures would benefit from some refinement.**