Back in May, when discussions about the 5th Framework research programme had just begun in the European Parliament, Spain held up approval of draft proposals at a meeting of EU member states because its ministers were worried that cuts to EU's subsidies to poorer regions (eg Spain) would affect their country significantly.

A report in Nature claimed the disagreement threatened to delay the start of the 5th Framework (which needs approval by Parliament, Council, member states and consultative bodies) but disputes like this are commonplace and the EC is, if anything, experienced in dealing with them. This means that it will become effective at the beginning of 1999.

Framework programmes run for four years – the first was in 1984 – so the 5th will end in 2001. The budget is expected to be Ecu 15 billion. Funding for Euratom, Europe's atomic energy community, receives its slice of the cake (nine per cent) separately from the overall structure. The proportion of the cake to be given to basic research is yet to be decided.

The 5th Framework has a new structure. Instead of the 20 programmes of the 4th Framework there will be thematic and horizontal programmes – the Commission believes the 5th Framework can be best managed with a new matrix-style structure. Most of the programmes of the 4th will continue and find a place somewhere; they may suffer a name change at least.

Thematic Programmes
- Living World & Ecosystem
- Information Society
- Competitive & Sustainable Growth

Horizontal Programmes
- International Cooperation
- Small to Medium Sized Enterprises
- Improving Human Potential

IHC – Improving Human Potential
This is the successor to TMR. Its share of the Framework programme has risen to ten per cent – TMR received only 6.5 per cent – because it is universally popular. The overall structure will be as follows:
- Reinforcing the Human Capital of Europe's Researchers
- Research training networks
- Community fellowships
- Optimal Use of Europe's Major Research Infrastructures
- Infrastructure cooperation networks
- RTD projects for access improvement
- Access to large research infrastructure
- Promoting Scientific and Technological Excellence in Europe (eg Euroconferences)
- Harnessing Socio-Economic Research to the Needs of European Society
- Supporting the Development of Science and Technology Policies in Europe

5th Framework Timetable
Proposal by the European Commission 30 April 1997
Decision (following consultation in parliament) of 1998
Decision on what the new programmes will be 2nd/3rd quarter of 1998
Beginning of funding process at DG12 3rd/4th quarter of 1998
First calls for proposals end of 1998/ start of 1999
First contracts 3rd/4th quarter of 1999