

A SUMMARY OF THE YEAR 2004

The Council of State issued a report in spring 2004 concerning a new consumer policy programme extending up till 2007. The programme emphasises the role of consumer issues in the different administrative branches and the importance of a new type of know-how and horizontal co-operation. Consumer research, for its part, reinforces the consumer viewpoint among decision makers and experts. It creates premises for a new kind of collaboration, not only between different policy sectors but also between the business sector and other areas. The results of anticipatory and topical research make it possible to address large-scale problems and transmit knowledge about consumers and users to benefit the development of markets and services.

The household sector and consumption as such have grown into a power which upholds the economy and overall well-being and whose growth and behaviour are closely monitored. Consumption and satisfied consumers are among the basic elements of commercial and economic life. This also accounts for the growing demand for consumer research. The changing service structure, internationalisation of markets, product development and adoption of new technology have a marked impact on consumers' everyday life and on their choices, risks and problems. On the other hand, active consumers themselves contribute to the development of markets and an innovative society.

Improving the effectiveness of consumer research has been one of our main challenges in the past year. A review of sectoral research institutes commissioned by the Science and Technology Policy Council included an evaluation of the National Consumer Research Centre (NCRC): its position, activities, operating conditions and resources. Work for the revision and renewal of NCRC's strategy was initiated when the new board of directors took office in autumn 2004. In the context of in-house development we concentrated on the problems of defining and measuring research activities. Collaboration with other research institutes was further strengthened to achieve comprehensive joint projects and reinforce our research expertise.

The recognition and effectiveness of NCRC are based on wide, in-depth multidisciplinary research whose results are transmitted through various channels. Our expert activities are manifold. During 2004, we utilised information networks to increase and speed up the dissemination of research results, use of databases, and other communication. The results of research conducted at NCRC were made available on our web pages and in our publication series, but also widely in national and international journals, books and reports. Additionally, we continued to take an active part in the maintenance and development of the information service on national consumer research.

Apart from written documents and publications, NCRC's consumer- and user-driven research findings were made known by our researchers in oral presentations and through personal communication. Our personnel had a visible role in numerous events organised by decision makers and business enterprises, as well as by research, teaching, advisory and non-governmental organisations. The amount of papers presented in national and international seminars, conferences, committees, expert groups and workshops has grown year by year. Furthermore, NCRC's expertise is in great demand in the development of the scientific community. Consumer research results also received wide exposure in the media in the past year. Our co-operation partners and financiers and the users of research were involved in the preparation of new research programmes. NCRC's active contribution to the activities of the Scientific Society for Consumer Research is a permanent form of collaboration at the national level.

Closer international co-operation

NCRC's recognition in the international arena has kept growing as a result of intensified international collaboration and expert activity. In 2004 our researchers were involved as members in international research teams and working groups, participated in international publishing activities and visited foreign research institutes. NCRC personnel engaged in international expert co-operation, e.g., in Eurostat's European Advisory Committee on Statistical Information (CEIES) and its working groups, in the European Credit Research Institute's (ECRI) network, and in various committees of the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE), and participated in the work of Nordiska Konsumentutskottet.

Development of the work community

The maintenance and enhancement of research expertise are among the key challenges of a multifaceted research institute like NCRC. This requires active participation in researcher training together with universities and other institutes of higher education. In 2004, NCRC strengthened the position of its fixed-term project personnel by determining the principles by which permanent posts are established. Establishment of permanent posts was continued along these lines. We also transferred to a new payment system and initiated the preparation of a personnel policy programme. It is worth noting that the work atmosphere and functionality of NCRC have been found, by various measures, to be better than in other sectoral research institutes on average.

I extend my sincere thanks for a successful work year to the personnel and members of the board of NCRC as well as to all our national and international co-operation partners and stakeholder groups. This offers us a sound basis on which to build our future activities.

Eila Kilpiö
Director, prof.