

GeneWatch UK response to the EU life sciences strategy consultation

April 2025

Past investments in genomic science and technology, led by vested interests, have led to poor economic decisions and a failure to tackle deep-seated socio-economic problems. Misplaced investments and technological and scientific failures have resulted in significant opportunity costs. Decisions about investments have been made by a small circle of experts without input from wider society. Unless this is changed, a cycle of hype, commercial interests, concentrations of power, and dependency on public-private partnerships, will likely lead to these problems being repeated in the context of future investment decisions, leading to misallocation of resources.

Although the concept of the 'Life Sciences' is broad in scope, much investment has been poured into genetic science and technologies. However, genetic technologies have, in reality, failed spectacularly to deliver the claimed benefits, both to the economy and to health and the environment. This is primarily due to an over-simplified and false perception of the role that genes play in human health and behaviours and how living organisms adapt to their environments. For example, billions in public R&D spend were shifted from 'agricultural' research to 'biotechnology' research, without delivering a single product. Much over-simplistic and biased human genetic science was first developed by the eugenicists to justify colonialism, and has subsequently been seized upon by a wide range of commercial interests (tobacco, food, chemical, nuclear, pharmaceutical, agrichemical and IT-based) to blame genes for human ill-health and inequalities, and to promote supposed technical solutions to a socio-economic and environmental problems, whilst undermining sustainability and public health. Genes are poor predictors of most diseases in most people and the concept of individual genetic risk predictions has been used to deliberately undermine public health strategies that could have been adopted (e.g., to improve diets and tackle health inequalities and pollution).

Economic success is based on making the right decisions, with the right information, and likewise the economy is not something that is "given", but can be whatever society wants it to be. The EU should learn from past mistakes and seek to base future Life Sciences investment decisions in reality, not hype, and in the broader interests of society, rather than the views of vested interests. As part of this process of change, it is important to engage civil society organisations, decision-makers and the wider public in a more informed debate in order to make investments more accountable.

Further information is available on www.genewatch.org, particularly in the following briefings and reports:

Gene Editing: Is anyone really being left behind? GeneWatch UK briefing. April 2025.

<https://www.genewatch.org/uploads/f03c6d66a9b354535738483c1c3d49e4/gene-editing-left-behind-fin.pdf>

Polygenic risk predictions: health revolution or going round in circles? GeneWatch UK report. September 2023.

<https://www.genewatch.org/uploads/f03c6d66a9b354535738483c1c3d49e4/gw-prs-briefing-fin.pdf>

Bioscience for Life? GeneWatch UK Report. 5th April 2010.

https://www.genewatch.org/uploads/f03c6d66a9b354535738483c1c3d49e4/Bioscience_for_life.pdf