

UK funding

Projects reprieved – but cuts still loom

Physicists in the UK are awaiting the outcome of a review into the health of physics that was commissioned on the back of a funding crisis in one of the country's major funding research councils. The Wakeham review, which is due to publish its findings next month, was initiated in January by the UK's science minister Ian Pearson after an £80m shortfall in the budget of the Science and Technologies Funding Council (STFC) led to it pulling out of the Gemini telescopes in Hawaii and Chile and the International Linear Collider (see *Physics World* January p7). Led by physicist Bill Wakeham of Southampton University, the review is also looking at physics facilities in the UK and how best they should be funded.

The panel for the Wakeham review has already received input from the largest physics departments in the country on the nature and volume of their published work. However, researchers are disappointed that the review has not been charged with looking at the STFC funding crisis itself. "I fear that people are pinning too many hopes on the Wakeham review," says Steve Schwartz, a physi-



cist from Imperial College London.

However, there was some good news for physicists last month when the STFC announced the outcome of its "programmatic review" following a major consultation with the community. The review led to a reprieve for some projects, most notably the e-MERLIN project, including the iconic Jodrell Bank telescope, which will now be partially funded by the STFC. Meanwhile, the UK's contribution to the LHCb experiment at CERN, which was originally going to

Some success

The UK's contribution to the LHCb experiment at CERN will be cut by 5%, not 25% as planned.

be cut by 25%, will now only be cut by 5%. The UK has also been reinstated as a full member of the Gemini consortium, but will now sell 50% of its observing time to partner members.

The STFC is now inviting nominations to create a set of advisory panels that are supposed to increase communication between the community and the council's bosses. However, physicists are still angry at how the STFC has handled the budget crisis and are sceptical of the new panels' potential influence. "Not only has the STFC not learned the lessons of consultation," says Schwartz, "it appears to have actively rejected positive suggestions made by senior members of the community."

Indeed, Andy Fabian, president of the Royal Astronomical Society, indicates that these researchers should now be included in the process. "I think that more senior active scientists need to be involved in the actual decisions," he says. Another cloud on the horizon may appear later this year when the STFC announces details of its grants for physics and astronomers, with an expected deficit of about £25m. "Now that we have had the programmatic review, we have to face the funding of the people who will do the work," says Fabian. "Cutting their numbers by a third, which is what we are facing, is serious."

Michael Banks

France

Protests force rethink on CNRS reforms

Recent mass protests by scientists over reforms at the French national research council (CNRS) have paid off – in part, at least. France's minister for higher education and research, Valérie Pécresse, has made several revisions to her original "Horizon 2020" strategic plan to reform the CNRS, and the amended plan has now been adopted by the council's board.

Although the CNRS will still be divided into a number of institutes based on the main scientific disciplines, subject areas that had previously been excluded (biology and information sciences) will now be represented. This means that all disciplines currently studied at the CNRS will remain and should all have equal importance. There will now be six new institutes – in maths, chemistry, physics, engineering, social sciences, and ecology and biodiversity – in addition to two existing institutes for nuclear

Fear factor

Researchers protesting in Paris claimed that the CNRS was going to be dismantled.



physics and "science of the universe".

The new plan also promises to give more autonomy to the scientific committees in charge of each thematic institute – something that campaign group Sauvons La Recherche (SLR) and union representatives feared would be taken away from them.

The CNRS board initially convened on 19 June at its headquarters in Paris to approve the original reform plans, but the presence of thousands of angry protesters outside the building meant that the meeting had to be cancelled.

The demonstrators said that the CNRS was being "dismantled" and that this had to be stopped.

The plans were then revised and the new strategy, which Pécresse says is a "first step to CNRS modernization", was approved on 1 July by a majority of 15 to 6. The ministry believes that the reforms will make the CNRS more interdisciplinary and enhance technological innovation. International collaboration, as well as links between industry and universities, will also be encouraged.

However, SLR and the unions remain concerned. They fear that the CNRS will be divided into "upper" and "lower" class institutes, with budgets being unfairly distributed and worse job security for scientists.

Indeed, SLR has launched a new petition concerning these points and scientists are even threatening to strike (from their administrative duties) if their demands are not met. "The latest news from Pécresse is not good," SLR spokesperson Bernard Monthubert told *Physics World*.

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Paris