

interesting if true

WHERE'S KEITH? Once upon a time STFC chief executive Keith Mason could be seen out and about, taking flak in public for all manner of woes. But *Research Fortnight* can't help noticing that he has been remarkable only by his absence recently. No site visits, no photo ops, no community chit chats. He is due to stand down in March 2012, but how should we interpret his low profile in the meantime? Surely no one can have built up that much unused holiday?

DON'T BLINK FIRST German research funders are watching the UK's debate on student fees and graduate taxes with interest (*see News, page 6*) in search of inspiration on how to deal with the country's unpopular student fee system. Both countries agree that some action must be taken on the subject, and soon. But while the Germans wait to see what the UK does, UK policy bodies say they are monitoring the developments on the German side. So don't expect much movement on this in the near future.

BIG BANG BOTHER As religious and atheist commentators debate Stephen Hawking's book-sales-boosting assertion that the universe doesn't need God to exist, trust US network Fox News to take, as its tag line promises, a "fair and balanced" approach. An opinion piece by popular contributor Cal Thomas quotes scripture to refute

Hawking—including "the fool has said in his heart 'there is no God'" and "the gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing", and concludes: "If Hawking thinks it's all foolishness, isn't that evidence he is perishing?" Such feats of logic are of course hard to refute, but given Hawking's famed doctor-defying longevity, perhaps Thomas might like to rethink his words.

DIY A survey for data centre company Sentrum has found that UK companies routinely ignore the advice of consultants they have hired to advise them on the design and specification of their data centres. So it would seem that RCUK's Shared Services Centre is in good company.

ON YER BIKE With the spectre of swingeing funding cuts come October's spending review hanging over their heads, academics are turning to ever more outlandish means of raising money to support their research. Perhaps the most drastic idea came from British Academy president Adam Roberts, who cycled 1,000 miles from Land's End to John O'Groats in August to raise money for humanities and social science research. He finished on 29 August—his 70th birthday—raising £3,220 in the process. In that spirit, we hereby challenge the Royal Society's new president, Paul Nurse, to swim the English Channel for science!

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