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07 Feb 08 **2921**

Up front

STFC accused of 'spin tactics'

Scientists have accused the Science and Technology Facilities Council of "spin tactics," following a press release on 7 February, which said that funding physics would "remain broadly level for the next year".

But some physicists have accused the council of attempting to reword existing facts, suggesting that while funding levels might not be affected - thanks to a helping hand from full economic costing - the STFC remains firmly on course to cut 25 per cent of postdoctoral positions.

Paul Crowther, an astrophysicist from Sheffield University, told Research Day that an increase in funding through full economic costs (FEC) is unlikely to offer any respite to the physics departments that face the possibility of closure. "The bottom line is that you are not going to have that much more money going to the people who are exploiting facilities. Extra FEC money is going to go into universities but somehow it gets lost before it reaches the person that's actually doing the job," he said. "A big chunk of money goes to universities, a bit of that filters through to departments and then a bit of that goes to the person who is doing the job".

So departments that rely heavily on STFC funding for their income are in as much danger as they were when the council's initial announcement was made, he said.

The research council statement also confirms that existing rolling grants for particle physics will "largely protected" from immediate cuts because they are not due for review until 2009. However, the STFC still plans to cut grants awarded to physicists working on projects from which it intends to withdraw, including the International Linear Collider and solar terrestrial physics, and has made no definite promises for the long-term future, saying only that the findings of the Wakeham review can be "accommodated within this timetable".

It suggests that, by 2011, there will only be a drop of 11 per cent in the number postdoctoral research assistant grants compared with 2005. But physicists insist that this nevertheless continues to represent a 25 per cent drop compared with 2008 numbers.

"It just happens to be because of the way these grants are done on a three year cycle," says Crowther. "If you pick a low year like 2005 then compare it to 2011, it's going to be 11 per cent down. It is 25 per cent down from today. That's the more important figure."

Other sites STFC press release.

Government departments

£100 million for climate change research

The Department for International Development will increase funding for climate change research to £100 million over the next five years, Douglas Alexander, the secretary of state for international development, announced yesterday.

The ten-fold increase in funding, as compared to the previous five years, will be spent on researching the impact of global warming on the world's poorest communities and on helping their governments and the private sector respond to the demands of climate change.

DFID also announced plans to establish a new climate change network, which will draw together expertise of climate change researchers and institutions across a number of countries.

Other sites Department for International Development press release.

Engineering inquiry launched...

A major inquiry into engineering in the UK has been launched by the Commons Innovation, Universities and Skills Select Committee.

University of Sheffield



Message If you have any queries about this service, please contact Deborah McClean at the Research Office on the number below.

Phone:0114 222 1449

Email: D.McClean@sheffield.ac.uk

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