

Women and children first

Lübeck, West Germany

A TEN-YEAR programme to support young researchers in West Germany was approved in mid-June by the centre-right coalition government in Bonn and is likely to provide a new direction for research and teaching at universities far into the future. The programme will provide a ten-year increase in the number of temporary research and teaching positions at overcrowded West German universities in anticipation of a wave of retirements and will greatly expand research staff in many laboratories. There will be special emphasis on bringing more women into academic research and teaching, where they are badly underrepresented.

The programme, originally announced by the ambitious West German Education Minister Jürgen Möllemann more than a year ago, was not approved until the last minute because of the rapidly changing situation in Germany and worries over the cost of unification. Only a part of the budget has so far been approved — just DM4,000 million (\$2,400 million) of the DM6,000 million originally requested by Möllemann — leading Hubert Markl, president of the granting agency DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) to say that he would not breathe easily until the plan was given the necessary approval by the *Länder* (which will provide 40 per cent of the funds) and written into the 1991 West German budget. A decision is expected later this year.

The programme will provide the single largest boost to West German university research since a group of new universities were built in the 1960s. DFG can expect a 12 per cent rise in 1991 and benefits will flow to the Max Planck Gesellschaft, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and other foundations, as well as to universities and polytechnics themselves.

By providing extra support to female scientists, Möllemann hopes to redress the huge imbalance in virtually all university faculties. Although women receive *Abitur*, the German version of a high-school diploma, in roughly equal proportion to men, just 2.6 per cent of all ('C4') professors at West German universities are women. The Education Ministry does not plan to introduce quotas for women at universities, but rather "to eliminate financial barriers" that prevent women from studying, said ministry official Wolfgang Mönikes, for instance by paying for such provisions as day care for young children.

Graduate students are another major beneficiary of the programme. The

number of graduate colleges will dramatically increase, where students will be able to undertake interdisciplinary doctoral projects supported by groups of professors and other students. The colleges will complement but not replace the traditional individual research programmes supervised by a single academic adviser or "doctor-father". Postdoctoral researchers will also do well; those who are considered excellent but cannot find a professorship will be persuaded to stay at universities through parallel programmes known as

WHERE THE NEW MONEY WILL GO

	Amount in DM
Graduate student support	>1,000 million
Postdoctoral support at non-university research centres	300 million
'Heisenberg programme' for highly qualified young researchers	175 million
Qualification for professorships (<i>Habilitation</i>)	1,000 million
Special measures for women	250 million
'Fiebigler professorships' (time-limited)	>300 million
Sending young researchers abroad (under auspices of Humboldt Foundation)	37.5 million
Strengthening European cooperation at universities	600 million
Applied research at polytechnics	200 million
Approximate total over ten years	4,000 million

'Fiebigler Professorships' and 'Heisenberg scholarships'. The first provides temporary faculty positions, including teaching responsibilities, and the second provides equipment and literature as well as a salary for researchers who will not have to teach.

Steven Dickman

MAX PLANCK GESELLSCHAFT

New problems, old worries

Lübeck, West Germany

THE Max Planck Gesellschaft (MPG) of West Germany approved the founding of two new institutes at its annual meeting here last week. Outgoing MPG president Heinz Staab announced the creation of an Institute for Microbial Ecology in Bremen and an Institute for Terrestrial Microbiology in Marburg. Construction will be completed sometime after 1992.

The two new institutes are going ahead despite continued concern that a five-year increase in funding for MPG could evaporate if Bonn and the *Länder* do not adjust the budget for inflation and higher personnel costs. The two sides agreed last year to give both MPG and the granting agency DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) a five per cent increase in each of the next five years.

The MPG budget for 1990 is DM1,257 million (\$752 million). Staab expects tough negotiations with trade unions next year that could eat up the entire increase.

Freedom for Fang Lizhi

Washington

As *Nature* goes to press, Fang Lizhi, the dissident Chinese astrophysicist, and his wife, are reported to be about to land at London's Heathrow airport after having been unexpectedly granted permission to leave China. According to a statement issued by the US government, Fang is to take up a position at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom.

Fang has been living in the US embassy in Beijing since June 1989, when he sought refuge there with his wife at the time of the Tiananmen Square massacre. According to a statement released by Xinhua, the official Chinese news agency, "former Beijing Astronomical Observatory researcher Fang Lizhi" and his wife, Li Shuxian, have been given "lenient treatment" for their involvement in disturbances in China and allowed "to go abroad for medical treatment". The statement says that Fang had shown "signs of repentance".

Sidney Jones, of the human rights group Asia Watch says that permission for Fang and his wife to leave China probably came as a "reward" for US President George Bush's controversial decision to renew China's 'most-favored nation' trading status and to forestall Congressional action to remove that status. Jones hoped that Fang's release would not end international concern over the plight of other dissidents in China and that Fang would be able to speak up on their behalf.

According to Xinhua, Fang and his wife agreed that they will "not engage in political activities directed against China" after they leave the country. Alun Anderson

Inflation is also a worry because of the costs that might arise from the unification of Germany. MPG is particularly concerned about the costs of unifying German science. Although MPG is not planning to take over any East German scientific institutions, Staab says that it intends to support large numbers of young researchers, most of whom will be expected to stay in their home institutes.

Staab also announced a programme that would encourage outstanding young researchers to remain at MPG institutes as independent researchers for a few years beyond their postdoctoral fellowships, lending flexibility to a structure that some researchers have worried was growing stiff (see *Nature* 340, 335; 1989). The meeting was the last for Staab, 64, as president. Hans Zacher, a specialist in social security and social welfare law and director of a MPG institute in Munich, began his six-year term as president on 22 June, his sixty-second birthday. Steven Dickman