EMBO

Another Step Forward for the Laboratory

Last week the reality of a European Molecular Biology Laboratory in Heidelberg came closer with the signing in Geneva of the agreement to establish it.

Now that the agreement to set up a European Molecular Biology Laboratory at Heidelberg is signed and sealed, molecular biologists can look forward to the emergence during the next five years or so of a centre which should have a place in Europe similar to that held by the famous Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in the United States.

Early Days

The idea of a laboratory on a European scale was first put forward a little more than ten years ago at a meeting at CERN —that shining example of European cooperation in science— where the signature ceremony took place last week. Later, in 1964, the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) came into existence with the object not only of founding a laboratory but also of financing fellowships and summer courses. To begin with EMBO received $750,000 from the Volkswagen Foundation for a period of three years starting in 1966—the object was that the organization should prove itself and in the meantime seek more permanent support from European governments.

The first EMBO proposal for a laboratory (in 1968) envisaged something larger than the one that is now to be built. But the governments involved did not approve, to some extent at least because EMBO itself had not thought out in sufficient detail what the purposes of the laboratory were to be and what functions it was supposed to perform.

Then out of a meeting in Konstanz in 1969 came proposals that formed the basis of the plans for the laboratory that have finally won acceptance from ten European governments. It is intended that part of the function of the laboratory shall be to provide a service to national institutes in, for example, the development of advanced instrumentation. It will also carry out advanced training and will, like Cold Spring Harbor, be a centre for meetings both formal and informal.

Heidelberg

The site provided by Germany for the laboratory is deep in the forest at Heidelberg next to the Max-Planck Institut für Kernphysik, which together with the Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum has offered temporary office and laboratory accommodation so that scientific work can begin quite soon, before the laboratory proper is completed.

As far as staff is concerned, the total number of personnel is expected to reach 130 in 1976 and the full complement of about 300 in 1978. Of this number nearly sixty will be qualified scientists and engineers (QSEs), including about sixteen post-doctoral fellows, and there will be about 167 technicians, fifty-five administrative staff and thirty to thirty-five visiting scientists (at any one time).

There are also plans afoot for establishing an outstation of the laboratory at the electron synchrotron (DESY) in Hamburg and one at the high flux reactor in Grenoble. This will make possible experiments with intense X-ray and neutron beams.

Expenditure

Table 1 shows the expenditure envisaged in the years until the laboratory is fully operational. It includes an estimate of the way in which a special contribution to capital costs made by the German government may be spent. Ratification by the participating governments is unlikely to take less than a year, but during that time sufficient money will be available for architects to be engaged and other aspects of advanced planning to be completed.

Table 1 Global Costs of the Laboratory to Contributing Governments

Estimated ceiling of non-recurrent costs	1973 May–December	1974 January–April	1974 May–December	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	Totals
	Before ratification			After ratification					
Preliminary studies	71	63.5							134.5
Central laboratory			2,406	2,704	2,385	1,291	630	176	9,592
Outstation at DESY, Hamburg	568	140	213	77					998
Outstation at Grenoble	96	447	78	46					267
Total *A*	735	250.5	2,697	2,827	2,385	1,291	630	176	10,991.5
Possible application of German special contribution (DM 12,000,000)	537	113	1,100	950	579				3,279
Net non-recurrent costs *B*	198	137.5	1,597	1,877	1,806	1,291	630	176	7,712.5
Recurrent costs (estimated budget)									
Central laboratory			558	1,431	2,564	3,743			
Outstation at DESY, Hamburg	124	72	169	299	324	324			
Outstation at Grenoble	39	56	139	259	284	294			
Total recurrent costs *C*	163	128	866	1,989	3,172	4,361	5,066	5,595	
Global costs to governments (*B*+*C*)	361	265.5	2,463	3,866	4,978	5,652			

Costs are in thousands of accounting units at 1972 prices (1 AU = $1.2).