

United Kingdom

London medical colleges for the chop

THE Westminster Medical School, and the pre-clinical courses at King's College and the Royal Free Hospital should close, according to a London University working party whose report was published last week. In addition the British Postgraduate Medical Federation would be disbanded and five of its smaller institutes would lose their separate identities. Chaired by Lord Flowers, the committee was charged with rationalising expenditure on medical education in the university while retaining student numbers and staff.

Savings of £6 million a year would result, says the report: £1 million on maintenance of the premises to be vacated; £1 million on administration; £1 million on academic services; and a further £3 million "from the eventual rationalisation of academic departments and academic posts". The present cost of the schools to the university is some £51 million a year. The savings would be redistributed among the remaining medical schools.

In terms of research, the principal casualty of Flower's proposal would probably be King's College — one of only two schools in the university (the other in University College) to operate its pre-clinical teaching on a multi-faculty university campus rather than in a hospital.

"Research is not threatened directly" says Peter Baker, professor of physiology at King's, who estimates that King's receives 24% of all the Medical Research Council and Science Research Council grants for pre-clinical science subjects to the University of London Medical Schools. But if King's loses its medical students, staff members are likely to be reduced and their research with it.



Lord Flowers: finding a way to rationalise expenditure.

Baker feels that the working party has been unduly influenced by a desire to bring pre-clinical teaching within hospitals, in direct opposition to the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Medical Education (the Todd report of 1965) — which stressed the need for a broader-based, multi-faculty organisation for medical teaching.

The battle lines are drawn, Baker believes, between the medical profession which would like to see students exposed to hospital life as early as possible, and the scientists who believe that a medical student requires a thorough grounding in scientific method. Also at stake, says Baker, may be the money involved in pre-clinical education — twice the amount spent on the clinical phase.

When clinical and pre-clinical education are combined 'vertically' within a teaching hospital, says Baker, with the division of funds controlled by hospital committees, "clinicians are very effective in giving the pre-clinicians little money". Pre-clinicians were not represented on the Flowers committee, Baker notes.

The report will be considered by the university for a decision in July. □

High Energy Physics

LEP by 1986?

THE Large Electron-Positron collider, LEP, could produce its first beam by 1986 — three years ahead of the original target, the European Organisation for Subnuclear Physics, CERN, is expected to announce later this week. A Committee of Council meeting last Friday approved this advanced programme, although CERN member states have not yet received a formal proposal.

If CERN members are favourable, there could be a decision within a year to build LEP — while keeping to a 'constant' budget. Pressure from the Italian delegation, plus the prospect of competition from the United States have led to CERN's new sense of urgency.

The attitude of Professor Herwig Schopper, who is likely to be elected CERN's next director-general in June, may also have contributed. Professor Schopper told *Nature* recently that LEP could be built within five years of a positive decision, "but we will have to cut out all the frills". The minimum 'one-sixth' LEP defined in earlier CERN designs could be trimmed, thinks Schopper, to a 'budget-LEP' without changing the size of the tunnel or compromising the chase for the intermediate vector boson. "Building electron accelerators is very different from building proton accelerators" he says. "In our last accelerator at DESY [PETRA] most of our calculations were proved wrong. It will be the same with LEP."

Building LEP will thus be an experiment. Sophisticated orbit correction mechanisms should be built when needed rather than designed *a priori*. Financial savings could also be found in the experimental halls. **Robert Walgate**

ARMS proposes security for 60% of untenured researchers

THE UK Association of Researchers in Medical Science has prepared a document showing that 60% of present contract workers could be placed in tenured career tracks with no additional expenditure and no reduction in the workforce. The plan calls for the creation of a pool of tenured researchers to be funded out of the £81.5 million now used to support contract work by five main sources; the MRC (£24.8 million), the Department of Health and Social Services (£18.3 million), charities and trusts (£22 million), pharmaceutical companies (£11.9 million) and the Royal Society (£4.5 million). ARMS proposes the creation of research institutes based at

universities or medical schools typically employing 85 researchers, 50 of whom would be on tenured tracks and 35 post-doc. The cost per institution would be £1.29 million per year based on an average salary of £9,000 plus 25% for pension and insurance plus £2,500 running expenses plus a 10% institutional surcharge.

Surveys of three industrial laboratories show that total running costs of a research establishment of 2000 employees averages £20 million a year, a figure that compares favourably with ARMS' estimates. The total cost of the ARMS scheme nationally for the estimated 4500 researchers currently employed on short term contracts

would be £68 million. The proposed 10% institutional surcharge would be used to build up an operating fund for tenured researchers out of the estimated £26 million currently supplied by charities and trusts who cannot commit their money on a long term basis.

Representatives from ARMS discussed the proposal last week with Professor James Gowans, Secretary of the Medical Research Council who requested that it be taken to the universities first for their reactions. Gowans told *Nature* that "ARMS is writing to the wrong address. If they get a deal from the universities then I'll have a look at it". **Joe Schwartz**