

UK nuclear physicists wonder if there is life after Daresbury

London. With Daresbury's Nuclear Structure Facility (NSF) closing in six months, British nuclear structure physicists are pinning their hopes on capturing a European physics centre expected to be built in five years. However, without an indigenous particle accelerator, their only chance of doing so lies in maintaining an active research community. That is why NSF officials are using equipment capital to buy beam time



Linac is on the road again.

and set up collaborations around Europe and even in Australia.

The Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC) is studying a proposal on the feasibility of setting up such a European centre at ISIS, a pulsed neutron source based at its Rutherford Appleton Laboratory. But ISIS is not the only candidate for a centre to study intense (around 100 microamps) beams of radioactive particles; the GANIL heavy ion accelerator in Caen, France, is also ex-

pected to be a strong contender. Britain's success will depend on having a facility ready and on the vigour of its nuclear structure research community. Although the £1.5 million (US\$2.7 million) test-bed proposal is expected to find favour with the SERC, its timetable of two years may be stretched to four because of a shortage of money.

In the meantime, the health of the British research community will depend on a band of 'scientific gypsies', working largely in collaborations at other facilities across the world. The most recent of these collaborations involves the donation of the Daresbury Linac (linear accelerator) to the department of physics of the Australian National University (ANU) at Canberra. In return, the British team will receive 20 per cent of the available beam time for five years.

The ANU accelerator was designed to accommodate a Linac-type device, but no funds were available. Although a European collaboration would have been more convenient for the British, the technical compatibility with the Australians made the deal very attractive.

The Linac has a chequered history. Originally purchased for the tandem accelerator at the University of Oxford, it had yet to be used when that facility was closed in 1986 in favour of the NSF. Transferred to Daresbury, it had been tested but never used experimentally when, in 1991, SERC made the decision to close NSF.

British researchers are concerned that their community will not flourish without a national facility. "Daresbury did us a lot of good and there was a great cross-fertilization of ideas," says John Sharpey-Schafer of the University of Liverpool. "A memory of what it was like will endure, but for how long?"

Ian Mundell

British physicist to head CERN

London. Christopher Llewellyn-Smith, chairman of physics at the University of Oxford, is expected to replace Carlo Rubbia as director general of CERN, the European Laboratory for Particle Physics. The appointment, announced last week, should be confirmed at a meeting in December, and he will take up the position on 1 January 1994.

Llewellyn-Smith is chairman of CERN's scientific policy committee, and no major changes in programme direction are expected when the reins change hands. Within Britain, however, his appointment could strengthen the government's commitment to CERN at a time when currency fluctuations are robbing domestic research by in-

creasing the cost of its international obligations. The Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC) estimates that the sterling crisis will increase by £10 million the cost of its European obligations.

Llewellyn-Smith was a vehement critic (see *Nature* 315, 619; 1985) of the Kendrew report, which in 1985 recommended reducing Britain's contribution to CERN unless spending was trimmed. The report led to staff cuts and changes in the formula used to calculate each country's subscription. A SERC working party that reviewed the report earlier this year concluded that there was no cause to demand further alterations.

Ian Mundell

Answers, but no solutions, for dispute at JET

London. British researchers at the Joint European Torus (JET) should be treated like workers at other European facilities, according to a new report to the European Parliament examining the bitter dispute between workers and management at the Culham Laboratory in Oxfordshire. But a question of jurisdiction threatens to delay for several months any resolution of the conflict, which has spawned several brief strikes at the experimental nuclear fusion project (see *Nature* 357, 270; 1992).

The Budgets Committee of the European Parliament, meeting in Oxford last week, discussed a report by four independent consultants on terms and conditions at nine of the European Communities' joint research projects, including JET. The report made a number of recommendations that would resolve complaints by British researchers that they are being treated unfairly on pay and on employment prospects following the completion of the project in 1996.

The complaints stem from differences between the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA), which hosts JET and employs the British staff, and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM), which employs all the other European researchers. The report's preferred solution is that UKAEA staff working on JET be offered temporary EURATOM contracts until the end of the JET project; the cost would be ECU7 million (US\$9.1 million) at present prices. If that is not possible, the report suggests that UKAEA staff should be treated the same as EURATOM staff when researchers are hired for projects following JET.

However, the Budgets Committee refused to set aside the money on the grounds that the initial decision rested with the Energy Committee, which had commissioned the report. It said it would discuss the matter at its next meeting, on 7 October.

On top of this, the possibility of legislative changes means that the European Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee will have to be consulted. If and when the parliamentary committees give their support, the matter passes to the European Commission and, possibly, to the Council of Ministers.

Although British researchers at JET are pleased that the report vindicates their claims, they are no nearer to an improvement in their situation. Over the summer there were six strikes, each involving about a hundred people, and the union credits them with accelerating the report. A refitting of the torus is proceeding slowly, but JET management says that it is hard to tell how much of the delay is caused by the strikes and how much by routine technical difficulties.

Ian Mundell