

UNITED KINGDOM

Science Stagnates in Election Budget

LONDON—The British government unveiled budget proposals last week that provide little solace to the country's beleaguered scientists. The budget, the last to be offered by the Conservative government before it calls a general election—which must be held by next May—contained pledges for increased spending in 1997 for vote-winners such as schools, health, and law enforcement. But science spending will be frozen at \$2.1 billion, which amounts to a 2.5% cut in real terms. Worse, projected figures for the following 2 years indicate that the freeze will persist.

John Cadogan, director-general of the research councils, says this is "a positive outcome" in view of the funding pressures facing the government. But physicist John Mulvey,

spokesperson for the lobby group Save British Science, is less charitable: "The figures mean a reduction of about \$38.9 million in 1996–97 compared to last year and \$21 million next year," he says.

The only bright spot for researchers was a partial reprieve from massive cuts announced in last year's budget for university infrastructure—the main source of funds for buildings and large items of scientific equipment. A year ago, Chancellor of the Exchequer Kenneth Clarke cut the overall university budget by 5% and lopped 31% off capital expenditure. The goal was to encourage universities to develop business partnerships for capital projects.

The projected income to universities from industrial partnerships is falling far short of

the government's cuts in infrastructure funding; only \$50 million is expected from this source for the whole education sector next year. Clarke's response is to provide a \$325 million boost to the universities over the next 2 years, including a special allocation of \$32.5 million for science equipment. This gesture even got a mention in the chancellor's budget speech to Parliament—the first time he has highlighted science in the budget speech itself.

Gareth Roberts, chair of the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals, which represents university heads, says the decision to restore some infrastructure funds shows that "the government now clearly recognizes the funding crisis facing U.K. higher education." But Mulvey is not convinced: "The problems created in November 1995 have not been halted or reversed."

—Nigel Williams

GERMANY

European Labs Fight Back Against Cuts

BERLIN—The German Bundestag last week approved an austere 1997 budget for the Federal Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Technology that will result in cutbacks in some domestic research programs and in Germany's contributions to several international labs. Even before the bill was approved, however, some international labs moved to force Germany to make concessions: Cuts must be approved by the councils of each facility, and the German proposals met stiff opposition in council meetings last month, with more to come during December.

During the Bundestag's debate, the opposition Social Democrats complained that the budget will be a blow to Germany's competitiveness and criticized staff reductions that are leading the prestigious Max Planck Society to close four institutes in western Germany. In the end, however, the Bundestag approved an overall cut of 3.7% in the ministry's budget. Research Minister Jürgen Rüttgers defended the reductions, asserting that his ministry will do more with less: "If you have less money, then you have to use it more intelligently." Rüttgers noted that some German research institutions will receive more federal funding—including 5% increases for the DFG, the main research granting agency, and the Max Planck Society.

Among the areas likely to be hit hardest is space research. Germany, one of Europe's big spenders on space, will scale back its contributions to the European Space Agency (ESA) by about 3.3% to \$660 million. And Germany's space agency, DARA, must cope with a 5.6% reduction in its administrative budget. Overall, the ministry's budget for national space research (separate from the

ESA) will decline by about 13%. More reductions may be in store for DARA: Last summer, Rüttgers proposed merging DARA with Germany's DLR aerospace research institute as a way to reduce overhead costs and sharpen the focus of aerospace research efforts. The ministry is now considering details of the reorganization proposal, which would form a new space/aviation agency to supervise both research and management.

The sole bright spot in the ministry's bud-

get for international labs is a 4.5% increase in contributions to the Heidelberg-based European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) (see table). But the other European research labs are not taking the proposed German reductions lying down:

GERMANY'S PROPOSED INTERNATIONAL CUTS		
Organization	Reduction (\$ million)	Reduction (%)
CERN	29.6	9.3
ILL	1.6	7.1
ESRF	1.7	8.6
ESO	0.8	3.0
ESA	22.0	3.3
EMBL	(+0.73)	(+4.5)

SOURCE: EMER

get for international labs is a 4.5% increase in contributions to the Heidelberg-based European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) (see table). But the other European research labs are not taking the proposed German reductions lying down:

■ The budget would cut Germany's contribution to the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility in Grenoble, France, by \$1.7 million (8.6%), but the ESRF council voted last week to approve a somewhat higher budget (\$78 million) than German representatives had requested—Germany's share will be about \$800,000 more than the German

budget had allocated for ESRF. Karl Witte, an ESRF official, says that the new budget—which includes extra money from an out-of-court settlement—will still allow ESRF to continue installing its last eight beam lines and provide the same level of beam time for researchers next year.

■ The Institut Laue-Langevin (ILL), a neutron-scattering center in Grenoble, would lose \$1.6 million (7.1%) of Germany's contributions. But the ILL council, which also met last week, approved a reduction in the institute's budget of only 2.1% to \$53.5 million (not including fuel costs) for 1997. Director Reinhard Scherm says that savings must be made through personnel cuts. "There is no other way," he says.

■ The biggest reduction—\$29.6 million, or 9.3%—would come in Germany's contribution to the CERN particle physics center near Geneva. The CERN council meets on 20 December and is expected to approve an 8.5% cut for 1997–98 and 9.3% for 1999–2000. The center plans to go ahead with its preferred schedule of completing the new Large Hadron Collider by 2005, making up for the budget shortfall by extending the payback period to 2008.

■ The European Southern Observatory (ESO) council meets this week in Santiago, Chile, to discuss Germany's plan to cut its contribution by \$0.8 million (3%). Six of ESO's eight members must approve the cut by Germany, which pays about 26% of the budget.

If the international labs succeed in tempering Germany's cuts, the extra funding may have to come out of Germany's domestic research budget.

—Robert Koenig

Robert Koenig is a writer in Berlin.