RESEARCH COSTS

Canada to Begin Funding Overhead on Projects

OTTAWA, CANADA—Winning a competition last year for Canada's biggest new scientific facility in 30 years was quite a coup for the University of Saskatchewan. But along with the right to host the $116 million Canadian Light Source (CLS) came a king-sized headache: the need to find an estimated $9.4 million each year to operate the 2.9–giga electron volt third-generation synchrotron radiation facility once it's finished in 2004. It's a problem facing all Canadian universities, which unlike their U.S. counterparts receive no money for overhead on federally funded research projects. But help may be on the way.

Last week federal Finance Minister Paul Martin announced a $268 million outlay for future equipment awards provided by the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI), a $1.3 billion entity created in 1997 to rejuvenate labs in universities and research hospitals. The funds would be awarded competitively in support of infrastructure grants such as the $37.8 million that CFI gave Saskatchewan last year to help finance the synchrotron facility.

The money, part of an unusual minibudget unveiled in the run-up to a parliamentary election scheduled for 27 November, is the first direct federal outlay for overhead costs, which up to now have been met by a combination of provincial operating grants to universities and federal transfer payments for postsecondary education. School administrators say it meets a desperate need.

"Universities have to be able to take advantage of research opportunities," says Peter MacKinnon, president of the University of Saskatchewan. But big projects like the CLS do carry unreimbursed costs, as do individual investigator grants awarded by the country's three research granting councils. "Universities are often left with the obligation of finding money for matching programs or for meeting indirect costs," MacKinnon says. "It's imposing a very considerable burden on all institutions, particularly on the research-intensive ones."

To fill the gap, administrators have traditionally looked to private donations and grants from provincial governments. But those sources are drying up, says Manuel Buchwald, chief of research at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. As provincial governments clamp down on health care spending and on university budgets, he adds, "it's becoming increasingly difficult for the institution where the research is done to provide the indirect costs."

The new pot of money is a response to those pressures. But it won't erase the problem. The money can't be used to support existing equipment or facilities, notes CFI president David Strangway, and it won't be given automatically to all future CFI infrastructure awardees. "There are a lot of interesting questions for us to resolve," says Strangway. For example, he says, CFI has yet to come up with a good definition of indirect costs, and it's still debating whether small replacement facilities should get overhead funding.

Although the logistics must still be worked out, Strangway imagines asking groups seeking future CFI infrastructure grants to include a specific request for indirect costs. These combined proposals would be assessed by peer-review committees. This new process will start in the next funding cycle, which begins in January with a call for proposals, leading to awards in late 2001.

MacKinnon sees a plan for growth in that next cycle. The light source, called Saskatchewan's "Field of Beams," is scheduled to open with 10 beamlines (conduits for carrying the synchrotron light to workstations), and researchers hope to add 20 more. MacKinnon says that "it would be nice to think that CFI operations funding would be available for additional beamlines."

University officials say they welcome the support but note that the new fund only scratches the surface of what is needed. They hope for additional resources after the election from the governing Liberals, who have a commanding 20% to 25% lead in the polls. "There is still a very, very compelling case for a broader program to deal with the indirect costs of tricouncil-funded research and other publicly funded research," says MacKinnon.

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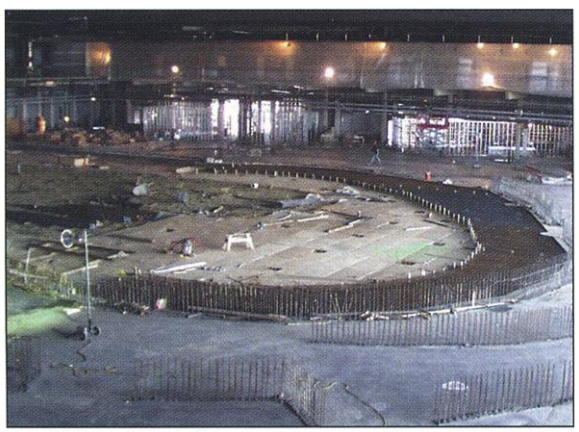

CREDIT: THE CANADIAN LIGHT SOURCE/UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Brighter light. New government program would help pay to operate facilities, including additions to the Canadian Light Source, under construction in Saskatoon.

ScienceScope

The Verdict Is In In a first-of-its-kind case, a Japanese court has ordered a university to pay for the "academic harassment" of a female faculty member. Kumiko Ogoshi, a research associate in the department of public health at Nara Medical University, claimed that her supervising professor, who has not been identified, tried to get her to quit by spraying discarded chemicals in her office, packing up her office while she was away, and withholding research funds. Ogoshi and others say such treatment helps to explain why only 7% of all full professors at Japan's universities are women.

The compensation, awarded earlier this month by Osaka District Court, amounts to just $5000. And the court sidestepped Ogoshi's bid to make her boss personally liable for his behavior by saying that, as a public employee, he is protected from such suits. Still, the decision was "gratifying," Ogoshi says.

The university has appealed the ruling, saying that "the professor's actions were the result of the plaintiff's work performance and were legal and appropriate."

Secure Area Energy Secretary Bill Richardson has asked a think tank led by John Hamre, a former deputy defense secretary, to study how the Department of Energy (DOE) can maintain security without jeopardizing science (*Science*, 6 October, p. 22). Ironically, last week's announcement came just days after Congress voted—over DOE's objections—to require more agency employees to take polygraph tests, which researchers say have hurt morale.

The report, due out next year from the Washington-based Center for Science and International Studies, is intended to show "how to make science and security compatible," says Maureen McCarthy of DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration. But skeptics wonder if the study will change the minds of congressional leaders dissatisfied with DOE's security efforts. "This is after the fact," opined policy analyst Al Teich of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (which publishes *Science*).

This year's defense authorization bill, for instance, would extend lie detector tests—currently required for about 1200 staffers at DOE labs—to up to 5000 more agency employees who handle sensitive information. It would also bar the Energy Secretary from exempting researchers from testing, even at the risk of degrading the science.

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