

# Reunification Blues for East German Scientists

*Shakeup of the institutes: Even established scientists must join in a 2-for-1 competition for jobs*

Berlin—FOR THE 20,000 MEMBERS OF THE old East German Academy of Sciences who are worrying whether their future lies in a laboratory or an unemployment line, the last weeks have brought a double dose of news: the first science budget for reunified Germany and, at last, the massive Science Council assessment—over 2,000 pages of analysis of the past performance and future prospects of the old east Germany's research groups.

Overall, the verdict is simple: If you are an east German scientist, your chance of continuing your career is just one in two. The Science Council study envisages 10,000 jobs in the web of universities and new research institutes that will replace the old Communist system. But the tough question for each researcher now is, "Will I be one of the lucky ones to win a job in the new system?"

Despite the detailed verbiage of the Science Council assessment, no individual can read his or her future with certainty in it. Institutes and research groups were assessed, not people. Some groups were thoroughly criticized; the theoretical physics group at the Einstein Laboratory in Potsdam was told that it was not up to international standards. Others were praised. The Division on Molecular Cell Genetics at the Central Institute for Molecular Biology in Buch, for example, heard the good news that its work on intracellular protein transport was of "undisputed" scientific competence and "suited for integration" in the future research system. But praise carries no guarantees for members of the group—each individual will have to apply for a job on personal merit as the new system emerges.

Exactly when that will be is anybody's guess. "The Science Council, in concluding the evaluation, has done its duty," says council chairman Dieter Simon. "Now it's up to the politicians to act."

So far the politicians appear ready to buy most of the science council recommendations. The most recent indication was Research Minister Heinz Riesenhuber's decision to put about \$900 million in his budget to help rebuild eastern science (*Science*, 26 July, p. 376). But there are huge problems lying in wait. Half of the jobs are planned for

universities and research institutes that are supported by a mixture of federal and state funds—but the east German states are in too bad a shape to pay.

For Berlin and Saxony, the result could be "a catastrophe," Wolf-Michael Catenhusen, chairman of the Bundestag Committee on Research, Technology, and Technology Assessment and a member of the Social-Demo-

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cratic opposition party, told *Science*. Eighty percent of the institutes the science council wants to establish would be in these states, and "they cannot cope with it alone," he said. Whether the federal government will take a bigger share of the burden or risk collapse of the scheme will not be known until the Bundestag debates the budget in October.

Even aside from the funding problems, the changeover to the western structure promises to be an organizational nightmare. East German policy was to concentrate research in the academy and turn universities into little more than institutions of higher education. The Science Council now wants 1,700 out of the planned 10,000 research jobs to be back in the universities. But the universities are already overstaffed and are being told they will have to accept massive layoffs. "Clearly those who have to go [from the universities] will not welcome the entry of their colleagues from the academy," Simon pointed out.

Various incentive schemes are under discussion to encourage the universities to take in the best people available rather than retain jobs for their own staff. The Max Planck Society will fund 25 research groups within the universities in a new form of grant sup-

port. Additional "transfer grants" will also be given out to help universities taking on new staff. But Simon doubts whether they have gotten the formula right. The proposed two-year term for the grant is too short to provide a powerful incentive, he says.

Red tape is already slowing reform. "Bureaucracy has increased instead of decreased," complains Carl-Günter Schulz, director of the Central Institute for Electron Physics in Berlin. Adjusting to western wage and tax regulations, redundancy rights, budget rules, and grant application procedures is proving difficult for its 690 researchers. Their institute is to close down completely by 31 December of this year.

That is also the last day for the Central Institute for Molecular Biology in the Berlin

suburb of Buch. The institute was selected as a test case, and its difficulties should give a good indication of what is in store for others. The government decided in January that the institute's facilities should be taken over by a new National Research Institute for Molecular Medicine. A committee to organize the new institute was ready to go in March. After the director is ap-

pointed, each of the 1,600 staff members will have to apply individually for the 550 positions envisioned at the new institute. But when and with whom should they file their applications? "Everybody feels the pressure," says Hans Wilhelm Groscurth, senior administrator in Berlin's city government.

Added competition for jobs will also come from people leaving other institutes and from west Germans. But the Science Council, says outgoing director Günter Pasternak, "takes it for granted that a large share of the new positions will be staffed from the outstanding research groups of the former central institutes....For the rest one has to find alternatives."

What are the alternatives? The talk is of scientists turning into entrepreneurs, producing biochemicals, or starting service companies. But the director of the Central Institute for Electron Physics puts it more bluntly: "The rest are going to be unemployed." ■ RICHARD SIETMANN

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