Notes from the Brits at CERN meeting with R. Wade 17/06/10

UK funding cuts:

Discussions are on-going on how to cope with cuts which have and will be announced by the new coalition government. The first round of “immediate savings” already announced was for 6 billion pounds, and there is good news that after the drastic cuts last year, STFC funding not reduced proportionally (which could have been up to 8 M) but by 200 k “so we dodged the first bullet”. However, over the next funding period, a reduction in public funding of 10% is expected, with some ring-fencing of priority areas. If science is not ring fenced, this could imply up to a 20% reduction. The potential impact of 20% cuts is currently being worked on. Some programs have already been cut to the point that further reduction is simply not possible, so a uniform “salami slicing” is not possible, and the UK would have to pull out of some areas of science. International subscriptions will also be hit (CERN, ESO…). Before the change of government, operation costs for ISIS and the Diamond light source had been promised by Drayson, but it is not clear what will happen to this.

The effects of the economic down-turn were also discussed by the Finance Committee and CERN Council. The UK are not the ones complaining the most, since other countries are even worse hit. Globally this will have to be looked at during extra FC and Council meeting late summer.

In the discussion, it was pointed out that the UK particle physics program is no-longer forward looking, limited essentially to the LHC and some neutrino physics. On a more positive note, David Willets visited CERN in January, and is now Science Minister. The visit went very well.

Council Feedback:

There has been progress in both the scientific and geographic enlargement of CERN. On the scientific side, there is consensus that CERN can be involved in particle physics, with a coordination and support role. CERN may also participate in experiments in other areas, experiments such as underground particle-astrophysics.

Regarding geographic enlargement, as confirmed in the DG’s message on 18/06, Council also opened the door to greater integration in particle physics when it unanimously adopted the recommendations of a working group set up in 2008 to examine the role of the Organization in the light of increasing globalization in particle physics. The key points are that:

* All states shall be eligible for Membership, irrespective of their geographical location;
* A new Associate Membership status is to be introduced to allow non-Member States to establish or intensify their institutional links with the Organization;
* Associate Membership shall also serve as the obligatory pre-stage to Membership;
* The existing Observer status will be phased out for States, but retained for International Organizations;
* International co-operation agreements and protocols will be retained.

Applications for Membership from Cyprus, Israel, Serbia, Slovenia and Turkey have already been received by the CERN Council, and are undergoing technical verification. At future meetings, Council will determine how to apply the new arrangements to these States.

In discussion, we heard that although there will be no geographic restriction, the intention is to retain a majority European nature to the organisation. Agreements can be established with associate member states for specific projects. Associate membership will cost 10% of the calculated full membership for a particular country. There will also be a different option of membership of a large global project, such as CLIC or an LHC energy upgrade.

The extra income from new (associate) members will partly be used to enhance the scientific program, and partly to reduce the contribution of existing members.

The time scale for the 5 new countries is for a report in September and vote in December (requiring unanimous support for them to join). Then there will be a negotiation as to how fast they ramp up to full membership (and full payments!).

Pension Fund and CHIS:

Various models are being looked at to get the Pension Fund back to a balanced state, including higher contributions, later retiring age, an injection of more capital. A combination of all these will be needed spreading the impact on all parties. Extension of the retirement age is under discussion, most likely to be on a voluntary basis. Part of the problem is the mix of 2 populations with different conditions for retirement, depending on whether they were hired before or after 1987. Comments were made that a combination of keeping people after age 65, and a funding freeze, would drastically affect the ability to hire young people.

Although a discussion of the CERN Health Insurance Scheme had been proposed for the agenda, there were no particular points raised.

Return on Investment ([supporting slides](file:///\\cern.ch\dfs\Users\s\sfoffano\Documents\Private\Brits@CERN\Brits@CERN_GB%20Industrial%20returns_17_6_10.pptx)):

D. Gregorio reported on the encouraging progress since initiatives were introduced in 2009 to improve the UK Industrial Return Coefficient for supplies. This is defined as the percentage of CERN purchases to a particular country, divided by the percentage of the CERN budget paid by that country. The coefficient is calculated as an average over the previous 4 years. The 2010 value for the UK is 0.27. The value for a well-balanced country would be 0.8. However, breaking this down into the values for a particular year, the UK was 0.27 (2006), 0.24 (2007), 0.17 (2008), 0.3 (2009) and 0.43 (2010 – over first 6 months only). In 2009, in agreement with STFC, a road show was organized at RAL and at Daresbury, for mechanical engineering, IT and electronics representatives from CERN to meet companies. There were 121 sessions with companies discussing supplies and CERN’s needs. Key companies were identified and some orders have already been placed during end 2009/early 2010. Also, since the UK is poorly balanced, only UK companies have been targeted for certain purchases, such as disk servers, PCB assemblies, and cutting of tungsten plates. There are also better responses to market surveys in the last 18 months. Companies take the trouble to reply, although this is sometimes just to explain the reasons for declining. It was pointed out that the overall volume of purchasing has gone down, but that the weak pound should be helping the UK to be competitive. The UK Industrial Liason Officer has still not been replaced, and an agreement from UK Trade and Industry to partially fund the post has fallen through. The ILO needs to be a person who can spend significant time in the UK and in CERN, and be proactive, not reactive.

Recruitment initiatives ([supporting slides](Brits@CERN%20Recruitment%20Results%20170610.pptx)):

J. Purvis presented progress since the last meeting covering several visits to Career’s Fairs and various universities involving a few EasyJet flights several events attended in a few days of an expert in a particular field + HR person to explain the various programmes. Statistics were shown across the programmes showing the impact of these initiatives which gave an evolution for example of 12 UK Technical Students selected out of 73 UK applicants in the April 2010 Committee against 2 UK selections out of 6 UK applicants in the April 2009 Committee. As the question is frequently asked about how and where do HR advertise, the complete list was given including Eureka, New Scientist, Beechwood and Jonathan Lee …

The GET (Graduate Engineer Trainee) programme is a major recruitment opportunity which will be branded as Fellow-like Engineers. James thanked those who had participated in the visits. The same rhythm cannot continue for budgetary and time-commitment reasons however all who travel for professional or private reasons and who have frequent contact in the UK are encouraged to contact the recruitment service and take publicity information with them.

Any Other Business:

S. Foffano reminded people about the [Brits@CERN website](https://espace.cern.ch/brits/default.aspx), accessible to all on the mailing list for posting and sharing relevant information. She commented on the usefulness of the site to resolve a few travel problems between CERN and the UK during the recent volcanic ash air travel crisis. She also invited suggestions on how to improve these meetings, make them more interactive and how to include other information of relevance on the agenda.

Finally R. Wade offered to come back end August with more news following the special Finance Committee by which time more should be know about the UK Funding cuts. Date 25th August to be confirmed.