

money to "place emphasis on promoting the work of young scientists," says EPSRC head Richard Brook.

But allocation of the £403 million among the two physics-related councils and the four other research councils will take some hammering out, with decisions expected next month at the earliest. "One can assume that there will be jockeying for position between the councils and the Office of Science and Technology [the body in charge of the research councils]," Foster says. The fraction of the budget going to biology and the medical sciences will tend to go up compared to that for other areas, he adds, "but I don't believe there will be a big discrepancy."

And, with half of the £600 million tagged for university infrastructure coming from Wellcome, "it follows that at least half will go to biomedical research," says Tony Quigley, who is deputy to the director general of the research councils. "As for the other money, there is a general assumption of a priority for the biosciences." Nonetheless, says SBS's Mulvey, "new money for biomedical research will reduce pressure on money for the rest of science."

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Physics Societies Offer Free Undergrad Memberships

Starting this month, undergraduates in the Society of Physics Students will be able to join, free of charge, any one of the ten member societies of the American Institute of Physics. For the price of SPS's \$15 annual dues, students can sign up with one of the member societies and then enjoy all, or nearly all, of the benefits of regular membership, including free subscriptions to journals and newsletters and the opportunity to attend and give papers at professional meetings. (Sorry, grad students aren't eligible for the new program.) The member societies will absorb most of the cost of the new program.

Bo Hammer of AIP's education division, which administers SPS, says the new membership program is "part of a big push to make SPS more of a professional society for undergraduate majors [by] helping them get more out of studying physics than just their course work."

SPS currently has about 660 chapters and 5800 members, most of them undergrads. Those enrolled at schools that have no SPS chapter can still take advantage of the free memberships by becoming at-large members of SPS. Further information is available by contacting Jacki Nagy, AIP Education

Physics Olympiad Held in the Land of Fire and Ice

The competition was hot in Reykjavík, Iceland, in July at the 29th International Physics Olympiad, where 266 high school students from 56 countries tackled a two-day exam consisting of theoretical and experimental physics problems. All five contestants from China won gold medals, capturing first place for their country, and all the team members from Russia (last year's champion), Iran, Hungary and Vietnam took home medals too. China's Yuao Chen got the best mark, 47.5 out of 50, and his teammate Yuan Liu was the top-scoring girl.

There were only 11 gold medalists—about half as many as in recent years. All students who get 90% or better of the average of the top three scores win gold, notes Vidar Agústsón, an Icelandic businessman and former high school physics teacher who organized the event. "In this case, the three best students were far ahead of the others."

The American team (pictured above) earned a silver and a bronze, as well as two honorable mentions. India garnered one silver and one bronze in this, its first, physics olympiad; Ireland was also competing for the first time. Colombia and the Philippines kept their teams home this year because of financial hardship, and the Kuwaiti team also missed the olympiad.

This year's theoretical problems included predicting surface distortion due to lava melting in an ice cavity; exploring the mechanics of a hexagonal prism rolling down an incline; and using the relativistic Doppler shift to analyze astrophysical data from a 1994 *Nature* paper that seemed to suggest that some interstellar objects can move faster than light.

The experimental exam included measuring the frequency dependence of magnetic field attenuation by aluminum foil; and determining the self and mutual inductances of two coils, and the magnetic susceptibility of the material used to link them.

When they weren't solving physics problems, the participants went sight-seeing. "Not a single minute was lost," says Misha Lipatov, a US team member. "We visited a glacier, traveled into the interior of Iceland, went to a disco and attended the numerous pools that are all over Reykjavík." Lipatov, who emigrated from the Ukraine three years ago, says the international physics competition "was considerably more publicized in the former Soviet Union than in the US. I had been dreaming of going to such an olympiad ever since the seventh grade."

"What impresses me most," adds Southern Nazarene University's Dwight Neuenschwander, who was responsible for selecting and coaching the American team, "is the very strong friendships these kids form with their counterparts from around the world. This transcends physics."

Iceland's Ministry of Education and Culture picked up about half of the \$600 000 tab for the event; voluntary contributions from participating countries came to about 25% of the total, and the rest was provided by private businesses and in services by the city of Reykjavík. The American team was sponsored by the American Institute of Physics and the American Association of Physics Teachers, with additional support from AIP's other member societies and from private and corporate contributions.

The 30th International Physics Olympiad will be held next July in Padua, Italy.

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THE AMERICAN COMPETITORS in this year's physics olympiad in Iceland were (left to right): Andrew Lin of Cheshire, Connecticut (silver); Peter Onyisi of Arlington, Virginia (bronze); Lisa Carlivati of Reston, Virginia (honorable mention); Elizabeth Scott of Houston; and Misha Lipatov of New York City (honorable mention).



THE CHINESE AND TAIWANESE TEAMS sang together at the olympiad's closing banquet.

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