

28th January, 1965.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH IN NUCLEAR SCIENCE

GOVERNING BOARD

THE FUTURE ORGANISATION FOR NUCLEAR PHYSICS

Note by the Chairman

The Executive Committee

Now that Nimrod is in operation, many more questions are thrown up by the work done in the Institute's laboratories than could be dealt with in detail by the Board. That was the reason for setting up the Executive Committee last September, and experience has now shown that we were right to set up a body of this kind, meeting monthly at Chilton or Daresbury and allowing ample time for full discussion. I do not propose to describe all that has been done at the four meetings of the Executive Committee, but to concentrate on the more important points. These concern the future organisation for nuclear physics, and the future staffing arrangements. Financial developments are described in a separate paper.

The Future Organisation

Discussion of the new organisation has not been easy. Besides the change of Minister, many of the officials with whom we have been working for many years have also been moved and replaced by others, with the result that we have had less effective contacts than we would have liked on many matters which affect the future organisation of nuclear physics.

One important point is that nuclear physics is not to be lumped in with the rest of physics and mathematics, but will be dealt with in a separate division of the SRC, under the control of a Board composed of leading scientists in the field of nuclear physics, with a member of the Council of the SRC in the chair. This is very satisfactory. This Board will be responsible for the nuclear physics work hitherto dealt with by NIRNS, for the British participation in CERN, and for nuclear physics grants to universities.

Hitherto we have been fortunate in that under our Charter we have had very wide powers in regard to staffing, conditions of service and so forth. We have of course observed the same standards as the AEA and had to obtain the assent of the AEA from whom we drew our money. But the AEA authorities have given us an ample degree of discretion.

It is very important that the new Nuclear Physics Board should not be hampered by having a markedly less degree of administrative discretion. I am afraid that we are not by any means satisfied that the new arrangements will be as satisfactory as they should be.

For one thing there is a long chain of responsibility from the Nuclear Physics Board to the SRC and from the SRC to the Department of Education and Science and from the Department to the Treasury. It may be argued that this long chain of responsibility is inevitable. But its restrictive effects could be greatly lessened if the degree of responsibility delegated by the Treasury to the Department of Education and Science, and by them to the SRC, and by the SRC to the Nuclear Physics Board, were on generous lines. I shall have more to say on this orally, but I am not altogether satisfied with the way the position is developing.

One aspect of this is the staffing arrangements on which we are not happy. Staff transferred from the NIRNS will have the right to continue

their conditions of service. The proposals as to future recruits are, however, less satisfactory. It is proposed that, although they will not be Civil Servants, their conditions both as to pay and as to pension shall be closely based on those of the Civil Service. We consider that, in this event, there will be difficulty in recruiting first-class supporting staff in competition with the AEA, particularly at the Rutherford Laboratory. In addition our two laboratories will soon contain staff on two different sets of conditions, but doing the same work. These difficulties would have been avoided, and at the same time interchange with the AEA and industry would have been facilitated, if the conditions of our staff - the substantial majority of the SRC - had been taken as the standard for the SRC in future.

The Future

Success in the future, as in the past, will of course depend upon people, in particular upon those who form the SRC Council, the Nuclear Physics Board and the staff of our laboratories. We believe that over the last eight years the work has been given a good start. An organisation of a new kind has been built up; not just a Government research organisation, but a body with unique, intimate connections with the universities, in which university people really feel at home.

The Institute has now been in being for almost eight years, and this is a time to take stock. One reason for arranging this meeting is that members of the Board shall have the opportunity to put on record any points that they think are of real importance concerning the way in which the functions of the Institute should be carried on in the future. I hope that members will not hesitate to say bluntly what they think the Institute has done well, and what they think we could have done better. Such observations made on this occasion will carry considerable weight, and will be of great value for the future.