

## Hungarian universities

# Degrees of difference

HUNGARY'S system of postgraduate education has been reformed. Last month, the Presidential Council approved a law establishing a new scientific degree, that of "university doctor", ranking below the existing degrees of "candidate" and "doctor of sciences". Ironically, the change has been urged by academics as a way of making young scientists less diploma-orientated.

Under the old system, young scholars could not even begin work on their candidate dissertation until they had published several pieces of research. One result is that of Hungary's 50,000 "scientific workers" (including social scientists and humanists), only some 20 per cent have a higher degree. Under the new system, however, people will be able to apply for a special "university fellowship" immediately after taking their first degrees. Fellowships will be awarded on the basis of an examination that will include a foreign language and a "philosophical-ideological" section as well as the applicant's special subject, and will carry a stipend of 5,200 forints a month, comparable with a university lecturer's salary of 5,800 forints.

The completed dissertation will be defended after three years before a committee of both academy and university specialists. Those submitting dissertations of a sufficiently high standard will be awarded a candidate's degree, while the less outstanding but still competent will receive the lower degree of "university doctor".

Although the new procedure will become law only in September 1984, the first batch of applications was accepted last December, and 390 fellowships have already been awarded (out of 520 applicants). These include not only 1982 graduates but also several young scientists who did not yet have the necessary publications to start a candidate's dissertation under the old system. A number of young physicians were also attracted to the new fellowships, as a means of switching from practical medicine to medical research.

Although it is too soon for the scheme to be assessed, a preliminary report presented to the presidium of the Academy of Sciences (which has overall responsibility for the operation of the scheme) suggests that the initial selection procedures are working satisfactorily, with 50 per cent of the new fellows accommodated in university research facilities and the rest in academy institutes. The chance of a higher degree at an earlier age may help to overcome the dissatisfaction caused by the extremely low starting salaries of young graduates, often below those of a manual worker of the same age.

Vera Rich

## European Science Foundation

# Fund of ideas but no funds

Strasbourg

AMBITION and timidity again collided at this year's general assembly of the European Science Foundation, Europe's unique blend of grant-making organization and learned academy whose members appoint themselves. Yet paradoxically, the foundation seems in good spirits.

Last week, the assembly was told of a plan to mount an infrared telescope in a converted civil aircraft (to fashion an "astroplane") and of the lingering hope (after four years of frustration) that European governments will find a way to build a super electron storage ring for generating synchrotron radiation. But the foundation also relinquished direct responsibility for one of its successes so far — a fellowship and training programme in neurophysiology — and was told clearly that it would lose all credibility with social scientists if it could not raise the funds needed for a study begun three years ago of language learning among adult immigrants.

The foundation's difficulties mostly arise because it is an impresario for research, not a research organization as such. Of next year's budget of FF8.95 million (£734,000) (approved last week), close on 90 per cent will be spent on administration — always vulnerable, never popular. And although the foundation will probably handle as much again on account of its research projects (quaintly called "additional activities"), that part of the budget is contributed only by those members willing to support individual projects.

Whence the row about language learning. The objective is to understand how adult immigrants — Bengalis and Italians in Britain, Finns in Sweden, Turks in Germany and Moroccans in France, for example — acquire the language of their host environment (if at all). The project fits in well with others of the social science projects, including a major study of intra-migration due to be completed next year. Unfortunately, when the foundation willed the end, it was constitutionally incapable of willing the means.

Professor W.J.M. Levelt, director of the Max-Planck-Institut für Psycholinguistik at Nijmegen (Netherlands), which coordinates the project, said last week that work was well under way on the core of the project — a scheme to assess the linguistic progress of a sample of more than 200 guest workers in five different countries. Yet last year (1982), the foundation had wrung only FF1.4 million from its members towards the total cost of FF2.4 million. The Max-Planck-Gesellschaft had bridged the gap, paying the salaries of four research workers and even supplying the five research teams with a minicomputer for use

in data analysis.

But this cannot carry on, and is in any case "not acceptable", Levelt said. "You cannot vote year after year to approve the budget and then fail to accept the consequences of your joint decision." And if the further FF8 million that will be needed (over three years) had not been promised by the end of the year, activities would have to be curtailed and "the reputation of the European Science Foundation with social scientists will be in question". Most members looked at their feet, but the Finnish Academy and Norway promised to look at the question urgently, and Britain and France said they would consider increasing their contributions.

These are the hazards ahead of the astroplane. According to Professor C. de Jager of the Space Research Laboratory at Utrecht (Netherlands), the objective is to modify either an Airbus or a Canadian Challenger aircraft to carry 2-m and 1-m infrared telescopes respectively. Total costs, including 300 hours of operations a year over the decade, would amount to FF350 million for the Airbus and FF150 million for the Challenger. De Jager argued that the project would be complementary to satellite and ground-based observations, but that it would put balloons out of the infrared business. It seems to be understood that France and Germany will decide between them which option, if any, flies.

The European synchrotron radiation project is in much the same position. Refinement has continued of the design for a 5-GeV storage ring capable of generating synchrotron radiation at a wavelength of 0.1 Å. There are now several potential sites all over Europe, but none of the host governments has as yet offered a sufficiently large share to get the project started. Meanwhile, the planners are worried by the proposal of Stanford University in California to build a 6-GeV storage ring for the same purpose. The general opinion is that a decision must be made by next year or the European project must be abandoned.

Technically, this is what has happened to the European Training Programme in Brain and Behaviour Research, which organizes training courses and provides student travel grants in fields related to neurobiology. Having decided a year ago that the programme should be left to its own devices so as to free itself for new initiatives, the foundation was this year faced with a demand from the sponsors that it should continue to administer the scheme, which will henceforth be designated an "associated programme".

Professor H. Curien, the foundation's president (who is head of the Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales in Paris), explained that the underlying objective is to let successful projects make their own