

NEWS

GEC's Chinese connection

A £250 million contract with the People's Republic of China is in the offing for GEC Turbine Generators Ltd.

The company has signed an agreement to supply equipment for a new PWR nuclear power station at Daya Bay in the Province of Guangdong, 30 miles up the coast from Hong Kong. The power station will consist of two 'islands'; a nuclear island and a conventional island. The equipment for the nuclear island is to be supplied by the French company Framatome, while GEC is to provide two 985 MW generating units for the conventional island.

Conceived 6 years ago, the Guangdong station is a joint venture between the People's Republic of China and the Hong Kong Nuclear Investment Company, which, if everything goes to plan, will go into operation during 1992-93. Initially, the majority of its power will be used by Hong Kong.

GEC sees the agreement as a major milestone in negotiations with China and as a security for several thousand jobs within the company.

SERC publishes corporate plan

The **Science & Engineering Research Council (SERC)** is concerned that because of financial restraints it is not adequately underpinning the basic and strategic sciences and engineering which is its prime function. In its first corporate plan, published in December, the SERC says that:

- to ease its financially constrained situation it is attempting to redistribute over a period of 5 years up to £18 million a year
- it will encourage partnerships whenever appropriate internationally, with the European Community, with industry, with government departments (especially DTI) and with other research councils
- it will continue to look carefully to control its own manpower. The recognition of a clear role for its establishments will help monitor that process.

But even with these redistributions and savings, the Council believes that it will be unable to take up essential opportunities of strategic research in science and engineering. It regards this as very serious for the future and concludes that, because of the continuing importance of science and technology in the UK's national life, research in science and engineering should share in the projected economic growth.

The plan states that the council believes that there is a strong case for a special injection of funds for equipment for universities' programmes — selectively awarded for items special to its

grants. This would complement the general base of equipment provided by the University Grants Committee with which the council would wish to collaborate to secure a common strategy for universities support.

The council concludes that its role in the provision of trained manpower is critical for the nation, both in graduate training in the basic sciences and for the high-technology trained manpower required by industry. It will continue to monitor the effectiveness of its policies in relation to changing requirements.

Copies of the Corporate Plan can be obtained from K. Hicks, Room 1144, SERC, Swindon (tel. 0793 26222, ext. 2304).

Optical Disk Forum takes the initiative

A new body, the Optical Disk Forum, is taking the initiative to reach early agreement on working standards for optical disks at the logical-files level. Such an agreement will complement many of those already reached by hardware manufacturers concerning standards in areas such as that of the CD-ROM.

Welcoming the initiative, the Commission of the European Communities has agreed to provide meeting facilities for the forum's inaugural meeting, which will take place on the 22nd January 1986 in Luxembourg.

The Information Industry Association (IIA) in the USA has already set up, within its standards committee, a body seeking to agree similar working standards for the file layout on CD-ROMs. Harry Collier, for the Optical Disk Forum, has said that the forum would be seeking to co-operate closely with the IIA group in the hope of achieving a joint working standard between Europe and the USA, thus giving information providers the maximum initial market impetus.

The forum will also be considering what could be done in addition to standardisation to enable information providers to use the new optical technology to reach a broad market as early as possible.

Attendance at the inaugural meeting of the Optical Disk Forum will be by invitation; those who wish to take part in this meeting as either observers or participants are invited to contact the organising secretariat at Learned Information Ltd., Besselsleigh Road, Abingdon, Oxford (tel. 0865 730275).

Micro Scope makes macro profits

In its first year of full Stock Exchange listing, Micro Scope has achieved an increased before-tax profit of £1 079 000, £485 000 up on 1984.

The company, which specialises in networking and videotex equipment,

went public in June 1985 following over 5 years of successful business. But 1985 has been a year to top all years with overseas business increasing from 5% of total in 1984 to 30% in 1985 and the turnover per member of staff rising from £55 000 to £65 000.

Micro Scope has used some of the money gained from the sale of shares to build a new 1600 m² head office and development centre at Maidenhead, which opened for business on the 2nd January 1986. The company's old premises, a converted boathouse on the Thames, will be used as a training centre and warehouse. With the company's increasing business, Chris Sealy, managing director of Micro Scope, feels that the new premises are a must, as he says: 'It will give us a lot more room to take on a lot more staff.'

With 14 distributors operating in 11 different countries, including the UK, Micro Scope feels its target of 50% overseas business by 1988 is well on the way to success but, despite this, Chris Sealy states that the company has no plans to open overseas subsidiaries. Why should it when the distributor network is obviously working so well.

As far as company acquisitions are concerned, Chris Sealy says: 'We feel confident that we could make a successful acquisition if the right company came along. We would like to do that but have no one in mind at the moment'.

1985 has brought increased profits and business to Micro Scope but Chris Sealy, for one, anticipates that 1986 will be bigger and better yet again.

Alvey annual report

The growing co-operation between universities and industry is highlighted in the **Alvey Directorate's** annual report for 1984-85. 'Virtually all our best academic teams are now involved in co-operative programmes with industry under Alvey', writes **Geoffrey Pattie, Minister of State for Industry & Information Technology**, in the report's foreword.

This co-operation between academic and industrial worlds was, says Mr. Pattie, one of the central objectives of Alvey. The hope is that this will lead to an irreversible breakdown of traditional barriers between the two sectors and to successful exploitation of the research.

The report, which is in two parts, is based on the **first Alvey conference held at Edinburgh University in June**. The first part, the report itself, contains outlines of progress in the enabling technologies and also accounts of discussions which took place during closed sessions. Part II consists of reprints of posters detailing projects which have been approved. Many of the posters were displayed at the conference, but more recently approved projects have also been included.

Copies of the report can be obtained from the IEE (Alvey Report), PO Box 26, Hitchin, Herts. SG5 1SA. The report and the poster supplement each cost £10.