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Dear Professor Edwards

I have just seen the sixth draft of the proposed Council Notice on Regrouping and trust that you will accept some comments on this.

The first comment concerns the fact that this is the first announcement to be made by SRC as such concerning regrouping, and assumes that everyone is aware of the need for these regrouping moves. Whilst I have seen many hundreds of sheets of paper on this subject, along with many others, a semi-public announcement of this kind should I feel contain at least the essence of the argument.

Secondly, whilst the mechanics of regrouping computing activities are explained, the future role of SRC in computing and computational activities is not explained, despite previous Council discussions on this topic.

Thirdly, the note lacks enthusiasm for any of its proposals. This is perhaps not surprising, since there is barely a majority view that this represents the best course of action. It is all rather bland and in no way matches up to a plan for the future of the laboratories concerned.

Fourthly, if the SRC cannot state "that it intends to establish a National Computing Campus ..." then DOI are being misled, as are also the professional staff of the Atlas Laboratory. The setting up of this institute as a natural development of the Atlas Laboratory must be seen as a real alternative. A weak statement here merely reinforces the idea that the Atlas Laboratory is being closed and that only rather vague plans are being made to handle "research computing" at other sites in the nuclear physics domain.

Fifthly, the importance of the concept of site Directors, which you stressed to me a few days ago, is barely touched upon, and then only in passing, as a result of the unbelievably casual mention of Dr Howlett's retirement. Announcing the Director's retirement in this way can only be condemned as discourteous and inept; such a statement must be handled with dignity and clarity, particularly as Dr Howlett has a wide circle of friends and colleagues internationally as well as nationally. This aspect of the note was particularly distressing, since we were not aware of the Director's imminent retirement, and his departure underlines the steady comment that SRC find the moment expedient to close the Laboratory; in the absence of further reasons, this is an understandable and partly supported

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view. It is perhaps ironic that just at the moment when others, including research organisations in the US, are planning to copy the Atlas pattern of support, the SRC should be set on fragmenting this successful operation. It is to be hoped that the coordinating committee can act in such a way that confidence in the direction of SRC computing policy can be re-established.

The note is thus inadequate and will throw serious doubt on the ability of the senior staff to convey the interests and the scientific objectives of the Laboratory to the Council. It may, however, be that it is after all still premature to make an announcement, since some important matters of structure and independence of the units have to be spelled out more clearly; these are matters not only of interest to members of the Laboratory but the university research groups.

My comments are written in the awareness that some hard facts have to be faced and some hard talking has to take place not only with the computing community but with the more powerful high energy physics community. The staff of the Atlas Laboratory are conscious of belonging to a successful team. I am therefore anxious that changes should be seen to be well-directed and likely to be effective and that short-term tactical moves do not dictate the breaking-up of an organisation which is needed in the longer term. The Council showed an awareness of this point at its recent meeting, but I do not see the same awareness in the Office, and in particular, the present note does not convey this sensitivity at all.

Yours sincerely

J E Hailstone

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