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NEWS ARTICLE



Atomic heavyweights meet in element factory

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Picture show Prof Poliakoff (left) with Prof Hofmann in front of the particle accelerator at GSI. Image courtesy of GSI.

PA 20/10



It was the perfect setting for a meeting between two superstars of the Periodic Table. The GSI Helmholtz Centre for Heavy Ion Research GmbH in Darmstadt, Germany, is the home of the heaviest elements on the planet — atoms so dense and unstable they only exist for a few seconds before decaying. And it was here that Professor Martyn Poliakoff, one of the faces of the award-winning Periodic Table of Videos project, met Professor Sigurd Hofmann, head of the research team responsible for synthesising these atomic heavyweights.

The team at GSI had invited Professor Poliakoff and video journalist Brady Haran to visit the centre after discovering the Periodic Table of Videos, a website dedicated to explaining and exploring the mysteries of the Periodic Table through short films. He took a tour of the GSI particle accelerator where ions are smashed together at incredibly high speeds, forming new elements through the process of nuclear fusion. Since 1981, GSI accelerator experiments have yielded the discovery of the six heaviest chemical elements, which carry the atomic numbers 107 to 112 — Meitnerium (synthesised in 1982), Hassium (1984), Darmstadtium (1994), Roentgenium (1994), Bohrium (1996) and Copernicium (provisional name, 1996). Professor Hofmann was the ideal guide, as he has been involved in the synthesis of all these elements over the past 30

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