than four the cost of the 250 ft. telescope with which Jodrell Bank pioneered the construction of very large steerable telescopes a decade ago. Evidently the experience of the past few years has persuaded the designers that it will be possible to construct a telescope of this size without presenting the Science Research Council with an impossibly large bill.

As yet, there has been no final decision about the location of the new instrument. It has been arranged that the Atomic Energy Authority should act as an agent for the Science Research Council, supervising the process of design and collecting whatever information will eventually be necessary for making a decision. With luck, design will be complete by the end of this year, so that a prompt decision by the Science Research Council would make it possible to have the new instrument in service by 1972.

inifhal teeching alfabet

In 1960, the University of London Institute of Education and the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales decided jointly to support an experimental study of a simplified and more regular alphabet to be used to teach children to read. The Reading Research Unit, which was formed to undertake the study, has now released its findings (*The i.t.a. Symposium, Research Report on the British Experiment with i.t.a.*, by John Downing, 25*s*. National Foundation for Educational Research). They justify the enthusiasm of the early pioneers of simplified reading. The alphabet used, Sir James Pitman's forty-four character initial teaching alphabet (i.t.a.), was used in forty-one schools to teach 873 children to read. The same number of pupils were taught by the conventional method. The unit took considerable care that the tests should be as objective as possible, given the notorious difficulties of controlled tests on human subjects.

The children taught with the i.t.a. learned faster than those taught by the normal method. At the age of eight (after three years at school) they were six months in advance of their normally taught contemporaries. Their ability in comprehension tests was greater, and their essays were as much as 50 per cent longer. Curiously enough, the i.t.a. children were even able to spell better after four years than were children taught by the traditional method. The report concludes that "the traditional orthography of English is an important cause of difficulty in learning to read". The children taught with the i.t.a. cannot of course entirely escape the effects of this problem—there is a setback when they finally go over to using the traditional letters, but it is not as great as might have been thought.

The report emphasizes that i.t.a. is not necessarily the best simplified alphabet that can be devised. There is obviously further scope for research into reading and methods of teaching it. Such research might well improve considerably the "productivity" of infant schools, and even pave the way to a simplified alphabet for adults. It is depressing then to find that the report may well have been the last fling of the Reading Research Unit; Mr. Lionel Elvin of the Institute of Education thinks it may be forced to close in May unless further funds are made available. The work of the unit so far has opened up a host of new questions about teaching methods and it deserves a chance to investigate them more fully.

Collaboration on Abstracts

The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority has come to an arrangement with *Nuclear Science Abstracts* by which the British literature cited in the abstracting journal will be abstracted in Britain and then sent to the United States for publication. Work on the scheme has already begun and the Atomic Energy Research Establishment at Harwell is responsible for co-ordinating the British effort. The agreement on collaboration, which has the blessing and partial financial support of the Office of Scientific and Technical Information, gives the Atomic Energy Authority responsibility for selecting which items in the British literature shall be abstracted. Later on it is planned that the authority shall also supply *Nuclear Science Abstracts* with indexing terms.

One of the arguments in favour of collaboration is that the libraries of the Atomic Energy Authority are already engaged on similar work to that of *Nuclear Science Abstracts*, so that duplication of effort will be avoided. Similar considerations have led to the decentralization of work on the Canadian and Japanese literature, and no doubt other agreements with *Nuclear Science Abstracts* will follow. To the journal itself, which is at present abstracting nearly 50,000 items a year, it will also be a great advantage that the cost of the operation will be shared with other countries; recently the journal has been under pressure from Washington to ensure that its size and cost do not grow exponentially but, rather, remain constant. At the same time, the efficiency with which the journal has operated since its foundation in 1947 has raised in some quarters the fear that devolution of responsibility may mean less speedy service. From this point of view, further extensions of the international agreement will be scrutinized with care. It also remains to be decided how *Nuclear Science Abstracts* will develop in the years ahead. Changing over to publication on magnetic tape may be tempting but is probably at present unacceptable. Forms of collaboration still have to be worked out with international organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency and the EURATOM organization in Europe, both of which are known to be interested in information processing. Yet another possibility, however remote, is that *Nuclear Science Abstracts* will wither away as the subject matter with which it is primarily concerned is transformed either into commercial engineering or into physics, chemistry and other more familiar disciplines.

Decimal Pound

The British Government seems to be determined not to change its mind on the decimalization of the British currency. In the House of Lords on January 30, Lord Winterbottom, Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Public Building and Works, said that the government did not believe the difficulties of making a transition to the system based on a pound rather than a unit half as big would be anything like as great as critics made out. He suggested that the critics were trying to frighten ordinary people and that the decimal currency board would ultimately launch a campaign