

OLD WORLD

Brighter Future for the Royal Institution

AFTER restricting the deficit of the Royal Institution to less than £10,000 a year during each of the past three years, inflation has finally got the best of all efforts and a deficit of £17,600 is forecast for 1972.

In drastic efforts to solve the institution's financial problems the managers have taken the unprecedented step of introducing a charge on all members from January 1973 for attendance at the evening discourse meetings. Attendance at these discourses has until now been free to members—although guests have had to pay a charge since 1969—but subject to approval at a special general meeting to be held in July it will cost members 60p on each occasion they attend the main theatre—or 30p if they prefer to sit in the gallery. Members will, however, be able to buy a season ticket for £6.65 which will enable them to attend all of the twenty discourses held in the year.

By instituting such charges the managers have avoided the potentially dangerous effects of increasing subscriptions which could have resulted in a drop in membership, thus reversing the trend of 1971 which saw a net increase of 243, with 314 new members having enrolled during the year bringing the total membership to 1,483.

The Royal Institution expects, if the average attendance at discourses remains the same, that the new moves will raise about £4,000 a year. This, however, will not by itself solve the financial problems of the institution. Other efforts to improve the situation include a campaign to make the library self sufficient by selling books which are judged not to be relevant to the purposes of the institution. So far this has raised about £100,000 and Sir Gordon Cox, the treasurer of the Royal Institution said this week that the target is £150,000 which, if invested, could provide an annual income of £7,500.

In the institution's annual report published recently Sir Gordon Cox attributes the smaller deficit for 1971 (£7,812 compared to £9,017 in 1970) chiefly to economies carried out by the staff. These economies were, however, mostly wiped out by salary increases of £10,000 which were necessary according to the report to "ensure that the remuneration of the staff is kept in line with that for comparable employment elsewhere in London".

Another item of expenditure which appears on this year's balance sheet but

did not last year is a sum of £2,001 for rates. In the past the rates have been paid through a government grant but the government will not in future pay for annual increases in rates although it will still reimburse the institution for the bulk of the payment to the local authority.

The treasurer warns that continued economies will be necessary and that every possible avenue must be explored in the search for more income. The property owned by the institution needs maintenance and Sir Gordon points out that even if this is phased over several years it is still a very formidable proposition.

In a plea for more sponsorship of its activities Sir Gordon points out that the gap between income and expenditure on the institution's educational activities was closed to some extent last year by the Courtauld Educational Trust which

agreed to sponsor a series of school lectures for five years. He added that he hoped that this example will "be followed by others so that this important side of our work may become self-sufficient financially".

Certainly with Sir Gordon Cox at the helm the future for the Royal Institution, although it may not be too rosy for the coming year, does look a lot healthier.

Sir Gordon Cox said this week that he was hopeful that by the beginning of 1973 the financial position of the Royal Institution will be improved but that 1972 will "strain the resources". As for the future, Sir Gordon said that he was very hopeful that in a few years the balance sheet will show a surplus but that this will depend on maintaining the momentum of the increased membership drive that has showed such dividends in the past 16 months.

SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL

More Space at RSRS

THE Science Research Council's Radio and Space Research Station at Slough is to expand its space activities, according to the report of the Radio and Space Research Station review panel published last week (Science Research Council, 1972). One of the chief changes, which was implemented in February this year, is the removal of the Space Research Management Unit from the council's London office to the RSRS, thus centralizing much of the SRC's support for space science at Slough.

Before February, the budget of the RSRS was about £1.3 million a year, but the management unit has brought with it an extra £3 million a year, most of which is for the purchase of Skylark, Petrel and Skua rockets, satellites and services for the SRC's space programme. The panel does, however, recommend that some of the basic radio research activities should be cut back during the next two to three years to make way for the station's increasing space commitment. Although the panel thinks it important that research on tropospheric physics and propagation at centimetre and millimetre wavelengths "should be continued at about its present level", it recommends that the ionospheric physics programme should be halved during the next two or three years and should in future concentrate on the improvement of ionospheric communi-

cations and the continuing provision of an advisory service. The number of staff involved in basic radio research is expected to drop from 86 in 1970/71 to 60 in 1973/74, and the funding to be reduced from £550,000 to £425,000 during the same period.

Dr J. R. Saxton, director of the RSRS, emphasized this week that the station was in no sense turning into an establishment devoted solely to the provision of services, and that basic research would continue to consume about 30 per cent of the station's effort. The panel also suggested that research on a contract basis might sometimes be undertaken for outside organizations, but Dr Saxton said that such contract work would have to be carefully selected because of the problems of providing the necessary staff, especially for short-term contracts.

The report also has something to say about the relationship between the RSRS and space and radio groups in universities. It says, for example, that "thought is being given" to the idea of using the station as a centre for back-up services for university space groups, especially the development of instrumentation at present being done by establishments like the Rutherford Laboratory. The panel also considers that the station should encourage universities to collaborate in research on topics such as the influence of meteorological factors on microwave propagation to which they seem at present to pay scant attention.