

University of London

Merger, merger everywhere

THE saga of the restructuring of teaching at the University of London, approved by the senate of the university in April 1982, is unfolding slowly. Shortage of funds for building projects is hampering progress towards some of the mergers that have already been negotiated and is delaying others yet to be finalized.

The reorganization was made necessary by a sharp drop in the budget of the university as a whole that threatened some of the smaller colleges with severe reductions in the numbers of courses they could offer. The University Grants Committee has, since the cutbacks were announced in 1981, relented a little and has allowed the targeted reductions in student numbers to be

finish up with surplus real estate on its books. St George's Hospital, now relocated in south London at Tooting, has surplus space originally built in the expectation that Chelsea College would move there. Now there is pressure to concentrate the teaching of pharmacy on that site, which would imply that the School of Pharmacy in Bloomsbury could be vacated. Bedford College is transferring its science teaching to Royal Holloway College, which has a 100-acre "green-fields" site at Egham, 20 miles to the west of London. One anxiety is that this site will be less attractive to would-be students.

Bedford was in need of new premises because leases on the existing site in



Counter-attraction. Bedford's Regent's Park site has assets unmatched by Egham

delayed by a year — a concession extended to only a few other universities.

The consequences for science teaching will eventually be profound. The aim is to concentrate on teaching at five major sites. So much emerged from the work of a number of university committees which last year painted with a broad brush the future pattern of teaching in broad subject areas, and which recommended a concentration of teaching on five sites, not always the same. The principle was, however, accepted by the university's joint planning committee and eventually by the university's senate, which nevertheless shrank from saying which they should be for lack of the power to dictate to colleges which are, in principle, autonomous.

Whatever the outcome of the organization now under way, the University of London is almost certain to

Regent's Park are due to expire early next century. Bedford has to raise £16 million to effect the move, and has applied to the University Grants Committee for the extra funds likely to be needed if the move is to be completed by the target date of the end of the 1985-86 academic year.

Kings College, based in the Strand, had earlier contemplated a merger with Bedford but has now agreed to merge instead with Queen Elizabeth College (QEC) in Kensington, which is exclusively science-based. Chelsea College, which was, with QEC, one of the most seriously threatened colleges, and which is also predominantly science-based, is now also negotiating and "actively planning" for a joint college with QEC and Kings, to have 6,000 students, as large as any other in the University of London. If this merger goes through, the combined college, which will

include a medical school and an engineering faculty, will have a student body with two-thirds science students, compared with one-third at Kings at present.

The new college will, however, have to occupy a reduced number of sites. Which of the sites used by the three colleges will be maintained has not yet been decided, but it is assumed that the Strand site will not be abandoned. The long-term objective is to concentrate on two sites, and QEC's Kensington site seems the most vulnerable. But it has been agreed that the site will be used for "the foreseeable future". Professor H.J.V. Tyrrell, vice-principal of Chelsea College, says that staff reductions entailed by the move, although regrettable, would have occurred anyway if the college had attempted to "go it alone".

Negotiations are also under way for an "association" between Westfield College in Hampstead and Queen Mary College in east London. The vice-chancellor of the university, Professor Randolph Quirk, is keen to see more science being taught at the east London site, in an area where substantial industrial growth is expected and links with industry might profitably be forged.

If the plans do go ahead, it is expected that science teaching at Westfield College will be moved to Queen Mary College and arts subjects at Queen Mary College will be moved in a reciprocal transfer to Westfield's Hampstead site. Imperial College and University College — two of the largest colleges in the university — will continue at their existing sites.

Tim Beardsley

Letting off steam

THE greatest use of energy in the United Kingdom is boiling water to make steam — yet there has been no study of the UK boiler stock since 1953. Until, that is, last week, when two energy specialists from the Science Policy Research Unit of the University of Sussex published a review. The potential implications are important: 63 per cent of industrial fossil fuel in Britain meets its end in boilers, say the researchers, and boilers could, in principle, burn anything. So a country's energy politics could be determined by its boilers.

In particular, some argue that coal could substitute for oil in this sector. However, only 3 per cent of the boilers installed in Britain in the past 20 years were coal-fired, says the report. Coal is cheaper to burn than oil, but coal-fired boilers cost twice as much as oil-fired ones (because of the ash). Replacement of oil-fired boilers, even at the end of their life, by coal-fired ones is at present uneconomic, even allowing for a 25 per cent government grant. The pay-back time is four years; industry normally demands two years. The picture is unlikely to change for another 20 years, the researchers say, until the oil-coal price ratio rises higher.

Robert Walgate