

## UK research

## Council considers economies

THE UK Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC) has decided to present a constructive and positive response to the Rayner report on its activities, despite criticisms of the report by SERC staff. Although the council disagrees with one of the report's chief recommendations, it will nevertheless investigate over the next few months the recommended sale of Herstmonceux Castle at the Royal Greenwich Observatory (RGO) and the possible merger of RGO with another SERC establishment.

Most of the recommendations of the Rayner report (see *Nature* 7 July, p.3) affected activities peripheral to scientific research. Three of its more significant proposals, however, provoked strong criticism from the staff side (not to be confused with the council itself).

These proposals are (a) that the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory should sell off 95 houses that it owns and uses to encourage staff recruitment; (b) that Herstmonceux Castle, a major component of RGO, should be sold and replaced by a new extension to other buildings on the site; and (c) that the implications of the merger of RGO with another SERC establishment (perhaps the Royal Observatory, Edinburgh) should be examined before April 1984. The first two recommendations, according to the report, would save SERC £3.3 million in capital and £430,000 a year in running costs.

The sale and the merger proposals provoked the strongest protests from SERC staff on the grounds that they have scientific consequences outside the Rayner unit's remit and competence. The SERC council has, however, decided to consider both proposals, partly because it seems politically sensible to do so (the Rayner unit was set up at the instigation of the Prime Minister, Mrs Margaret Thatcher) and partly because of the shortage of funds brought on by the increase in the sterling cost of subscriptions to overseas research organizations.

The council, which endorsed many of the other recommendations, disagreed last week with the proposed sale of houses at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory on the grounds that their rents and costs balance and that they are a significant aid in recruiting staff.

The council's chairman, Dr John Kingman, will next present the SERC management response to the Secretary of State for Education and Science, Sir Keith Joseph, who will decide what action is to be taken. The period between now and next spring seems likely to be an anxious one for SERC. The Advisory Board for the Research Councils (ABRC) is working on its own recommendations for the pattern of science spending over the next financial year. Second, a Treasury committee is

investigating whether SERC can carry forward to subsequent financial years some or all of its outstanding budgetary excess or deficit; a positive recommendation might release SERC from the severe financial pressures it faces at present. Third, however the Secretary of State for Education and Science responds to the ABRC recommendations, the British Cabinet's decision to reduce projected public spending by £5,000 million in 1984-85 may yet force the Prime Minister to abandon her promise that scientific research would be "protected".

Philip Campbell

## Scientists in India

From a correspondent  
New Delhi

**ABOUT 290,000 scientists and engineers, 15 per cent of India's total scientific and technological manpower, are unemployed, according to statistics recently released by the Department of Science and Technology (DST). The number of jobless is expected to rise to 373,000 by 1985, when the stock of scientific manpower is predicted at 2.47 million, an increase of 25 per cent over the present 1.95 million. Although unemployment continues to worsen, universities are turning out 37,000 scientists and engineers each year, 3,000 of them PhDs.**

One fact that stands out from the DST report is that the scientific manpower figure is no index of the country's research and development strength. Nine out of ten scientists and engineers are not employed in any activity related to research and development. According to the statistics, only 184,000 are actually employed in research and development institutions, of whom 64 per cent are working in administrative and non-technical positions. In other words, the effective manpower is just 60,000, which gives the lie to the often quoted statement that India has the world's third largest scientific and technical manpower.

Other highlights of the statistics for 1980-81 (the latest year for which figures are available) are as follows.

- India spent about £500 million (0.66 per cent of gross national product) on research and development in 1980-81 (a figure that rose to about £660 million in 1982-83). Three-quarters was spent on applied and experimental research, 16 per cent on basic research and 8 per cent on other activities.

- Fourteen per cent of the total came from the private sector, 8 per cent from state governments and 78 per cent from central government. The 470 private in-house research and development units and 62 units in the public sector spent about £130 million on research and development.

- Of the scientific and technical personnel engaged in research and development, 11 per cent were PhDs. □

## Polish education

## New guise for martial law

POLAND'S new special powers act, seen by many observers as little more than martial law in civilian dress, contains several clauses which cut across the principles of academic self-government embodied in last year's Higher Education Act. In particular, the new provisions offer the government the following opportunities.

- State "administrative organs" are granted, as a "temporary" measure, the right to enter the "sphere of activity" of universities and colleges to restore "disturbed legal order".

- The Prime Minister has the right to abrogate resolutions of the Main Council for Science and Higher Education and of the academic councils of universities should these prove to be "incompatible" with the law or with "vital social interest".

- On similar grounds, the academic councils and other collegiate organs of universities and colleges may be suspended for not more than six months, rectors and deans may be dismissed and replacements appointed.

- Students and lecturers may be suspended temporarily if they commit actions which are "particularly harmful" in social terms or aimed against the vital interests of the Polish People's Republic. (The inclusion of the word "particularly" is apparently a concession to the Catholic lobby within the Sejm.)

How far the amnesty for activists will go is not yet clear. It is known, however, that the six intellectual "advisers" to Solidarity and the leading Solidarity activists now awaiting trial will not be included. As far as persons in hiding or abroad are concerned, the amnesty is dependent on former activists giving a full account to the police of all their activities and, in particular, a list of their associates. It is not clear, therefore, how many will feel that they can, in conscience, take advantage of the offer.

Students stranded in Britain by the declaration of martial law, many of whom had been active in the now-banned Independent Students' Association (NZS) and who have found places in British universities under the auspices of the Polish Students' Appeal Fund organized from the London School of Economics, will be staying on in Britain.

One feature of the lifting of martial law, which had been expected for some weeks to be timed for the national day of the Polish People's Republic on 22 July, was the rigour with which its measures were applied right up the end. Even a few days earlier, scientists wishing to travel abroad to conferences were being told that visas would be granted only if they formally renounced such "anti-state" activities as having signed a petition for an interned or imprisoned colleague.

Vera Rich