

shared among six working groups with titles such as Terrestrial and Planetary Atmospheres and Ionospheres and Radio Propagation. A seventh working group used to be concerned with technical facilities, and this has survived intact. The other six have been compressed into an astrophysics working group and a geophysics working group. (For these purposes, geophysics does not include the Moon or the planets but only the space within the Earth's magnetosphere, but what happens when the Moon passes within the tail is uncertain.) One result, of course, has been to cut down the number of scientists who are party to working group discussions, and there have been complaints of the way members of the old working groups heard almost out of the blue that their services were being dispensed with.

It is even beginning to look as if the streamlining which was the chief reason for the reshuffle is going to be blunted. Because of the debate about the future of the lunar and planetary sciences in Britain, and the need speedily to take up American offers of participation in sample analysis, there has been a move to set up a sub-group along the lines of the old working group on the Moon, planets and interplanetary matter. This seems to have succeeded, and it could yet happen that all the reorganization has done is to replace a two tier structure by a three tier structure.

Because the new working groups were formed after the period covered by the most recent SRC annual report, the report does not contain a list of members, who are appointed for not more than four years: Geophysics Working Group, Professor F. G. Smith (chairman), Professor W. J. G. Beynon, R. Dalziel, Professor J. W. Dungey, Dr J. T. Houghton, Dr J. W. King, D. G. King-Hele, Professor P. L. Marsden, Dr R. J. Murgatroyd, Dr J. J. Quenby, Dr W. J. Raitt, Miss P. Rothwell and Professor S. K. Runcorn (secretary, Dr G. Clarke); Astrophysics Working Group, Professor R. L. F. Boyd (chairman), Professor D. J. Bradley, Dr H. E. Butler, Professor P. H. Fowler, Professor W. R. S. Garton, Professor G. W. Hutchinson, Dr K. A. Pounds, Professor J. Ring, P. W. Sanford, Dr D. W. Sciama and Dr R. Wilson (secretary, Dr J. H. Price); Facilities Working Group, Professor H. Elliot (chairman), Dr H. E. Butler, Dr E. B. Dorling, R. Dalziel, Dr H. G. Hopkins, A. C. Ladd, Professor J. Sayers, D. B. Shenton and E. G. Warnke (secretary, Dr G. Clarke).

RESEARCH GRANTS

Money for Polymers

THE Science Research Council is prepared to provide special support for research in polymer physics and technology following the recommendation of its Polymer Panel (*Nature*, **222**, 209; 1969). Universities and other academic institutions are invited to apply for these special grants (without having to fill in the standard grant application forms) before January 15, 1970, and particular areas of research will be given priority. To begin with, proposals based on an interdisciplinary team approach will be sought; the panel suggested that a typical research team should contain a chemist, an engineer, a physicist and a polymer scientist, but, even where an integrated team cannot be formed, the SRC will favour the fullest possible collaboration between departments or institutions.

Money will also be concentrated in areas where successful research could show immediate practical benefits, particularly in polymer synthesis, including three dimensional polymers; thermally stable polymers from cheap starting materials; inorganic polymers and new methods of polymerization leading to predetermined structures; the physical and mechanical properties of polymers and of composites based on polymers; and engineering aspects, such as design with polymers and their processing.

The SRC may make grants available for longer than the usual three year period and, as recommended by the panel, the funds will be open to small specialized groups as well as for the five or six main centres where research is now concentrated. The panel considered that there might, in the long term, be a case for a central polymer research institute but that at present the most effective support will be increased direct grant support through the normal channels. A committee under the chairmanship of Professor C. E. H. Bawn has been set up to assess these applications and to keep the research under regular review. Two other committees which have recently been established to encourage research in interdisciplinary fields are for control engineering and for enzyme chemistry (*Nature*, **222**, 209; 1969).

HUMAN SCIENCES

Postman's Knock at Oxford

THE fate of the proposed Human Sciences course at Oxford still hangs in the balance. The course has already been accepted by faculty boards and by the University's General Council, but although the motion calling for withdrawal of the decree which set up the course was rejected by 153 votes to 122 in the Hebdomadal Council last month, more than fifty members of the council called for a postal vote. The result is that the rejection cannot be confirmed unless the postal vote swings the same way. Voting papers must be returned to the registrar by 4 p.m. on Monday, December 8.

INSTRUMENTS

Set Fair at Siding Spring

from our Astronomy Correspondent

WITH the mirror blank for the Anglo-Australian telescope at sea between the United States and Britain, the workshops of Grubb Parsons at Newcastle upon Tyne are preparing to grind their biggest mirror yet. At a diameter of 155 inches, the blank is more than half as big again as the 98 inch 'Pyrex' blank now in the Isaac Newton Telescope at Herstmonceux. The 155 inch mirror is cast in 'Cer-Vit', the new glass developed by the Owens Illinois Company of Toledo, Ohio, which has become the wonder material of optical astronomy. The almost negligible coefficient of expansion is not the only advantage—the glass is also quicker to prepare and cast than conventional 'Pyrex' and the blank is easier to figure. Preliminary shaping of the 24-inch thick mirror and the drilling of the central hole for the Cassegrain focus have already been done at Toledo. Grinding and polishing at Grubb Parsons begin on December 10, and will last a good two years.