

UK universities

Feeling the pinch

Figures released by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals show that the number of overseas undergraduate and postgraduate students admitted to British universities in October 1980 was 90.7 per cent and 88.9 per cent respectively of the number admitted in October 1979. The intake of British undergraduates was 2.3 per cent higher than in 1979, an increase in line with the rise in the number of 18-year-olds in the population.

The shortfall in the number of overseas students was not as great as some had expected after the British government's decision earlier in the year to charge them the full economic fee for their education, averaging about £3,000 per year. But recent figures released by the Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA) indicate that a much greater shortfall may be expected this year. The number of applicants from overseas for admission in October 1981 is 33 per cent down on the

number received at the same stage last year. One reason for the delayed reaction may be that governments had already committed themselves to paying for students to study in Britain this year before the increased charges were announced. Applications from British students for university places in 1981, however, continue to show a small increase, the number from men being up by 2 per cent and from women by 7 per cent.

Figures released at such an early stage in the academic year are not a reliable guide of what will happen next year. Nevertheless, many universities are worried. They will face a difficult decision in February and March when they have to fix their fees for 1981-82. With a considerably reduced income from overseas students, they will have to decide whether to compensate by increasing the fees of overseas students yet again at the risk of discouraging even more students from accepting places.

According to the vice-chancellors' committee, the increase in the number of home students only adds to the universities' problems because the government has set

aside no extra funds to meet the growth. Well qualified home students could well be refused places because of a lack of cash to support them. The full effects of the increase in overseas students' fees will be felt in 1982-83 by which time government protection of overseas students who began their studies before October 1980 will have ceased. The government will then have effectively removed 10 per cent of universities' income from the recurrent grant.

The Committee of Directors of Polytechnics reports a similar but more marked trend for entry to full-time and sandwich courses in October 1980. Admissions of overseas students were down 29 per cent on 1979, but this was more than compensated for by a 7 per cent increase in home students, much of the growth being in science and technology courses.

Some polytechnics with a high percentage of overseas students, especially those near London, may be hit particularly badly. Others may only be able to offer those courses for which there is a buoyant demand. At Portsmouth Polytechnic, for example, the masters' course in fuel technology, the only one of its kind offered in Britain, is very popular. But courses offered by several institutions may suffer badly from increased competition. polytechnics' advantage may, however, be that they can adapt their courses to changing demands more easily than the universities.

Few universities and polytechnics have yet analysed this year's intake in terms of subject area and students' nationalities. But general impressions are that students from South-East Asia are having more difficulty in raising fees than those from the Middle East and that science and engineering courses are suffering less than courses in the humanities.

Judy Redfearn

Brazil's space programme

Aiming high

São Paulo, December

Showing refreshing optimism at a time of unprecedented inflation, plans have been drawn up in Brazil for an ambitious space programme costing hundreds of millions of dollars over the next ten years. Remote sensing and meteorological satellites and the rockets to launch them are included in a plan approved in principle by the Brazilian government.

Meteorology and remote sensing have already attracted substantial interest and investment in Brazil, where the information they can provide on the physical conditions of little-known areas is especially valuable. The remote sensing programme, set up in the 1960s, was intended to help map the Amazon Basin. The programme has grown from the use of aerial survey to using Skylab and Landsat images. A Landsat receiving station was

Poland freezes Antarctic research

Poland's Antarctic research programme for 1981 will include a "wide range of economy measures" according to a statement last month by Dr Maciej Zalewski, Secretary of the Polar Research Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences. From now on, he said, research will concentrate on "strategic lines" of special importance to science and the economy.

The main saving, said Dr Zalewski, will be made by discontinuing large and expensive summer expeditions, and concentrating on small teams occupying a permanent base on a yearly shift system. Nevertheless, some summer activity will

continue — such as the current joint expedition from the Academy of Sciences and the Marine Fisheries' Institute in Gdynia which is part of the international "Biomass" programme, as is the similar expedition planned for summer 1982-83.

What, then, is to be cut? According to Dr Stanislaw Rakusa-Suszczewski, of the academy's Institute of Ecology, very little of any significance. Antarctic programmes are planned by the three relevant institutes of the academy — geophysics, biology and ecology — and financed by the academy, and judging the proposed research entirely on its intrinsic merits, the arguments were so strong, he said, that the academy has decided to go ahead. Under the new programme, the main emphasis will be on marine biology and the study of whales, but in all disciplines there would be increased stress on fund a mental research.

This represents a significant change in research planning. Since the early 1970s, research in Poland has been target-oriented and financed on a project basis, within a complex hierarchy of "problems" of the national economy. (Fundamental research was still possible, but had to be formally associated with some specific "problem"). The new intellectual climate in Poland, with its emphasis on greater academic autonomy, described by Dr Rakusa-Suszczewski as a "very positive change", has clearly meant that, in reshaping the Antarctic programme to fit Poland's reduced economic circumstances, the planners of the academy have been able to make their decisions on basis of scientific value.

Vera Rich



Arctowski Station, King George Island.