

University of London

All change now

Of the central functions of the University of London, only the students' union is wholeheartedly applauded for its efficiency in the final report of the Committee on Academic Organization, published last week. The committee, set up in March 1980, was originally intended to recommend a new organization for the university. After last summer's financial cuts, the committee's terms of reference were redrafted to exclude the main teaching institutions.

One conspicuous recommendation in the report is that the university's Nuclear Reactor Centre (at Silwood Park in Berkshire) should either be closed or, preferably, transferred to Imperial College. The committee says that the centre's chief function is research, and that it should be possible for the centre to find at least half its total cost of £220,000 a year in research grants.

Among other recommendations are the continuation of the Marine Biological Station on the Clyde (administered jointly with the University of Glasgow) and the Institute of Archaeology. The report also suggests that the university could save £100,000 a year by closing its Botanical Supply Unit.

The most serious criticisms are of the central administrative machinery. The court department (which shares out the university's public grant) is too secretive, and urgently in need of computer techniques, the examinations department is overstaffed and the university's network of academic committees has outlived the time when "the need and even the opportunity for taking genuine decisions . . . has ebbed away".

In general, the committee comes down in favour of a university in which its colleges function autonomously, taking more control from the centre. But it is also against the proposal that University College should be financed separately.

These proposals are for change within the existing framework. The committees set up last September to recommend new patterns of teaching in broad subject areas appear to be following an orthogonal track. The first of their reports, published this week and dealing with the physical sciences, starts from the assumption that only large departments can be successful in research.

Most of its recommendations are that the teaching of science subjects should continue at four colleges (Imperial, King's, Queen Mary and University) and at most one other site within the university. A total of 58 academic posts in the physical sciences would be lost.

Both sets of recommendations will excite opposition. In each case, the next step is discussion by the university's academic committees and the senate.

AT&T pact hits snag

Washington

A federal judge in Washington has injected an element of uncertainty into plans to reorganize the giant American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) by announcing that, although the federal government and the company have agreed on terms for suspending the anti-trust suit filed by the Department of Justice, he is unwilling to dismiss the suit without further study of the agreement.

The Reagan Administration announced the settlement with AT&T, the largest company in the world, on 8 January. Under the terms of the agreement, AT&T has agreed to sell off 22 local telephone companies, with assets worth around \$80,000 million, in return for being allowed to enter other fields of telecommunications, such as electronic data processing, from which it had previously been excluded.

US District Court Judge Harold H. Greene, who has been hearing evidence in the government's case against the company since 1978, said last Tuesday that he was "delighted that a settlement had been reached". At the same time, however, apparently concerned at the secrecy and speed of the negotiations between the company and the Justice Department, he has refused to dismiss the case without further scrutiny of the terms of the agreement. Judge Greene said that the case was "too important to the judicial process, to the public and to the country" to be closed as a result of a "haphazard process".

Judge Greene's actions are in line with a law passed by Congress in 1974 giving the public an opportunity to comment on anti-trust agreements between the government and a private company before these are concluded. The law was passed in partial protest at the secrecy which had surrounded negotiations between the government and AT&T leading to a previous consent agreement in 1956.

David Dickson

Polish universities

Wings clipped

Polish universities will resume work by mid-February, according to a communiqué issued on 10 January by the ruling Military Council of National Self-Defence. Tertiary education establishments, it says, will function "taking into account regulations deriving from the decrees on the state of martial law" and special rules have been laid down governing the running of full-time courses during the state of emergency. Moreover, resumption of university activities each term will be approved on the basis of recommendations from the Provincial

Defence Committee — on the basis of how, in the previous term, the university complied with the emergency regulations.

The communiqué effectively abrogates the liberalization of academic life which followed the signing of the Gdansk accords in August 1980. In particular: academic and scholarly work is to be censored. The abolition of the censorship of learned publications was one of the first demands of the Academy of Sciences and the universities in autumn 1980, and was embodied in the censorship law which came into force on 1 October 1981.

University autonomy concerning syllabuses will be restricted. All students will have to attend courses in two foreign languages. This means a return to compulsory Russian, which was abolished by the Lodz accords that ended the students' sit-in last February. New courses and subjects will require ministerial approval, which will presumably not be forthcoming for courses reflecting the "plurality of outlook" promised at Lodz.

University rectors will now be responsible for maintaining order on campus and in students' hostels. No student may remain on campus outside tuition and library hours, and all staff must leave as soon as their working day is over. This reverses the spirit of the Lodz accords which left law and order on university premises firmly to the university authorities and banned civil police from campuses.

Attendance at lectures and classes will be obligatory, and absence without sufficient excuse may result in expulsion. Students may also be expelled for infringing Article 46 of the decree of martial law, which bans union activity and the organization of strikes and protests. Special classes are to be held at the start of the new session, explaining to the students the demands of martial law, and particularly of the new oath of loyalty.

University senates and faculty councils will be reduced to advisory status, and will have a composition "determined by the regulations of the law in force". This provision is ambiguous, since the communiqué also says that the universities will operate on the basis of the 1958 law on tertiary education — which would mean an end to the 30 per cent student participation in senates and faculty councils introduced after Lodz.

The rectors are instructed to appoint special plenipotentiaries to deal with the welfare problems formerly the province of students' unions and self-governance bodies, and will have the right to order their employees to carry out tasks hitherto not considered part of their duties. They may also order students to carry out "socially useful work" for the university or the national economy.

During the past year, all Polish university and technical college rectors have been democratically elected — except in Radom Engineering College, where an attempt to impose a rector who was not so