

Research Service

THE University of London Intercollegiate Research Service was first discussed about ten years ago. After nearly three years of hard work by a committee under Professor W. Klyne, the final scheme has been announced, with details of the allocation of funds. Altogether the Science Research Council is providing £170,000 to set in motion the service "for chemistry and related sciences".

Sophisticated scientific instruments are now so expensive that it would be impracticable to install and maintain all types of instrument at every college. The intercollegiate research service has been designed so that research workers from colleges inside and outside the University of London can have access to all the instruments. Seven colleges are housing and running the machines, making about 50 per cent of the operating time available to outside departments. The general principle is that samples are submitted, probably by post, to the department in question. The technician working with the machine makes the readings and the results are returned. Detailed arrangements may vary to make the best use of each type of machine.

The SRC grants have been awarded as follows: £14,560 for X-ray crystallography and £25,248 for laser Raman spectroscopy at Imperial College; £19,974 for Raman and long wavelength infrared spectroscopy at King's College; £26,925 for nuclear magnetic resonance spectrometry at Queen Elizabeth College; £23,519 for electron spin resonance spectrometry at Queen Mary College; £36,425 for mass spectrometry at the School of Pharmacy; £14,025 for mass spectrometry at University College; and £9,100 for optical rotatory dispersion and circular dichroism at Westfield College. Two-thirds of the machines are already installed.

A report was made to Dr G. Johns of the SRC in September on the machines in use, including some which have been operating for nearly a year. There seems to be no particular reason why an official announcement of the service should have been made at this stage in the proceedings, and there seems to be an ambivalent attitude to publicity amongst those involved with organization. Although parts of the service have been running smoothly since January, Professor Klyne is reluctant to describe the facilities in detail, possibly for fear of an influx of samples to be tested. The grapevine has been working in the chemistry departments of the University of London, but physicists and biochemists who might be keen to use the new instruments have had no official information. The individual colleges are anxious to help where they can, and, when time allowed, have run spectra for various industries. Professor B. C. L. Weedon, head of the University Board of Studies in Chemistry, thinks the service deserves publicity, especially in other universities which could well benefit from co-operative organizations of this kind. Professor Klyne's committee is hoping to produce a booklet in the near future, which will give instructions on how to send in samples, and the various facilities available.

New Role for BISRA

DOUBTS about the future of the British Iron and Steel Research Association (*Nature*, **214**, 867; 1967) have

now been resolved. The Council of BISRA have accepted the offer by the British Steel Corporation to take over responsibility for finance and operation of BISRA from October 31, 1967, when the dissolution of the British Iron and Steel Federation takes place. BISRA will then become the central laboratory of the BSC, and will concern itself with problems common to more than one of the four groups of the corporation. At the same time, the research done by BISRA within an agreed scope will be made available to the private steel companies, now represented by the British Independent Steel Producers Association.

The future work of BISRA will probably break down into three broad categories. As well as the co-operative research programme which has to be agreed by a technical collaboration committee jointly appointed by the BSC and the private companies, there will be sponsored work—which will doubtless include work for the corporation and for the private companies—and there will be work which falls outside the co-operative programme and is therefore available only to the corporation. The association is out to disprove the notion that collaborative work is impossible if one group dominates the others in size—and, in this case, in nature. In effect, BISRA had little choice but to accept the corporation's offer, since the fourteen nationalized companies supply as much as 80 per cent of the association's income.

BISRA sees its work as the central laboratory of the corporation as being slightly different in emphasis from that carried out by the individual groups of the corporation. BISRA will concern itself with problems common to several groups, and to the general improvement of processes, plants and products. The group research departments are likely to be concerned with more immediate problems in the day to day running of the plant, and problems specific to the product manufactured by the group they represent.

Mental Health Research

PEOPLE with cheque books will be interested to learn that the Institute for Research into Mental Retardation is now registered as a charity. The institute, whose chairman is Lord Francis-Williams, was founded in April 1966 by the National Society for Mentally Handicapped Children which donated the first grant of £5,000. Its function is to co-ordinate research, to provide a centre of information and to promote collaboration between workers of various disciplines. Eventually it hopes to attract support from all kinds of charities.

Although throughout the world a mentally retarded child is born every twenty seconds, the governors of the new institute are enthusiastic and optimistic. Dr D. Morris, vice-chairman of the institute and a practising paediatrician, suggests that prevention is possible in about half of the cases whose deficiency originates during the perinatal period. Five projects in primary prevention are already being sponsored by the institute, aided by a grant from the Wates Foundation. For example, research workers are anxious to know what causes the well known extra chromosome (chromosome 21) in the cells of mongols and how this shows itself in the clinical symptoms. The incidence of mongolism increases with age of the mother and this could possibly be attributable to the ageing of ova. Another promising