

The council now offers just over 200 courses in a wide range of subjects, operating in fifty colleges in England, Wales and Scotland. Sixty-eight of the courses lead to honours and ordinary degrees, ninety-one to honours degrees only, thirty to ordinary degrees and twelve to MSc. Fifty-six new courses proposed by colleges in 1967-68 were approved and, as usual, many of these are in fields which are not traditionally covered by the universities. For example, four degree courses in librarianship and information science have been introduced, and so have a part-time course in the sociology of education designed for teachers and other workers in the educational service; a course in textile marketing; and a sandwich course in public administration, in which the cooperation of local government is being sought. Keeping pace with the development of the polytechnics, the council has also approved a degree course in environmental engineering, which will involve collaboration between scientists, engineers, architects, public health officers and industrial managers. Similarly, a course has been approved in engineering geology and geotechnics which will bridge the areas of interest of civil engineers and geologists. Traditional subjects are also being given a face-lift: thus students of French are being given an opportunity to acquire a wide understanding of the country through a study of the language, politics, economics, geography and culture of France. Following on its move away from traditional mathematics, the council has also approved an honours degree in statistics and computing, the course showing "a significant orientation of mathematical studies toward areas of increasing industrial importance". New MSc courses deal with such subjects as diesel engine design, molecular science of materials and operational research. The council has also approved the first four-year course leading to an honours degree in education.

Although the council is usually associated with first degree courses, it is interesting that 109 students were enrolled for higher degrees in 1967-68—more than double the number in 1966-67. In the years ahead, this statistic will be closely watched by those anxious to see whether the twenty-six new polytechnics will really become free-living organizations.

INFORMATION

Finding Out about Metals

In spite of duplication of effort in the production of abstracting and indexing journals in metallurgy and related fields, many would-be users cannot easily get at the information contained in them. This is one of the implied conclusions of a detailed survey prepared for the Office for Scientific and Technical Information by the Aslib Research Department (*Metals Information in Britain*, Aslib; January 1969). The need for more centralization of information services was expressed at a meeting convened by OSTI in 1967, but at the time there was no basis for an assessment of the scope of a centralized service.

The authors of the survey, which this deficiency has inspired, Brian Vickery, Margaret Slater, Alexandra Presanis and Pamela Fisher, defined the metals field widely so as to include both producers and users of metals—not only iron and steel manufacture, for example, but metal used in the building industry as

well. To make the survey manageable, it was limited to individual members of seven British metallurgical institutes. The members (home and overseas) number some 38,000, but the total population surveyed was less because of overlapping membership. The response to the questionnaires sent out was poor and the authors of the survey had to be satisfied with 1,570 British respondents.

Nothing in the results of the survey will overturn common preconceptions. The most frequently sought information was in the categories described as metal constitution, properties, behaviour or specification and in metal production, method and process. Personal contacts were found to be of more than average importance in the categories described as metal use or application, commercial availability, metal production economics and equipment—possibly an indication of the lack of accessible documentary sources in these categories. Among the users' comments which received considerable support were that it would be good to have one central information source in Britain, that there is a lack of a good metals handbook, that the abstracting journals need combining or unifying, that the time lag in abstracting is too great and that there is a need for more information on standards. Abstracting journals most frequently mentioned by the British respondents were the *Journal of Iron and Steel Institute Abstracts*, *Metals Abstracts* (or its predecessors), and the *Nickel Bulletin*.

SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENTS

Cataloguing the Hoards

AN illustrated guide to the British collections of scientific instruments is being prepared by Dr Mary Holbrook with a grant from the Leverhulme Trustees to the British National Committee for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine. Although books have been written on the makers of British scientific instruments, there is at present no handbook concerned with the instruments themselves. Subjects such as astronomy, navigation, time measurement, optics, alchemy, photography and so on will be considered, provided the instruments were made before 1800. It would be impossible because of size to include the collections of the large national science museums; for example, the collection of instruments made for the children of George III, which is now at the Science Museum in London, needs a catalogue to itself. Dr Holbrook intends to concentrate on the museums at universities, observatories, schools and in Government departments. Museums which belong to private companies and antiquarian societies and private collections will be included. The scope of the collections will be described and cross-indexing will permit the location of instruments by type and maker. The details of the individual pieces will not be given unless they are of special interest; the aim is to provide only the main characteristics of specific instruments, their makers and their present whereabouts.

Part of the challenge in compiling a handbook of this kind is the difficulty of tracking down the private collections. Obviously much persuasive and persistent letter writing will be required if the contents of all the collections are to be revealed. How many private collections exist and where exactly they are to be