

been some misgivings about the criteria for purchase preference that have been proposed (see *Nature*, **234**, 117; 1971).

Sir John Wall, chairman of ICL, said this week that the report was a valuable contribution to the computer debate. He also pointed out that the Select Committee's "overall recommendations that imaginative support and preference should be given by the government to computer suppliers whose controlling interest is held by British nationals echo government policy expressed by Mr Frederick Corfield at the end of July 1971". ICL, he added, is well placed to meet the criteria proposed as a guide to purchasing preference.

Obviously hoping that the Computer Purchasing Board, if it is set up, would be able to interpret the purchasing criteria flexibly, Mr E. R. Nixon, managing director of IBM (UK) Ltd, said that he welcomes any proposals to increase competition for public sector business. "With two major manufacturing plants and a large development laboratory in Britain, IBM (UK) Ltd is, of course, already making a considerable contribution to the economy and, with its world wide experience of advanced applications to draw on, it is well placed to make a major contribution to the government's future needs." The sales of IBM (UK) Ltd were £170 million in 1970 compared with £131 million for ICL.

A spokesman for Honeywell was more critical of the report although he generally welcomed it and considered that it made some reasonable and firm proposals. Honeywell's chief complaint was that some of the recommendations in the report were incompatible with others. In particular it was not clear how the call for an end to the system of granting a single contract for a total system to one hardware manufacturer could be reconciled with, for example, the recommendation that preference should be given to suppliers whose controlling interest is held by British nationals—thus effectively ruling out all companies but ICL. The proposal to establish a Computer Purchasing Board has, however, met with Honeywell's approval on the grounds that the computer industry would then be dealing with the government through a single body. The proposal, Honeywell says, augurs well for greater consistency of treatment in the future and for a better understanding between the government and the computing industry. On the other hand, the company feels that the report does not spell out in sufficient detail how the recommended research and development support of £50 million should be distributed among British computer manufacturers; but it does consider that the setting up of a Computer Research and Development Board would greatly assist efforts to promote

REPRODUCTIVE BIOLOGY

WHO convenes Advisory Group

THE first meeting of the advisory group which is to help to direct the Expanded Programme of the World Health Organization on research, development and training in human reproduction was held in Geneva from November 22 to 26 (see *Nature New Biology*, **234**, 3; 1971). Invitations to attend the meeting were issued to: Dr B. Rexed, Public Health Services, Stockholm; Professor B. K. Adadevoh, University of Ibadan; Dr Lidija Andolšek, University Teaching Hospital for Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Ljubljana; Professeur Etienne Baulieu, Faculté de Médecine de Bicêtre, Paris; Professor Jack C. Caldwell, Australian National University; Dr Philip A. Corfman, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; Professor Elsimar Coutinho, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Salvador; Dr A. B. Kar, Central Drug Research Institute, Lucknow; Dr Anne McLaren, Institute of Animal Genetics, Edinburgh; Professor William Paul, Toronto Western Hospital, Toronto; Dr Sheldon Segal, Rockefeller University; and Professor N. A. Yudaev, Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR, Moscow.

common standards, both in hardware and software.

GEOLOGY

Abstracts Abandoned

GEOLOGISTS are concerned that the decision of the United States Geological Survey to end publication of *Abstracts of North American Geology* and *Geophysical Abstracts* next January will leave them without an effective and comprehensive English language abstracting journal. The decision seems to have been taken to avoid duplication of service, but the *Bibliography and Index of Geology* published by the Geological Society of America is not, according to Professor K. Clayton, University of East Anglia, an effective substitute for the doomed journals as it carries citations and key words but no abstracts. It also costs \$250 a year compared with \$10 a year for *Abstracts of North American Geology*.

There is at least some compensation for the geologists in that next January *Bibliographie des Sciences de la Terre* and the geology parts of *Bulletin Signalétique* will be combined to provide an expanded titles and key words service. There are also plans for the reconstituted journal to have input from the German government and from some East European countries. It is possible that some time in the future the Institute of Geological Sciences in Britain could provide a contribution but there are no plans at present to extend the journal to give a full abstracting service.

Next year there will be three chief English language abstracting journals that cover geology. *Mineralogical Abstracts* covers the fields of mineralogy, geochemistry and petrology, edited by Dr R. A. Howie of King's College London, and claims a 50 per cent coverage of all publications but a 90 per cent coverage of significant articles. There will also be two volumes avail-

able in the Geographical Abstracts series—*Geomorphology* and a new volume *Sedimentology*. Between them these journals only cover a part of the field and several important areas will not be abstracted effectively after the final publication the United States Geological Survey journals.

CHEMICAL INFORMATION

New Service Planned

THE United Kingdom Chemical Information Service (UKCIS) and the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) are launching a new information service based on magnetic tapes which store data on the structure of new chemical compounds reported in the literature. The tapes are prepared each month by ISI but the service will be administered by UKCIS which is operated at the University of Nottingham by the Chemical Society. The existing facilities to subscribers offered by UKCIS depend upon data tapes compiled by the Chemical Abstract Service, which is partly financed by the American Chemical Society.

Each of the ISI monthly tapes contains data on about 12,500 new compounds, encoded in such a way that letters and numbers correspond to particular sub-structures (for example carbonyl and hydroxyl groups); this makes it possible for searches to be made for chemical sub-structures of particular interest to individual subscribers while also allowing recognition of overall structures.

Subscribers to the new service will receive monthly lists of relevant compounds, each associated with an abstract in the ISI publication *Current Abstracts of Chemistry*, which details references, synthesis routes and so on. The cost to subscribers will probably be between £70 and £120 a year, about the same as for the other services which are to continue as before.