

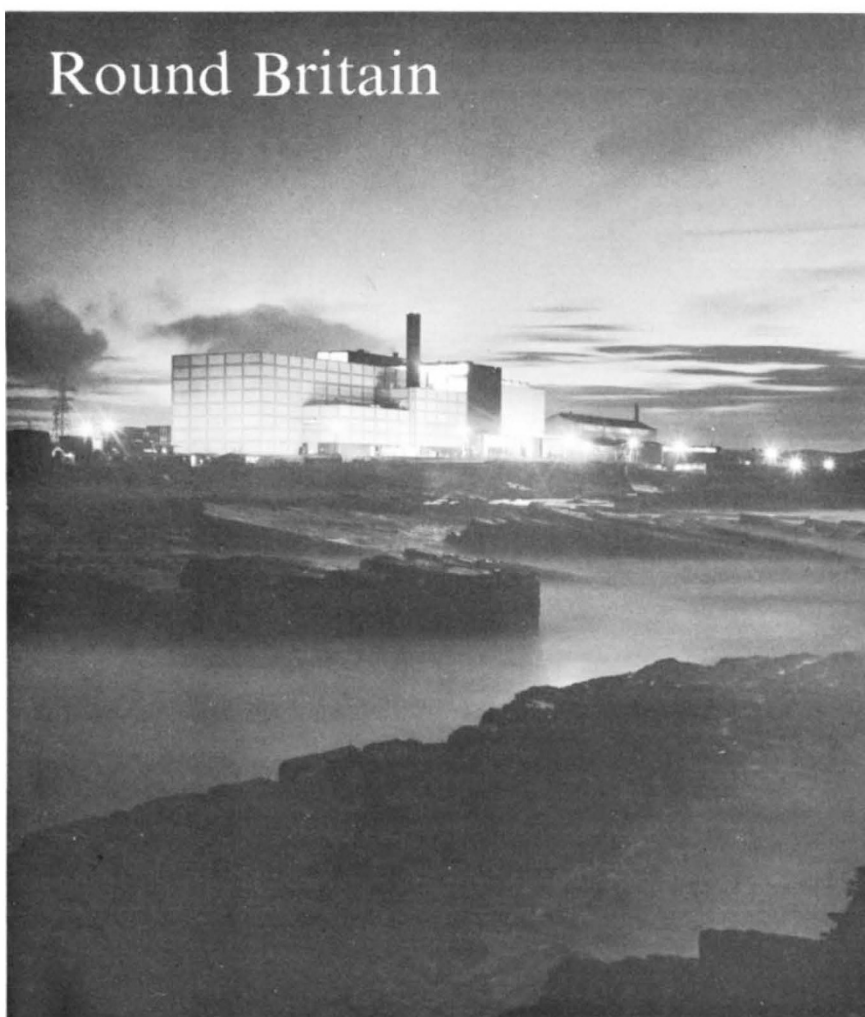
IN view of the emergency cuts in public spending last December, the Science Research Council (SRC) will have in real terms 2% less money to spend in the next year, but promises in its annual report that direct grant support to the universities will be maintained at the present level—reassuring news in the present financial crisis. The real cut in expenditure rather than the planned increase of 1½% will mean, however, that the council has to defer a number of major projects. A large slice of the SRC's budget (about one-third) goes on international projects such as ESRO, CERN and the reactor at the Institut Lane-Langevin, and fluctuating exchange rates over the past year have inflated the real contribution to international programmes.

The probable cuts in university expenditure on research loom large in the SRC's thinking for the future. The cut-back in university spending is likely to throw more of the burden of supporting basic research on to the SRC at a time when their funds are not increasing.

This will mean that the SRC will have to be much more selective about new projects to be supported. Provisionally, the council has decided that the growth of postgraduate studentships should not be more than 1% a year and that astronomy, engineering and the activities covered by the Science Board (genetics, enzyme technology, neurobiology and various branches of physics and chemistry which do not come under the other boards) should be given priority at the expense of some other programmes. The establishments run by the SRC will also have to face a period of restraint to help raise resources for new facilities which only the council can provide.

● The Prototype Fast Reactor at Dounreay in Scotland (above) is producing some 40 MW of heat but is not expected to feed electricity into the grid for a few weeks yet. That event will be the culmination of more than eight months of testing since the reactor went critical in March. The eight months have not been without their problems, however, even though these have proved to be relatively minor—for example, a tiny leakage of steam into one of the secondary sodium circuits and blockage of the seawater input to the steam condensers by seaweed.

The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) is, however, looking much further ahead than the time when the PFR generates its designed 250 MW of electricity. The first commercial fast reactor (CFR1) should,



according to Mr R. V. Moore, Managing Director of the UKAEA Reactor Group, be started in 1977 and completed in 1983. The present design envisages an output of 1,300 MW but an operating temperature of 500° C (50° C lower than that of the PFR) which would widen the choice of possible materials for its construction.

The big question is whether CFR1, assuming it gets the green light, will be built in as remote a corner of the country as Dounreay. Mr Moore thinks not.

● “The married are viewed sympathetically.” With those ambiguous words a fellow of Wolfson College led the way into the family accommodation of Oxford's newest college, conceived eight years ago as a means of offering a home to two of the less-well catered-for groups—graduate students and university staff entitled to but not possessing fellowships. At that time, says Sir Isaiah Berlin, the President of Wolfson, the university was faced with the threat either of “wholesale migration to the western hemisphere, or worse still, blocking legislation in the

Congregation”. Scientists predominate, reflecting not only their preponderance amongst graduate students but also the many uncatered-for scientific staff around Oxford. Now they seem regally looked after; through £3.2 million of Wolfson and Ford money in a building erected on the site of J. S. Haldane's house by the river.

Even if the senior members lack one or two perks such as a High Table, the environment in the coeducational college is idyllic by many standards and the recognition afforded to wives and families almost unique in Oxbridge. Down by the river, in the specially built loop for parking punts, the economic crisis seemed a thousand light years away. But can Wolfson retain its originality? Obviously the initial nucleus of fellows and the first generation of graduate students has a crusading zeal and is united by, if nothing else, a sense of coming together to improve the lot of those whom the university has left out. Whether this feeling can continue depends on the college's continuing ability to identify and support people who do not fall into neat categories or do fashionable things.