

Celltech's deal with MRC

The Medical Research Council revealed last week the broad outlines of its five-year agreement with Celltech, signed on 6 November last. The agreement raises perturbing prospects of delays in the disclosure of scientific information. It concerns work done by researchers directly employed by the council and not that of its grant-holders employed by universities.

The council has undertaken to inform Celltech of commercially interesting discoveries by its researchers in fields related to biotechnology before the work is published. (In other fields, the traditional relationship with the National Research Development Corporation will be maintained.) The council says that the freedom of its research workers to communicate with other academic scientists will not normally be impaired, but occasionally publication would have to be delayed "for a short period" while a decision is taken on patenting.

Dr Sydney Brenner, director of the Laboratory of Molecular Biology and a member of Celltech's Science Council, is unconcerned. Delays will not be serious, and the issues involved are less difficult than those which arise when individuals have links with commercial companies.

In return for the right to information (and ultimate exploitation), Celltech will give the council a "substantial proportion" of any royalties or profits that ensue. The council will place this money in a separate "Celltech fund". When the fund reaches a sensible level, a sub-committee will call for proposals from both universities and council establishments on how it should be spent. In the early stages, when the fund is limited, grants will be restricted to fundamental research in areas related to biotechnology. If the money rolls in, the scope of the fund will be widened.

If, however, the sum in the fund rises beyond a fixed limit, which has been agreed between the Department of Education and Science and the council, but which neither will reveal because of its quasi-commercial nature, the dispensation that allows the council to accept money from Celltech will have to be renegotiated. Hitherto, the arrangement between the research councils and the development corporation has been that the research councils can receive no such payment.

Robert Walgate

Polish universities

Sit-in complete

Last week, Poland's month-old student sit-in in Lodz ended with the signing of a wide-ranging agreement on academic autonomy. The students' action had begun over alleged delays by the Ministry of

Science, Higher Education and Technology in registering the new Independent Students' Association (NZS). Later, as the Lodz University students were joined by those from the Lodz Technical University and Medical School, and then by students in Poznan, Krakow and Warsaw, their package of "postulates" grew to more than fifty issues.

The problem of getting NZS registered had been dragging on since last November, when a limited sit-in at Warsaw University won a promise that the ministry would produce the necessary regulations by 20 December. Difficulties with the statutes of NZS were finally resolved last week, by the inclusion of a clause stating that NZS would abide by the constitution of the Polish People's Republic, but without specific mention of the "leading role" of the Party.

The major part of the Lodz Accord, however, sums up progress on the promised liberalization of Polish academic life. Several clauses therefore simply reiterate what has already been conceded. These include: the abolition of "reserved" places at universities, granted at the discretion of rectors or ministry officials to candidates whose performance in the entrance examinations did not merit their admission; university courses to be decided by the staff of the universities concerned; staff appointed on academic merits only; student participation in university government, and the election of university rectors by the academic senate in secret ballot.

Of the new demands raised at Lodz, the most radical have been dropped, including the reduction of military service and the abolition of compulsory courses on Marxism. (Some choice in "sociopolitical subjects" has, however, been conceded.) One major gain for the students concerned language courses. This had been strongly opposed by the minister, Dr Janusz Gorski, who had argued that a university is not geared to teaching foreign languages *ab initio*. Nevertheless, there will now be a wider choice of languages to be studied as subsidiary subject, in effect ending the compulsory Russian which many science students in particular resented. Having had several years of Russian at school, they say they would like to study a Western language, to have greater access to current research literature.

Access to information should also be facilitated by clauses promising larger editions of textbooks (most students now have to make do with secondhand texts), more foreign currency for buying foreign journals and research apparatus and more open availability of existing literature.

A new system of student grants "more in tune with the principles of social justice" is promised for 15 May, when it will be submitted to the students for consultation. By May, too, the detested "practical training" in manual labour will be replaced by paid voluntary physical work.

Student participation in university senates and faculty councils is set at 20-33 per cent, the student delegates to have full voting rights except in the awarding of academic degrees and titles.

The students also seem to have won their demand that the police should not be able to enter university premises at will. This clause, however, will presumably have to undergo some modification before the new legislation on higher education finally comes before the Sejm (Parliament), if campuses are not to provide an unintended sanctuary for, say, a purse-snatcher on the run. Inclusion of the clause, however, seems to reflect just how far the authorities are prepared to accept the concept of university autonomy.

What is clearly less acceptable, however, is the prospect of further unrest. Before finally approving the NZS statutes, therefore, Dr Gorski made sure that they contained some limitation on future militancy. The ministry's revisions laid down that strike procedures would follow the pattern of the "Solidarity" statutes, with the additional proviso that a sit-in can be proclaimed only by the majority decision of a specially convened meeting of a students' organization, in consultation with the authorities of the higher educational establishment(s) concerned.

Vera Rich

US science budget

Reagan's way

Washington

In the absence of any explicit science policy — and, indeed, of any official presidential science adviser — the new Reagan Administration has adopted a "back-to-basics" approach in deciding where the budget axe should fall on federally sponsored research programmes.

Last week, Mr Reagan submitted to Congress the cuts which he is proposing, as part of a "national program for economic recovery", in the budget recommendations made by Mr Carter last month.

As expected, the main cuts will fall on those additional areas of responsibility which the federal government has taken on in recent years but which Mr Reagan is suggesting should be returned to individuals, to states or to private corporations and other institutions.

In the universities, for example, he proposes to eliminate a new fund for modernizing research equipment which Mr Carter had proposed creating in the National Science Foundation, with an initial budget of \$75 million. Mr Reagan also wants to cut federal support for biomedical research institutions previously provided through the National Research Service Awards.

The Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) would see its budget cut by more than two-thirds,