

under which their wages were increased to cover extra duties — which included the extraction of pituitaries. Previously they had been paid on a "piece rate" — 20 pence a gland — so they now had no incentive for their unpleasant task. Pressure from hospital authorities on the workers, however, brought a response. Public mortuary workers also now receive nothing where they received 20 pence per gland before, so this may also be a factor in the HGH supply shortage. Negotiations are under way, says DHSS, on how these workers might be compensated by the area hospital authorities for providing the glands.

Some officials are suggesting that the real cause for the fall in supply is the "regularization" of collection procedures, compared with a little bit of horse-trading before. In the past, acetone sample bottles have been sent through the post; this is strictly illegal (acetone being inflammable) and has now been stopped. Also, extraction is now being done under full containment because of the danger of the propagation of slow virus from an infected gland (the pituitary being nervous tissue).

And were relatives always informed? Dr Lowry claims they were, and that he thus obtained more than half the pituitaries available from public mortuaries in London. The problems he lays squarely at the door of the DHSS. **Robert Walgate**

University of London Storm ahead

The reorganization of the University of London promises to be a more turbulent process than was foreseen a year ago. The plan that the Swinnerton-Dyer committee should make its final recommendations by the end of this year has been foreshortened by the mounting sense of urgency within the university. The committee has now agreed, with some misgivings, to produce its recommendations before the beginning of the next academic year. Meanwhile, the basis of the committee's interim report has been questioned by a document now circulating within the university, and likely to colour the arguments put by the Association of University Teachers to the committee at a meeting next week.

That document questions the arithmetic leading to the conclusion that the university's income will fall by between £15 and £20 million by the end of this decade. This is held to involve the unwarrantable assumption that the 3½ per cent cut in university finances announced last December will be permanent, the unnecessary assumption that overseas students attending London colleges will be charged only the minimum tuition fees decreed by the government and inconsistent assumptions about the basis used for calculating the loss of income if the numbers of overseas students decline. Briefly, the committee's calculation for the university as a whole is said to exclude the allowance made by the University Grants

Committee for part-time students.

This and other documents will form the basis on which the union will draw up a formal reply to the Swinnerton-Dyer committee's interim report, probably before the end of the month. Apart from arithmetical arguments, the union is concerned at the negative tone of the interim report, which is said to have neglected the university's advantages, in particular its attractions for overseas and part-time students and the relatively favourable age structure of its academic staff.

This view is likely to be echoed by the responses from individual colleges in the university, expected by Easter. Another view gaining ground is that the committee's interim report, with its comprehensive analysis of how the university spends its money, is sufficient, and that it should be for the university rather than the committee now to say what should be done.

The pitfalls for such committees are nicely illustrated by the troubles which have befallen the Flowers report on the organization of the medical schools in the University of London. After the rejection of the Flowers recommendations by the senate of the university last October, the

Soviet activists honoured

Three leading Soviet human rights activists have recently been honoured by Western scientific bodies.

The most prestigious award, foreign associateship of the French Academy of Sciences, was conferred on Dr Andrei Sakharov on 16 February. This, however, according to M. Paul Germain, one of the two secretaries of the academy, was in no way a political act, but was simply in recognition of the great importance of Sakharov's work in various fields of physics.

The Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium however, took a double view. When challenged by the Soviet embassy in Brussels that they should not award an honorary doctorate to Viktor Brailovskii, the Moscow refusnik cyberneticist, on the grounds that he was a "criminal and a prisoner" the rector replied that they were conferring the award in recognition of his contribution to the field of science and for maintaining the weekly seminars (for refusnik scientists).

Finally, the Royal College of Psychiatrists in London, in conferring an honorary fellowship on Dr Semeon Gluzman, did so specifically in connection with his work for human rights, for Dr Gluzman's chief contribution to psychiatry was the co-authorship (with Vladimir Bukovskii) of the *samizdat* "Handbook of Psychiatry for Dissidents" (a manual on how to resist psychological and pharmacological pressure), for which he is now serving a three-year sentence in Siberia following seven years in a labour camp.

Joint Planning Board set up a working party to make a more detailed analysis of the costs of medical education in the University of London. The report, based on an analysis by a firm of professional accountants, suggests that the cost savings obtainable by closing various clinical and preclinical schools are not those forecast by the Flowers committee, and that none of the options so far discussed would yield as large a saving on the total cost of £32.8 million as a modest change in the staff-student ratio.

Chemical and nuclear weapons Scientists speak out

Two groups are being set up to give British scientists a stronger voice on the development of weapons of mass destruction. On 26 February, the Russell Committee Against Chemical Weapons, a branch of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, launched a campaign against what is seen as a chemical arms race. And at the end of this month, a conference is being held at the Open University, Milton Keynes, to inaugurate Scientists Against Nuclear Arms, a group committed to providing scientific information on nuclear weapons.

Scientists Against Nuclear Arms says that it has already received several hundred letters expressing interest and support. And 19 signatures were attached to the appeal for names of those opposed to chemical weapons when it was launched last week. One notable signatory, Dr Frederick Sanger, not distinguished as a signer of petitions, is particularly concerned with the possible use of new techniques in biology to develop more sophisticated chemical weapons and with the distortion of research priorities that could result from a chemical arms race. These issues, and uncertainties about the British government's future policy, have prompted the appeal, which asks scientists not to take part in research on chemical weapons and the British government not to stockpile them.

Despite repeated assurances that there are no plans to store or manufacture chemical weapons in Britain, the appeal's organizers fear that the British government's policy may change in response to pressure from the new Reagan Administration to house stocks of new binary chemical weapons on European soil. Last year, the United States announced that it was building a plant to manufacture binary weapons.

Believing the present to be a time of uncertainty, the appeal's organizers say there is an urgent need for public and parliamentary debate. Scientists have an important role, they argue, because the development of chemical weapons could be influenced more directly than that of any other type of weapon by research in non-classified laboratories. **Judy Redfearn**