

The Australian National University¹

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THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY was established by Act of the Commonwealth Parliament in 1946, with the object of encouraging fundamental research and the training of research workers. Although it may eventually incorporate the Canberra University College and thus enter the field of undergraduate teaching, it is primarily intended as a postgraduate institution. Its emphasis on research and the training of graduate students makes it unique in the Australian academic structure and will enable it to supplement the work of the other universities at a higher level. So far, four research schools have been established: the John Curtin School of Medical Research, the Research School of Physical Sciences, the Research School of Social Sciences, and the Research School of Pacific Studies.

The establishment of a new university involves a period of building, both building in a literal sense and the moulding of an administrative and academic organization able to carry out the functions of the university. On both scores good progress has been made.

So far as bricks and mortar are concerned, the university's building program has necessarily been shaped by the housing shortage and the difficulties of undertaking large-scale construction during a period of nation-wide development. The activities of the university were thus directed primarily toward the construction of buildings that would provide accommodation for its staff. The first major building started was University House, which will be the university's residential college and the center of social and cultural activities. University House should be completed in time for occupation early in 1952. In addition, six houses are being built on the university site, and others are nearing completion, are already occupied in various parts of Canberra, or have been purchased in the open market. Altogether a hundred dwellings will be needed before the end of 1951.

So far as academic buildings are concerned, the university is fortunate in having on its site the old hospital buildings, which have been used as government offices and libraries since the erection of Canberra's new hospital. Some of these have already been made available to the university, and the library began to function as a self-contained unit, with 50,000 volumes already purchased, early in January. Some depart-

ments, notably International Relations, Law, and Economics, are already functioning in these buildings, and, when they are all handed over to the university, they should provide sufficient temporary accommodation to house, besides the library, the whole of the Research Schools of Social Sciences and Pacific Studies.

M. L. Oliphant is supervising the erection of the buildings for the Research School of Physical Sciences which, with University House, are the only major buildings so far begun. These should be completed in time for Professor Oliphant to begin operations some time during 1951. Plans for the Medical School have been completed, and building of the workshops will soon be undertaken. A start will be made on the research laboratories toward the end of the year, but no other buildings will be constructed until conditions in the building trade are easier. The university's administrative headquarters are housed, for the time being, in converted army huts on the site.

By the end of 1951, therefore, the university should be taking physical shape. This does not mean, however, that it will not function as a university until then. Three departments of the Social Sciences are already operating in Canberra, two medical departments are engaged in research in Melbourne, one in London, and one in Dunedin. Altogether 21 members of the academic staff have been appointed, including Professor Oliphant, director of the School of Physical Sciences, 12 professors, 5 readers, and 3 research fellows. In addition, there are 11 people undertaking research on University Research Fellowships, and 53 reading for higher degrees in overseas universities on National University Scholarships. The administrative and library staff numbers 69. During 1950, 50 people joined the university's staff. During 1951 the number of new appointments is expected to reach 80, and by then most appointments for the existing organization should be filled.

The other principal activity of the university during this preliminary period has been to invite distinguished overseas scholars to Australia to confer with Australian research workers and to conduct lectures and seminars in Australian universities. As the university's own activities expand, this aspect will become less important, but it has been a means of bringing Australian institutions into touch with the leaders of overseas thought, and has achieved a subsidiary aim of introducing the National University to the academic world. As part of the Commonwealth Jubilee celebra-

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tions in 1951, two Jubilee Seminars have been arranged on the topics "Scientific Research and the Commonwealth" and "Federalism." For the first Sir Edward Mellanby, of the United Kingdom Research Council, and James Conant, of Harvard, have been invited; the second will be conducted by K. C. Wheare (Oxford), W. A. Mackintosh (Queen's University, Ontario), and J. L. Montrose (Belfast).

In the next year the university will undertake more of the academic functions that are normally attributed to a university. So far the work has been necessarily concentrated on research, but the second important aspect of the university's activities, the training of graduate scholars in methods of research, will be started in 1951 with the admission of a limited number of students who will read for Ph.D. degrees.

In other respects, also, the organization of the university will be taking a more familiar shape. The present Interim Council should shortly be replaced by a permanent governing body, elected partly by convocation. In other universities the electoral body consists of the university's own graduates, but because the National University as yet has no graduates, arrangements have been made for convocation to consist of members of the Interim Council, certain members of the staff, and representatives of other Australian universities. Pending the arrival of the full academic staff in Canberra, academic problems have been referred to an Academic Advisory Committee in Britain, comprised of Professor Oliphant as director of the Physics School; two other distinguished Australians, Sir Howard Florey and K. C. Wheare, advising on the Medical School and Social Sciences School, respectively; and the eminent New Zealand anthropologist Raymond Firth, advising on the Pacific Studies School. This body is continuing to function, and advantage will be taken of Professor Wheare's seminar visit, and the fact that Professor Firth will shortly be working at the National University for a period of one year, to hold a meeting in Australia during the middle of 1951 to discuss the general development of the university. Meanwhile, the continuing academic body, the Board of Graduate Studies, has commenced to operate in Canberra.

The familiar university routine will begin this year, following the enactment of a statute fixing university terms, providing for the admission of students, etc. It is planned that each professor will be in charge of one of a number of departments under the general supervision of a director. The School of Social Sciences, for example, will for the time being consist of the Departments of Economics, Law, Political Science, History, and Social Philosophy. Each professor will have under him readers and perhaps some permanent fellows, but most of his staff will be comprised of research fellows, whose appointments will be of limited tenure. The latter will perform a vital function in the university—in addition to pursuing their own research, they will help train the graduate scholars and, after a few years, will be expected to

move on either to higher positions within the university or to other universities and learned institutions. In this way there will be a constant stimulus arising from new blood on the staff.

The professor will be responsible for framing the general research program within his own department and will cooperate in the research work of the school as a whole. He, with other members of the staff, will be engaged primarily in research, but, because it is recognized that research needs supplementing by teaching and discussion, these activities will become an integral part of his work. His teaching will mainly take the form of the training of graduate scholars, but he will be encouraged to get about and accept, by invitation, limited teaching obligations in other universities and other institutions. The work that senior staff members will be required to undertake is of such importance that appointees must be scholars of international reputation. To draw such people, the terms of appointment have deliberately been made attractive—salaries are relatively high; plenty of time will be made available for individual research, and adequate assistance will be granted in the form of research assistants, library facilities, and up-to-date equipment; and there will be liberal provision for travel and leave.

The typical student will be a graduate of another university—not just an ordinary graduate, but an honors graduate especially selected as someone able to hold a place in the Australian academic scene. He will live at University House and read for a Ph.D. degree, meanwhile undertaking research of his own and helping with the research of others under the supervision of a senior member of the staff. The usual relationship of a small staff and a large number of students will be reversed, so that there will be a relatively small number of students compared with staff. By the time he has received his doctorate the student should be well qualified to take a post on the staff of another university, or to accept a research position with government or industry.

Finally, it should be mentioned that not all the students will be Australians. It is hoped that the university will soon build up a reputation that will attract scholars from all over the world. It should be able to do this, partly because it will occupy a special position in one of the world's academically unmapped areas—southeast Asia—and partly because it will endeavor to provide for some of the needs of southeast Asian students themselves.

These few comments should be sufficient to show that, while the National University is rightly described as an experiment in education, it is an experiment that holds great promise for the future of Australian university education. Other countries have developed graduate universities, and the National University is not the first institution to place primary emphasis on research. But the Australian National University is perhaps the first to combine these two functions and make them the predominant reasons for its existence.