

UGC), at a teacher-training institution, or at one of the country's 30 polytechnics, many of which are on a par with universities in all but formal status. The maximum educational fee at a university is under \$200 a year, but, subject to a means test, all students are eligible for "maintenance grants" of up to about \$850 a year, provided through taxes raised by their local governments. It is also worth noting that little evidence of scrimping is to be found in the construction and equipping of the many universities that have sprung up all around Britain since World War II.

The Open University

Visiting academics from Western Europe, mindful of the vast overcrowding with which they must contend in their own institutions, are often astonished at the amount of space devoted simply to well-furnished lounges. Thus, Britain probably holds the lead, at least among Western countries, in mass lowering of barriers to advanced education, combined with the maintenance of reasonably high traditional academic standards. In response to those who argue that traditional standards of admission are ridden with biases, Britain can point to its pioneering Open University (*Science*, 29 August 1969), which, when it starts next year, will give large numbers, regardless of credentials, access to high-quality university education.

In these conditions, it is perhaps mystifying why still more students do not continue their education. The answer is that more and more are doing just that, but, in Britain, going on to university has not yet acquired the American-style status of "the thing to do," regardless of one's work ambitions. Also, with job openings fairly plentiful, many young people apparently prefer to earn rather than to study.

Quasi-governmental is probably the simplest tag for the UGC, but even in Britain it is something of an administrative oddity. Consisting at present of a full-time chairman, 20 or so part-time members drawn from education, research, and industry, and a professional staff of about 35, it is not a statutory body and there is no law underlying its existence. It is perhaps best described as a well-established habit for financing the universities. Founded in 1919 simply through an announcement of the Treasury, it was given the task of advising the government on the financial needs of the universities. In 1964, when these needs had grown to relatively large pro-

portions, a move was made toward bringing the UGC closer to government policy by relocating the appointment power from the Treasury to the newly organized Department of Education and Science. The move inevitably aroused many misgivings about the implications for academic independence, but though opinions differ, the most widespread one is that the shift has worked out well for promoting economy and coordination without painful interference in the autonomy of the universities.

Viewed against the financial uncertainty that now afflicts American higher education, one of the principal charms of the UGC system is that it allocates funds on a 5-year basis, with provisions for meeting increased costs and unforeseen problems. The current annual sum is \$640 million, which represents a considerable increase over past years. And the figure does not include earmarked research support that is provided by a separate system of research councils. In preparation for each quinquennium, each university submits a detailed description of its plans and programs. The criteria employed by UGC in scrutinizing these are not among the most visible matters in British affairs, but obviously it would recommend restraint if all 45 of its institutions proposed establishing centers for Slavic studies. After all the proposals have been examined and presumably pared, UGC takes the total to the Department of Education and Science. Its recommendations to the Department are never made public, and no figures are ever issued to indicate how well it fares in dealing with the government.

But the bulk of the sums that are forthcoming are delivered to the universities as block grants. At this point, a delicate balance between autonomy and direction comes into force. As stated in a Memorandum of General Guidance which the UGC issued for the 1967-72 quinquennium, "Each university is free to determine the distribution of its annual block grant in the light of the guidance, general and particular, which the Committee has given. It would, however, be in accordance with generally accepted convention that the Committee should be consulted before any major new developments outside the framework set by the universities' quinquennial submissions and the guidance contained in this general memorandum and in the individual allocation letters, are undertaken."

The universities are, of course, free to go their own way. They can exceed the

NEWS IN BRIEF

● **POPULATION RESEARCH CENTERS:** The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development has announced that it wishes to receive applications from organizations and universities for establishment of Population Research Centers. The centers will conduct research on population growth, structure, and distribution; they will receive continuing support from the National Institute. Information and applications may be obtained from James F. O'Donnell, Center for Population Research, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Md. 20014.

● **INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH GRANTS:** The National Science Foundation has announced the first major grants under its new projects of Interdisciplinary Research Relevant to Problems of Our Society. The largest and most comprehensive program, to cost \$1.5 million, will include eight projects of environmental research and technology assessment to be done at Oak Ridge National Laboratory. Another \$3 million in grants has been given to nine universities which will research ten problems, including energy needs, urban engineering, and problems of fire.

● **STATES SUE AUTO MAKERS:** Fifteen states have filed suits in the Supreme Court asking the Court to force auto manufacturers to install at their own expense pollution control devices on all cars sold since 1953, and to start a "crash program" to develop better devices and a pollution-free engine "at the earliest feasible date." The states charged that General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, American Motors, and the Automobile Manufacturers Association conspired to eliminate competition in pollution control devices, and that such conspiracy violates the Sherman Antitrust Act. The Justice Department brought a similar suit against the auto makers last year but settled it with a consent decree under which the manufacturers agreed not to obstruct development and installation of the devices.

● **GRIZZLY BEARS:** Skins and skeletons of grizzly bears may be requested by educational institutions from the Office of Natural Science Studies, Yellowstone National Park, Wyo. 82190.