United Kingdom: The Annual Report for 1988/89 of the Medical Research Council

Clinical Research Initiative
The Council sees a need for a major initiative to strengthen and expand the clinical research base in the United Kingdom. The main objectives of this initiative are:
- to apply the recent major advances in basic biology to clinical medicine, and to achieve this aim by bringing together outstanding basic and clinical scientists in teams large enough to enable them to collaborate and exchange ideas, information and discoveries, to avoid the problems of isolation and share sophisticated equipment and facilities;
- to establish for this research an appropriate clinical environment;
- to establish appropriate mechanisms for industrial liaison. As the first step in this initiative the Council has proposed the creation of a major new Centre for Clinical Research and Postgraduate Medical Education.

Interdisciplinary Research Centres (IRC)
In its 1987/88 Annual Report (for the 1987/88 Report see Experientia *45* (1989) 1009) the Council reported that it had welcomed the initiative taken to set up IRCs, since this would further develop a method and scale of support which it had found highly effective through MRC units in university departments and new ventures such as the Institute of Molecular Medicine in Oxford. Progress in planning the following IRCs is already well advanced:

Toxicology. Funds were approved in 1988/89 for an IRC in toxicology. It has been agreed that this should be set up at the University of Leicester and that the MRC Toxicology Unit should be moved there to form a key component of the new centre.

Protein Engineering. An IRC is to be established in Cambridge and funding has been made possible through the additional resources the Council has obtained from the Science Budget 1989/90.

Cell Biology. An IRC is to be established in London University. Funding has again been made possible through the additional resources provided in 1989/90, supplementing existing Council support.
In addition, the Council is participating in an IRC in Molecular Sciences established in Oxford by the Science and Engineering Research Council. The MRC's contribution will be in excess of £1 million over five years.
The Council has further identified the following areas of immediate promise for the development of IRCs: Brain and Behaviour, Neurodegeneration.

MRC Unit on Protein Function and Design
A new MRC Unit on Protein Function and Design has been established in Cambridge. It will continue the pioneering work of Professor Alan Fersht on the practical application of genetic engineering in the design of novel enzymes, antibodies and other proteins for use in therapy and in other commercial applications. The Unit's programme will form a central component of the IRC in Protein Engineering (see above).

MRC AIDS Programme
The MRC's programme of AIDS research, which covers a broad range of study from molecular biology, immunology, virology and synthetic organic chemistry through epidemiology and clinical research to studies of sexual behaviour, has continued to expand steadily during the last year. The AIDS Directed Programme which began in 1987 is aimed at developing vaccines for prevention and drugs for treatment of AIDS and HIV infection. A wide range of approaches on a number of potential vaccine candidates is being funded. The research on drug therapy is focusing on specific components of the virus as potential targets for chemical intervention. A major clinical trial jointly between the UK and France of Zidovudine (AZT) in the treatment of asymptomatic infection began in the autumn of 1988. An extensive programme of epidemiological studies of AIDS is under way to investigate the natural history of the disease and factors which affect transmission between individuals.

MRC Human Genome Mapping Project
The Council was pleased to learn in February 1989, that additional funds, amounting to some £11 million in the first three years, would be available from the Science Budget to implement its proposal for additional work on the human genome. The Council had put forward plans for a Human Genome Mapping Project comprising two major elements:
- A Resource Centre that would provide biological material for UK teams, and a service for collecting, collating and mapping information provided by the individual research teams.
- A Directed Programme to develop enabling technologies, stimulate new types of study, coordinate activities, and to provide additional training opportunities.

The Directed Programme has now been established and the first round of grants and research studentships has been awarded. The Resource Centre will be established as a distributed but coordinated activity, with the major focus at the MRC Clinical Research Centre, Harrow.

Training Awards and Studentship Stipends
The Council has been concerned for some time about the growing evidence of hardship caused by the inadequate level of the postgraduate stipend and its effect on the quality and quantity of graduates expressing an interest in postgraduate training. The Council therefore decided that within their existing resources, funds should be found to allow stipends to be increased in the autumn of 1989. All research and advanced course students should receive thereafter an annual increase of between £480 and £720 with those on the AIDS Directed Programme

receiving a further annual increase of £500. The total annual cost to the Council will be some £500,000.

Cooperative Studentships
The Council has introduced a new scheme of cooperative studentships where one sponsor will be an MRC establishment or a higher education institution and the second sponsor an organisation outside those categories but with biomedical research interests. The new scheme will be formally launched in 1990 when it is hoped that at least 30 awards will be available at an annual cost of £200,000.

Account for the year ended 31 March 1989
The Council's Grant-in-aid for the financial year 1988/89 totalled £149.7 million. Contributions from other Government departments and other bodies brought the total up to £164.2 million. The total expenditure was £163.4 million, of which £65.4 million went to salaries, recurrent expenses, capital equipment and new building for research units and external scientific staff. The National Institute for Medical Research received £15.8 million and the Clinical Research Centre £12.9 million. £7.5 million were allocated to training awards and fellowships.

The full Annual Report can be obtained from the
Medical Research Council Headquarters Office
20 Park Crescent
London W1N 4AL, England

Announcements

France

XVth Conference on Hormones & Cell Regulation
Mont St. Odile, Alsace, France, 24–27 September 1990
Main topics: growth factors, transcriptional effects of steroid hormones, novel actions of calcium.
Further information from: Mrs. M. C. Barker, Hormones & Cell Regulation Conference, Imperial Cancer Research Fund, P.O. Box 123, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2A PX, U.K.

Austria

2nd International Interdisciplinary Symposium 'Peritoneum and Peritoneal Access'
Vienna, 13–16 November 1990
Please address enquiries to: Vienna Academy of Postgraduate, Medical Education and Research, Alser Straße 4, A-1090 Vienna/Austria, Tel.: (1) 43 13 84, 42 71 65, Fax: (1) 42 13 83 23.

USA

International Symposium on Multiple Risk Factors in Cardiovascular Disease
Washington, 10–12 December 1990
This Symposium will provide information on the state-of-the-art and on the most recent therapeutic advances to research investigators, cardiologists, internists and geriatricians who are often confronted with selecting either a single risk factor for treatment, or treating several risk factors simultaneously but less aggressively.
The evaluation of risk factors is a critical problem in the treatment of chronic diseases, and especially cardiovascular disorders. In depth knowledge of the physiopathology, pharmacology (including pharmacokinetics) and therapeutic effectiveness of treatment is necessary. Bioethical considerations may also be required in the decision-making process.
For further information please contact the Organizing Secretariat: c/o Dr. Marjorie G. Horning, Baylor College of Medicine, One Baylor Plaza, Houston, Texas 77030 (USA), Phone: (713) 797.0401, Fax (713) 796.88 53.

ICRO International Cell Research Organization Training Courses

International Laboratory Training Course on Molecular and Cellular Aspects of Immunology
Rehovot, Israel, 2–13 December 1990
Information by: Prof. Zelig Eshhar, Department of Chemical Immunology, The Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot 76100, Israel. Fax 972-8-46 69 66, Electronic mail LIESHHAR @ WEIZMANN

International Training Course on Virus Immunology
Instituto Butantan, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1–31 October 1990
Information by: Dr. Carlos Augusto Pereira, Instituto Butantan, Laboratorio de Immunologia Viral, Av. Vital Brasil 1500, CP 65, 05504 São Paulo, Brazil.
Telex 55.11.83 325 Buta, Telefax 55.11.8 15 15 05

ICRO Advanced Course on Biological Membranes and Liposomes
Shanghai Institute of Biochemistry, 20 August – 1 September 1990
Information by: Professor Qi-shui Lin, Shanghai Institute of Biochemistry, 320 Yue Yang Road, Shanghai 200031, China. Fax: 86-21-4 33 83 57; Telex: 33 626 SIBAS CN