
Universities to set up mathematics institute

By Tom Wilkie
Science Editor

EDINBURGH has launched an attempt to propel Scotland to international leadership as a centre of excellence in mathematics.

Herriot-Watt and Edinburgh universities are pooling resources to set up an International Mathematics Institute, which will combine two related elements: an International Centre for Mathematics (ICM) and a Mathematics Research Centre. Professor Elmer Rees, of Edinburgh University, says no comparable institute exists in the UK.

The ICM is modelled on the successful International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) at Trieste, Italy. The brainchild of Abdus Salam, the Nobel Prize-winning physicist, the ICTP is supported by the United Nations and the Italian foreign aid budget. It offers talented physicists from developing countries the opportunity to attend top-level seminars and concentrate on research. The first lectures will be given in 1991. Professor Rees expects the ICM will cost about £500,000 to set up and a similar amount annually to run.

The Mathematics Research Centre is designed to provide a spin-off for industry. Although mathematics is traditionally regarded as an abstract science, many industrial problems require advanced mathematics for their solution. Professor Robin Knops of Herriot-Watt University said the science was now vital to fields such as the modelling of fluid flow, chemical and biological reactions and weather forecasting. "Mathematics is not an esoteric pursuit," he said.
