

OLD WORLD

IPCS Attacks White Paper

THE silence which has enveloped the British scientific community since the publication of the government white paper on research and development last July was broken yesterday by the publication of a scathing attack on the government's proposals by the Institution of Professional Civil Servants.

The white paper, says the IPCS, is an "inadequate and disappointing response to the wide-ranging public debate about [Lord Rothschild's] formulations". In particular, the institution complains that no reference is made to strategic research by the government when it recommends that £20 million should be transferred from the research councils to government departments over the next three years. This "deplorable" omission, says the IPCS, implies that the government has failed to "grasp one of the essential functions of the research councils".

The institution is also unhappy about the statement in the white paper that "no conditions are to be placed on the use of the money transferred to the customer departments but the expectation is that it will be spent to commission applied research work from the research councils". Such an approach will lead to uncertainty within the research councils, says the IPCS, and to prevent this the institution strongly urges the government, as the Select Committee on Science and Technology has done, to plan future departmental spending on research and development on a five year basis.

The IPCS is also unhappy at what it considers a toning down of a promise made by Lord Jellicoe in the House of Lords in February this year during a debate on the green paper on research and development. Lord Jellicoe said that the government had "a closed mind on the principle that no transfer should take place unless and until the government departments concerned are properly equipped and capable of managing the funds entrusted to them". In the white paper the government merely states that no transfers of money will be made "until the customer departments have established their central scientific staffs".

The Civil Service Department, however, denied this week that the white paper was inconsistent with what Lord Jellicoe had said in February and that it was still the intention of the government to ensure the efficiency of each department before any money was transferred.

The institution also regrets the division of the Nature Conservancy, but says that the new arrangement will function if those responsible for the organization of the conservation work in the new Nature Conservancy Council and for the research work in the Natural Environment Research Council "get on well together and are willing and anxious to assist the work of the other section".

On the positive side, the institution considers that the white paper's recommendation that £20 million should be transferred to the research councils over three years and not immediately is a merit. It also likes the government's reaffirmation of its commitment that scientists should play a larger role in working out departmental needs and in formulating policy. The institution also welcomes the setting up of a task force to advise the government on how to encourage greater mobility within the civil service but it regrets that it was not represented on this task force.

The IPCS welcomes the government's assurance that after the £20 million has been transferred to the departments in 1975-76 there will be a "period of stability before any further review is carried out". The institution has been

concerned about the effects that frequent reviews have on the morale of the staff in government laboratories.

In spite of the detailed criticisms, the institution pledges its support for the new system, which it says will "ensure an effective link between science and the community's needs". The IPCS also welcomes the government's unequivocal commitment "to the maximum cooperation between all the parties involved" and on this basis alone, says the institution, "the government's new organization could turn out to be a turning point".

ATOMIC ENERGY

International Fusion

IN spite of speculation last year that the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority was in danger of being disbanded, the annual report for the year ending in March 1972, published this week, shows no outward sign of this (*United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, 18th Annual Report and Accounts, 1971-72*).

The authority's expenditure during 1971-72 was £96.59 million, compared with £95.3 million in 1970-71. The authority recouped £51.2 million of this

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Leaden Shoes

GOVERNMENT departments are making slow progress in bringing their research and development organizations into line with last July's white paper. Although the transfers of funds from research councils to ministries outlined in the white paper do not become effective until March 1973, the Chief Scientists' organizations, which Lord Jellicoe has repeatedly said will have to be firmly established before funds are transferred, are still in a very early stage.

The Department of Health and Social Security seems to have progressed furthest, having appointed Dr R. H. L. Cohen as chief scientist until April 1973 and Professor Douglas Black of the University of Manchester as his successor. The "small team of scientists"—thought to be about a dozen—that will complete the organization has not been appointed, however, and formal talks with the Medical Research Council on which projects the DHSS will take over from the MRC have not yet begun.

The situation at the Department of Trade and Industry seems equally un-

decided. The requirements boards which were paraded before the Select Committee on Science and Technology even before the white paper's publication have still not been set up.

Things seem little better at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Foods where a Chief Scientific Adviser (Agriculture) has been appointed in the person of Mr W. F. Raymond, formerly of the Grasslands Research Institute, and where Mr G. Elton, already a member of the department has acceded to the title Chief Scientific Adviser (Food). A similar small team of scientists—thought to number about six at Senior Scientific Officer level or higher—has yet to be appointed. The Chief Scientist has not yet been named, although the name of Dr H. C. Pereira of the East Malling Research Institute has been mentioned in the past few weeks.

Only the Department of the Environment seems so far equipped to handle its Rothschild money, £2.25 million in the year beginning next March. An organization consisting of a Director General (Research) with a supporting staff was set up in 1970 when the department was first created.