University safety report hushed up?

THE findings of a study by a senior inspector of the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) into health and safety in British universities may be controversial. Since the report of the study was submitted to the HSE last summer, it has not been made available to any of the organisations concerned with health and safety in universities. Neither the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals, nor safety officers in universities, nor the unions representing university employees have seen the report, even though they had all been led to believe that it would be available by the end of the summer of 1977.

The HSE puts the delay down to the length of time it has taken to consider the report and produce its own recommendations. But the general feeling outside the HSE is that the delay indicates that the report is embarrassing to someone. The unions, for example, feel that it may recommend major improvements to safety standards in universities which could cost of the order of £40 million.

The purpose of the study was to identify health and safety problems peculiar to universities. Prior to 1974, when the Health and Safety at Work Act was introduced, university employees had not been covered by health and safety legislation, so the HSE felt that a study to pinpoint special problems would be helpful to its inspectors (who were accustomed only to the problems encountered in industry). Hospitals, schools and other new entrants under the 1974 act have also been subjected to similar studies.

The university study was conducted by Miss N. Curry, of the Scotland West Area Office. She visited six universities chosen by the HSE in consultation with the CVCP—Leeds, Strathclyde, East Anglia, Cambridge, Swansea, and Salford—where she consulted heads of departments, union representatives and workers on the shop floor. By the Autumn of last year she had submitted her report to the HSE.

In contrast to the union's view that safety standards in the universities will

have to be brought up to those in industry, the CVCP thinks the report is likely to suggest that special provision must be made for universities and research establishments, in accordance with the recommendations of the Robens Committee on Safety and Health at Work. In the CVCP's view a major problem in subjecting universities to the same health and safety requirements as industry is in determining the rights and obligations of students.

Both unions and university safety representatives, however, are anxious to see the report as soon as possible. The CVCP wants to revise its code of practice on health and safety and the unions are anxious to advise their members in the light of the report's recommendations. In a reply to a letter in the new year from John Akker, Deputy General Secretary of the Association of University Teachers, Bill Simpson, Chairman of the Health and Safety Commission, said that the report would be available sometime in the Spring. As yet, however, the HSE can give no clearer indication of when that will be.

Judy Redfearn

South Korea to raise investment in science and technology

SOUTH Korea is planning major expansions in the development of science and technology. According to Choe Hyong-Sop, Minister of Science and Technology, the investment in science and technology is to be increased to 1.5% of the GNP by 1981 and 2.5% by 1991. The role of the Korean Science Institute in the development of the country's technology is to be expanded, and a vocational college established.

In a recent briefing session with President Pak Chong-hui, the Science Minister explained that the basic directions for technology policy are the "strategic development" of industrial technology and the "deepening of an atmosphere conducive to the development of science and technology". Considerable emphasis is being placed on the adaptation of advanced foreign technology to the needs and conditions of Korea, the attraction of private investment into the development, the training of technical manpower and the liberalisation of technology imports.

These aims are reflected by other Ministries. At last January's trade promotion conference, the Foreign Minister Pak Tong-chin said that efforts would be made to diversify sources of capital technology imports to Europe and the Middle East oil states. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry is simplifying the procedures and regulations governing the intro-

duction of foreign technology. Concentrated support is to be given to a number of industries, including the chemical and metal-working industries; and several other industries, including electronics and the motor-vehicle industries, are to be developed into major export industries. Large enterprises will be encouraged to establish their own technological research institutes, and during the current year the Ministry will release \$494,000 from local currency loans and \$1,300 million from foreign exchange loans for laboratory equipment for such institutes.

Behind all these plans for expansion, however, one can sense a growing concern with energy supplies. South Korea is presently a coal producer, but importing of coal may become necessary as early as 1979. Oil is a major import, both for transport fuel, power generation, and for use in the important chemical industry. Plans are going forward for a new petrochemical

complex—the country's third—and new price stabilisation measures for essential commodities which should help hold down prices of certain types of oil and petroleum products. New sources of oil supplies are being sought in Africa and South America, in addition to the current Middle East suppliers (Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia), in the hope of maintaining stable supplies and prices.

At the same time, the Energy and Resources Minister announced that no more oil-burning power stations will be undertaken; in future all new stations will be either lignite-burning, nuclear or tidal. In support of this policy, testing facilities for nuclear fuel processing with an annual uranium capacity of 10 tons are to be set up this year at the Taedok Specialised Technology Research Institute, and testing operations will commence by the end of the year.

Vera Rich

Refusnik challenges withholding of his degree

SINCE 1976, academic brilliance has been a necessary but not sufficient condition for receiving a higher degree in the Soviet Union—a proper political outlook is equally, if not more, important. According to Article 24 of the regulations of the Higher Qualifications Commission (*Vyshshaya Attestat-*

sionnaya Kommissiya—VAK) which assesses a university's recommendation that such-and-such person be awarded the degree of Candidate (PhD) or Doctor, it is required that such persons have shown themselves to be among "those who follow the norms of communist morality and those who act

according to the principles of Soviet patriotism and proletarian internationalism".

These regulations are by no means simply a paying of lip-service to Party and ideology. In what promises to be a test case, *refusnik* Arkadii Tsinober is challenging the right of VAK to withhold his Doctor's degree on the grounds that he is "amoral and unpatriotic".

Tsinober, who had worked at the Institute of Physics of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR for 15 years, defended his Doctoral thesis in the summer of 1975. Shortly after-

wards, he applied to emigrate to Israel. At this time, although the new regulations of VAK had not come into force, their content was well known in Soviet academic circles, and dissidents were predicting that by 1985 no non-Party person would be able to hold a major academic or scientific post.

Tsinober's application for a visa was turned down on the grounds of the "secrecy" of his work on MHD—an excuse which might have appeared more valid had not his colleague and co-author Professor H. Branover been allowed to emigrate. He never received his Doctoral degree—and this,

he claims is solely due to his desire to leave the country. Since the Soviet Union is a signatory to the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the right of the citizen to leave any country, including his own, Tsinober claims that the refusal of his degree is unconstitutional, and is attempting to make good his claim through the Latvian courts.

In a recent message, he stressed that it is not simply a paper qualification that is at stake—that is a minor matter—but the whole question of state intervention in the academic process.

Vera Rich

New science policy minister for the Netherlands

AFTER a record breaking period of 206 days without government, the Christian-democrats and conservatives under Dr Dries van Agt as prime minister, finally came to power in the Netherlands at the end of last year. The new minister for science policy is Dr Rinus Peijnenburg, the right hand man of Dr van Agt during the days without government.

Formulating science policy will be a new area of government to Dr Peijnenburg. As well as being minister for science policy, he is acting as economic adviser to Dr van Agt, who unlike most prime ministers is not an economist. Even though he has little knowledge of science and technology, Dr Peijnenburg's varied experience as a politician should prove useful in his new post.

During the formation of the new cabinet last year it was doubtful that the position of the coordinating minister for science policy would be strengthened. Recently, however, Dr van Agt has indicated that the science policy minister is to have more power and more money for running his department.

The organisation remains the same as in the previous cabinet. Responsibility for science policy lies with the department of education. Two ministers have some responsibility for science: the minister for education, who is concerned with science education in schools and universities, and the minister for science policy whose concern is science outside educational establishments.

With his other commitments, it remains to be seen how much time Dr Peijnenburg will spend on science policy. After a couple of months in office, however, he is taking his responsibilities for science very seriously and he may not have much time for his duties as economic adviser. He already has a science budget for 1978 which was allocated by his predecessor, Fokele Trip, who had been in charge

of science policy for four and half years. The total budget for 1978 is 5.9 billion guilders of which 2.8 billion is to come from government funds (1.2 billion is to be spent in universities). Industry—mainly the five multinationals, Philips, Shell, Unilever, DAM and AKZO—will spend 3.1 billion. The percentage of the gross national product spent on the total scientific effort will remain at 2.1%, the same as in 1977. This is the greatest percentage for civil research in the EEC after West Germany.

Dr Peijnenburg's science policy will follow along the same lines as that of Fokele Trip. Like Mr Trip, he will

encourage technological innovation in small-to-medium-sized industry and has even promised a memorandum on innovation within a year. Other new activities include the setting up of a group to look into ageing research and a committee is to be set up to look into the state of biochemical research in Holland. A special group, linking various departments, will be established to advise the government on Dutch policy for space research and technology in the 1980s. In 1978 a decision will also have to be taken on the development of an extended version of the Fokker F-28 passenger plane at a cost of 200 million guilders. Casper Schuurung

Biowarfare lab goes civil

The Ministry of Defence's (MOD) Microbiological Research Establishment (MRE), Porton Down, is to be retained for civil research after 1979, the government announced last week. The illustration shows a category IV containment facility for microbiological research at Porton.

The future of MRE has been uncertain for more than a year. In the 1976 Defence White Paper, the MOD announced its intention to shed its responsibility for the establishment—where it has carried out most of its microbiological warfare research.

Last week, however, in reply to a question on MRE's future in the House of Commons, Dr John Gilbert, Minister of State at the MOD, said that the government had "decided to retain MRE as a civil establishment subject to satisfactory administrative arrangements being made" because it had "concluded that many of the capabilities and facilities of MRE represent a national asset of value".

Before "satisfactory administrative arrangements" are made, however, the MOD will continue to "manage the establishment in 1978–79 and reduce it

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to the size appropriate for the civil programmes now foreseen. This is expected to be about two-thirds of present strength". In the meantime "proposals for the transfer of responsibility from the MOD to the Department of Health and Social Security and the Public Health Service are under discussion".