

two conditions: First, the South Bank building must be large enough to ensure that the bulk of the documents in frequent demand can be housed there, not only in 1965, but also for at least the following twenty years when, with the projected development of the Bloomsbury site, the situation might well be reviewed; and, secondly, arrangements must be made rapidly to transport or transmit documents held in the British Museum, so that the reader on the South Bank can have what he wants within minutes rather than hours. Much of the work of a reader in a reference library involves consulting many documents in conjunction with each other, and following up references found in them: delay in obtaining documents may make it impossible to complete a search and necessitate further visits. The obvious way to minimize this danger is to accommodate the greatest possible stock on the South Bank, and it is earnestly to be hoped that some way of increasing the space available will be found.

The Government seems to recognize that the new Library will ultimately need a staff which is well equipped professionally, particularly with scientists, and more numerous; but it is not enough to promise more staff when the Library becomes operational. In a lending library, records can give a reliable indication of users' habits; but virtually nothing is known as established fact about the use of reference material on open shelves. Surely now is the time to appoint a nucleus of the future staff, free of operational duties, to determine users' needs and to establish data on which detailed plans can be based.

Mr. E. M. Nicholson is doubtless wise to urge that now that a start has been made one should not jog the arm which lifts the cup. No one in his senses would wish to do so; the project must be given every chance to succeed. This means not only that critics should criticize constructively, but also that the Government should provide powerful support for the practical implications of its own proposals. Unless it does, the National Reference Library of Science and Invention may be little more than a less dingy Patent Office Library inconveniently and perhaps ineffectively linked with the British Museum.

LESLIE WILSON  
(Director)

Aslib,  
3 Belgrave Square,  
London, S.W.1.

THE leading article in *Nature* of July 1, on the National Reference Library and other issues, calls for comment in regard to the problems of scientific information. Miss Webb is certainly to be supported in her aim of recruiting graduate staff who will assist readers in exploiting the resources of the new Library. The National Lending Library, which will not be in such direct contact with its users, is in a much more difficult position to assist in information retrieval (so long as it remains primarily a library). It is not to be expected, however, that such national libraries should undertake large tasks of information retrieval for readers, and hence they are not the correct authorities to handle research on the problems of the collation and dissemination of scientific information. Furthermore, although the needs of users must, of course, be studied and so far as possible met, the organization of such libraries is best left in the hands of scientifically trained librarians, and should not be considered a matter for dictation by any body of

users who are only too often unable to specify their questions clearly and are mostly unacquainted with the intricacies of such problems as classification and information techniques. In some respects, however, this position may be changing, since an increasing proportion of the users of the Patent Office Library comprises information officers.

The problems of information retrieval arise mainly, however, in special libraries and, more particularly, in information departments in industry, research associations, and the like. Many smaller (and perhaps even some larger) researches into information techniques are being carried out, with little publicity, in information departments of the larger industries, and steady progress has been made by the Classification Research Group; most of such groups are in regular contact with Aslib. The collation of such work and the promotion of new researches would, therefore, be far better undertaken by Aslib, with its new research department, than put under the vague ægis of the national libraries. The research being undertaken by Mr. Cleverdon on retrieval by different methods of classification, at the College of Aeronautics, Cranfield, under the auspices of Aslib (on a grant from the National Science Foundation, and not, be it noted, from the British Government) is an excellent example of pioneering research in this field. The Advisory Council on Scientific Policy does not appear to be adequately acquainted with the nature of the problems to be solved.

Mr. Nicholson is quoted on the need for "senior people trained professionally both as scientists and librarians" and reference is made to the "perennial discussions on training intelligence and information officers". I would point out that the Institute of Information Scientists, formed in 1958, is now concerned with education in information work and a two-year postgraduate evening course, based on the Institute's full syllabus, was started last January at the Northampton College of Advanced Technology, London. Examinations based on this syllabus, and leading to the granting of its certificate, will be held by the Institute. The provision of this course was arranged in consultation with Aslib. If sufficient students are forthcoming, it is hoped to start a repeat course as early as next September. It may also be of interest to mention that Dr. G. Malcolm Dyson, now research director to *Chemical Abstracts*, served as president of the Institute for three years, and this office has now been undertaken by Sir Lindor Brown, who is also president of Aslib. The training of information scientists (the science graduate plus information officer really needed by Mr. Nicholson) is thus being actively and constructively promoted.

Finally, it needs to be stressed that information techniques and the problems of information retrieval, vital to modern scientific work, are not just matters of empirical trial and error, either in library organization or with complex computers, but require steady theoretical and practical scientific investigation. For this, the subject must ultimately become a recognized branch of postgraduate studies at universities and technical colleges. Much greater Government support and encouragement are necessary, however, before this final stage of respectability is achieved.

J. FARRADANE  
(Honorary Secretary)

Institute of Information Scientists,  
"Torran",  
Crofton Road,  
Orpington, Kent.