SCIENCE INFORMATION

A SUCCESSFUL first conference was held by the Institute of Information Scientists at Merton College, Oxford, during July 17-19, attended by 64 persons. The conference dinner on the Saturday evening was also attended by Prof. J. W. S. Pringle, representing the College, and by Mr. L. Wilson, director of Aslib (Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux), who proposed the toast of the Institute and spoke of the successful growth of the Institute since its inauguration in 1958, and of the courses in information science started at Northampton College of Advanced Technology, London, on the basis of the Institute's syllabus. Of these courses, the full-time, one-year postgraduate course, leading to the Diploma of the College, was the first full course in information science to be given in any country; the two-year part-time evening courses, which were started in 1961, lead to the Certificate of the Institute. The Institute now has nearly 400 members, of whom some sixty are in various countries overseas.

Of the papers presented, two concerned information services direct to management. Miss P. H. Cutting outlined the work at Messrs. Urwick, Orr and Partners, where she is information officer, and Mr. S. J. Batchelder described the work of the information department of the Leeds Incorporated Chamber of Commerce, of which he is the secretary. The wide scope and extent of the services provided at Leeds were of great interest, and indicated that many firms were finding that the Chamber of Commerce could provide answers to technical as well as economic questions. Mr. Batchelder remarked, however, that there were still many small firms which had not yet realized the value of obtaining information to improve their productivity. This is a problem which the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and other bodies have been attacking for many years.

An interesting point of view, provoking much discussion, was put forward by Dr. F. J. Wallace, senior research engineer at the Pressed Steel Co., Ltd., Cowley; he suggested that a research worker, especially an engineer, would prefer not to be given too much information early in the start of a new project. He would want to work with a general picture of the problem, and would welcome some basic data, but then needed a period in which to develop his own ideas before again seeking the services of an information department for the provision of detailed literature on specific points which he could then select. In the discussion, it was suggested that the engineer's outlook was, perhaps, always of a more practical and less theoretical nature and, therefore, different from that of, say, a chemist who generally required the full literature in advance of a project. The differences in the information requirements of workers in different subject fields would appear to deserve further investigation.

A paper entitled "Information work in A.D. 2000" was given by Mr. J. Farradane, the honorary secretary of the Institute and Senior Research Fellow (also course organizer) at Northampton College. This was a necessarily fanciful presentation of serious considerations of possible developments of present trends in information science within the next fifty years. He considered in particular the necessity for control of scientific publications by channelling better research work into a limited number of 'official' organs which would be reviewed, abstracted and indexed in large regional information centres; all other literature, especially trade literature, would receive

secondary consideration or be ignored for the record. Abstracting would have to give place to reviews of groups of papers at a time. (In discussion, Miss I. M. Slade suggested that special regional applied science and technology centres would also be needed, and could deal with their appropriate literature.) He also suggested that mechanized storage and retrieval would never be satisfactorily performed by present types of computers, which were appropriate for handling data, but not linguistic information, and that machines based on a closer approximation to the working of the human brain would have to be developed. Close liaison between such centres and industrial and other information departments (the latter feeding back information) was also considered important.

Mr. J. S. Rippon (information officer, Metal Box Co., Ltd.) gave a detailed survey of the extent to which information services could relieve research workers of the need to undertake their own literature searches. Although the research worker must clearly undertake adequate personal reading, and make his own decisions, the information department provided an essential service in view of the complexities of the literature problem and could do useful pre-evaluation of the material found. It was important that management, and research and development personnel, should appreciate the full scope of possible services which could be provided by an efficient service.

The problems of foreign literature, and especially those of technical translation and its cost, were considered by Mr. F. Liebesny (intelligence officer, British Aluminium Co., Ltd.). Since literature written in English is now only little more than half the total, with Russian now in second place, the need for skills in reading languages and for accurate translation was rapidly increasing; the exacting qualities required for good work were not common. He suggested that the only satisfactory course, in the long run, was for children to be taught foreign languages as a regular cultural necessity from an early age. The technical complexities were such that it was doubtful whether mechanical translation, even with pre- and post-editing, would ever be an economic possibility, or even feasible.

Finally, Mr. J. Blackwell (B. H. Blackwell Ltd.) and Mr. C. W. Hanson (head of research, Aslib) discussed the need for a new effort in publicizing the value of information work (and the work of the Institute). Mr. Blackwell suggested that the matter should now be put in the hands of professional publicity experts so that the subject could, in particular, be brought convincingly to the attention of management. Mr. Hanson pointed out that, as with research, it was difficult to give evidence of the direct economic value of information services; cases which might show convincing evidence were often related to confidential matters and could thus not be published. Adequate information was necessary in order to keep up to date and abreast of competition. Researches carried out at Aslib had indicated the probable extent of wasted effort due to lack of adequate information in support of research, and this waste was considerable. He therefore supported the policy of increased publicity.

The conference provided a demonstration of the growing importance of information work since the Second World War and the consolidation of the profession of information scientist. It is expected that the full *Proceedings* will be published in the autumn.

J. FARRADANE