

NEWS AND VIEWS

Technology Takes All

THE Ministry of Technology will be the agency responsible for British defence research and development under the arrangements announced last week by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons. Mr. Wilson said that the Ministry of Aviation, which shed responsibility for civil aviation earlier this year, is now to be absorbed entirely within the Ministry of Technology. This is the outcome of a protracted study of various alternative arrangements that would have allowed the Ministry of Defence to retain responsibility for the development and procurement of military equipment. The result, which must be read as a vote of confidence in the Ministry of Technology, leaves that organization in charge of almost all public expenditure on research and development except that in universities and the laboratories of the research councils.

The transfer of the defence laboratories to the Ministry of Technology will be a considerable undertaking which is bound to preoccupy the ministry for several months to come. Apart from the increase of its size, however, the ministry may eventually rejoice in a much greater and more experienced supply of scientists turned administrators than that at present available. Eventually it is to be expected that the defence laboratories will be engaged much more directly in work for industry.

In the long run, the Central Advisory Committee on Science and Technology will presumably help to guide decisions like these. At the beginning of this week, however, no appointments to this committee had been made. It is now a month since that committee under Sir Solly Zuckerman was announced.

IEG No More

THE Information Exchange Groups which have been operated from the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, during the past five years will come to an end, at least for a time, in April 1967. Members of the Information Exchange Groups have been told that new members will not be accepted after November 15, 1966, and that no documents for circulation within the IEG system will be accepted after February 1, 1967. In a statement circulated to members of the Information Exchange Groups, Dr. Eugene A. Confrey, Director of the Division of Research Grants at the National Institutes of Health, says that the decision to wind up the present phase of the IEG experiment has been taken because, in the first place, the IEG concept has been shown to be workable and, second, because the rapid growth of the exchange groups in the past two years has now reached the limit of what can be accommodated. One other consideration which has apparently influenced the decision to bring the present phase of IEG to an end is that the necessarily selective way in which the system operates seems inequitable to those who work in areas not covered by an exchange group. For the rest, the organizers of the exchange groups apparently consider that detailed criticisms of the system could be met by suitable modifications.

On the basis of the experience of the past five years, the organizers commend the concept to scientific

societies and journals. They consider that the Information Exchange Groups have a part to play as complements to existing journals, particularly in areas of scientific research marked by the volume of current activity. They suggest that groups should be limited in duration and that decisions should be taken once a year about their continued existence. The ideal group is small, and this should be achieved by limiting the scope of each group. Experience has shown that the larger groups have worked less well than those restricted to particular fields.

Food Science for Reading

THE Fruit and Vegetable Preservation Research Association has decided to move from Chipping Campden to Reading, if sufficient money can be raised. The decision is in recognition of the advantages that can be gained by close proximity to other research groups in the same field, in this case the Food Science departments of the University of Reading and the National Institute of Dairy Research, and follows reports last week (*Nature*, 212, 766; 1966) that the Ministry of Overseas Development is considering whether to move two of its research departments to Reading. The council of the research association has been authorized to go ahead with the plan, and to try to find financial support from industry and elsewhere. The Ministry of Technology has taken an interest in the plan, and has hinted that it would be prepared to contribute towards the cost of the move.

Research for Training

THE Committee of Directors of Research Associations, conscious of the importance of the Industrial Training Act, last week organized a colloquium about it. The British economy increasingly hopes to rely on technical sophistication in industry and on a mobile labour force; men need not only to be trained, but also to be re-trained if circumstances make this necessary. The Act brought into being the industrial training boards, of which there are now seventeen. They are supported by a levy on the industries they serve, and spread the cost of training throughout the industry by returning money in the form of grants only to those which carry out effective training. The industrial research associations also train people, particularly in the advanced techniques which they have developed. As yet, the two kinds of organizations have had very little contact.

The specialist character of the research associations was seen as no bar to co-existence. Indeed, at the symposium it was argued that the research associations are well placed to anticipate the kinds of re-training that the boards should concern themselves with. One speaker urged, for example, that modern laundry workers should have a grounding in control engineering to enable them to live with increasing automation.

Blackett on Britain

THE economic advantage of industrial mergers was the principal theme of the Fawley lecture by Professor P. M. S. Blackett, delivered at Southampton to an audience of academics and industrialists on November 23. The speech is important not only for its lucidity, remarkable even for a President of the Royal Society, but also because it throws light on the thinking of the