

NEWS AND VIEWS

Swings and Roundabouts

THE swing away from science gets another push in the fourth report of the Universities' Central Council on Admissions (UCCA, 29 Tavistock Square, London, W.C.1, 6s.). The end of the bulge in post-war births seems to have been a sharper shock in science and technology than in other disciplines. Last year there were more places at British universities for undergraduate scientists than there were applicants qualified to take them up; it has become significantly harder to get a place in the humanities than in the sciences. Pure scientists, who make up 19.2 per cent of all applicants, gain 26.2 per cent of the places, while social scientists make up 29.7 per cent of the applicants and get only 22.5 per cent of the places. The council demonstrates that the situation exists and goes to some lengths to translate it into figures. Last year there were, it says, 500 too few applicants in technology, and 1,100 too few in science, figures open to all sorts of criticisms. The council produces no evidence, for example, that the projections made by the universities of the number of places available are consistent from department to department. This is important because scientific departments gain much more from expansion than others do and as a result their optimistic predictions are less likely to be met.

For all that, the trend is convincing and, as the report notes, disturbing. Since 1962, admissions in pure science have grown by 41 per cent, in technology by 28 per cent, in arts subjects by 55 per cent, and in social studies (economics, sociology, psychology, law, geography) by no less than 118 per cent. Chary of falling off the fence, the council is content to record the figures and leave others to argue about them. It would be fascinating to learn, for example, where the shortfall is concentrated—well known and respected departments claim to have no difficulty in filling their places—and it may be that students are helping to create centres of excellence willy nilly by voting with their feet. The council bases its judgments on the premise that university entrance should be exactly as easy for arts undergraduates as for scientists. It might well be argued, though, that the hurdles to entry should be lower for scientists, as an encouragement. Perhaps, indeed, the shortfall should be welcomed for the effect it will have on the generation now in the schools.

No Unwarrantable Intrusion

A WARNING that research into human behaviour may sometimes imply an unwarrantable interference with the privacy of people, and a code of values for the protection of individual privacy, are spelled out in a report of a panel under Dr. Kenneth E. Clark, chairman of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Rochester, and now published by the Office of Science and Technology in Washington (*Privacy and Behavioral Research*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 15c.).

The report says that the panel began work because of the threat to individual privacy implied by wire-tapping, electronic eavesdropping and similar innovations. On a number of occasions recently, the possibility that scientific enquiry might similarly intrude on personal matters has been raised in the United States Congress. While rejecting any notion that the 35,000 scientists who at present spend the \$300 million a year which the federal government devotes to behavioural sciences may be unaware of these problems, the panel does admit to having discovered a "limited number" of investigations in which privacy has been invaded.

The panel concludes that participation of experimental subjects in investigations must be voluntary and based where possible on "informed consent". Experiments should be designed in such a way that there is no permanent physical or psychological harm to participants. Similarly, published reports of research must protect the privacy of individuals, and government agencies supporting research should "satisfy themselves that the institution which employs the investigator has effectively accepted its responsibility to require that he meet ethical standards". Legislation, says the committee, is not necessary.

To the extent that these recommendations imply the supervision of the character of a person's work by his institution, they will in themselves be of some importance. In practice, the committee's interpretation of what is meant by privacy will raise other issues. As an example of intrusion, it cites an attempt at a sociometric measure in which children are asked questions designed to reveal their relationship to other children in the class. The committee says that this invades privacy because "it forces children to think about certain qualities of behaviour shown by one another and to reach firm conclusions about what is best or worst". The panel points out that in an experiment in which experimental subjects are given a sense of failure, the experimenter has a duty to see that they leave the laboratory with their natural spirits restored.

New Fellows

THE Royal Society has broken new ground by the election of a number of technologists to the fellowship. The list of elections of March 16 includes eight people whose present work is more in industry than in academic life. The inclusion of technologists in the fellowship, not an entirely novel idea, has been given especial importance in the last few years, and Professor P. M. S. Blackett, the president, drew attention to the virtues of electing industrial people to the fellowship in his presidential address on November 30, 1966. Many of those now elected as technologists have distinguished records in pure research as well. The list of elections on March 16 is the following:

E. J. W. Barrington, Professor of Zoology, University of Nottingham; K. L. Blaxter, Director of the Rowett Research Institute, Aberdeen; E. S. Booth, Member for Engineering of the Central Electricity Generating Board; C. W. Bunn, Dewar Research Fellow of the Royal Institution; C. S. Cockerell, Consultant, Hovercraft Development Limited, and Chairman, Ripplecraft Limited, Southampton; J. V. Dacie, Professor of Haematology, Postgraduate Medical School, London; N. A. de Bruyne, Managing Director,