

most important factor in Britain's economic development—the rate of investment in new plant and equipment. For too long investment in Britain has been insufficient. Economic growth at the upper end of the scale—4 per cent a year or more—will be possible only if there is a substantial increase in investment, as the document admits. But it produces no recipe for encouraging investment by private industry, beyond what is already provided by the regional economic policy.

UNIVERSITIES

**Expansion Slowed Down**

BRITISH universities can expect an average annual growth rate in the next few years of only three per cent—just under a quarter of that enjoyed over the past five years. The University Grants Committee reveals this in its *Annual Survey for 1967–68* (HMSO, 2s 3d), the first year of the new quinquennium. In 1967–68 there were 200,121 full-time students, which was more than the emergency expansion target of 197,000 set by the Robbins Committee in November 1963. This means that in the past five years the universities have expanded at an average rate of 13 per cent a year, but between now and 1972 the Government has agreed to an increase of only 20,000–25,000; the crash expansion programme is over.

The survey gives details of the supplementary allocations of funds made to twelve universities from reserves set aside during the initial distribution of the quinquennial grant, and of the £286,400 spent on “pump-priming” projects involving collaboration between universities and industry. Up to October 1968 the UGC's Sub-Committee on University/Industry Collaboration had received twenty-six applications and approved seventeen of them, ranging from the appointment of an industrial liaison officer at Oxford and Surrey to the initiation of a new type of interdisciplinary PhD course at Aston.

The effect of inflation on university recurrent grants, which are decided five years in advance, is particularly serious at times of economic squeeze. As a result the committee has decided to adopt a procedure for considering each year the extent of inflation so that it can if necessary ask the Government for further funds. After consultation with the Department of Education and Science, the committee has agreed to review the situation each September, relying heavily on the Index of University Costs (now maintained by Professor J. A. C. Brown of the University of Bristol) so as to be able to make submissions to the Government at the beginning of the academic year in October.

The distribution of departmental expenditure derived from the returns for 1966–67 is shown in the table. Since the 1966–67 academic year the UGC has also asked the universities to show the apportionment of academic staff time between undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, research and administration. But because of the misgivings of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals about the reliability of the returns, the UGC has agreed in principle to drop this line of enquiry. Instead it will accept the vice-chancellors' suggestion of a much more thorough enquiry addressed periodically to a sample of Britain's academics. During the year the UGC and the vice-

	U.g. teaching %	P.g. teaching %	Research %	Other %
Arts	50.9	10.5	27.5	11.1
Social studies	44.7	15.9	27.1	12.3
Education	9.7	55.3	21.7	13.3
Physical sciences	33.2	20.8	35.2	7.8
Biological sciences	38.8	17.5	35.3	8.4
Engineering	43.9	19.7	28.1	8.3
Pre-clinical medicine and dentistry	39.7	13.9	38.7	7.7
Clinical medicine	21.2	19.6	33.8	19.4
Clinical dentistry	51.7	9.1	26.0	13.2

chancellors also reached agreement about setting up a central record of all university students and staff. By 1973 it is hoped that the University Central Council on Admissions will have a computerized record of all students and most staff. A policy group consisting of representatives of the UGC, the DES and the vice-chancellors will consider requests for access to the record.

The painful results of the Government's cutback in capital expenditure are saved to the end of the report, which is Sir John Wolfenden's swansong as chairman of the UGC. In January 1968 the Government announced a reduction of £3.25 million spread over the academic years beginning in 1968 and 1969. To effect these savings the UGC deferred by a year £5.5 million of building work. Then in July 1968 the UGC was asked to prune capital expenditure yet again. As a result of its letter of August 1 to the vice-chancellors, £10 million of work was deferred for a year, and as a consequence the projects scheduled to begin in 1969–70 had to be completely revised to keep below the limit of £29 million set by the Government; in the three academic years from 1967–69, capital spending will amount to £79.6 million instead of the £95.1 million originally expected.

RESEARCH COUNCILS

**Growth Rates Confused**

THE Vote on Account, an annual exercise in confusion organized by the British Treasury apparently for its own amusement, has once again contrived to give the wrong impression. The figures published last week for research council budgets in *Nature* (221, 790; 1969) are not directly comparable; the 1968–69 figures are

	1968–69 (£ million)	1969–70 (£ million)	Increase in real terms (per cent)
Science Research Council	42.127	45.844	3.8
Medical Research Council	15.311	17.141	6.6
Agricultural Research Council	13.483	14.663	0.8
Natural Environment Research Council	9.193	11.725	20.4