

OLD WORLD

Birth of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils

THE cultural argument for scientific research is, these days, not sufficient to justify the spending of enormous amounts of money on research, according to the third and final report of the Council for Scientific Policy published last week (Cmnd 5117, HMSO, £0.24).

The CSP, which has been wound up as part of the government's decision on science policy last July, is to be replaced next month by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils. For the first year of its existence, the chairman of the board will be Sir Frederick Dainton, chairman of the CSP since 1970. The members of the board include the executive heads of the research councils, senior scientists of user departments and independent members.

In coming to terms with reality the CSP says that it recognises that science must compete for funds with other public needs and that claims for such funds must be judged not "only on their own merits but also in relation to the needs and objectives of society".

Nevertheless, the CSP holds that the planned expansion rate for science in Britain will not be adequate in a few years time to maintain "the same continuing level of scientific activity". The predictions for 1974-75 are for the science budget to increase in real terms over 1973-74 by less than two per cent. This is to be compared with a 4.2 per cent increase in 1972-73 and 13.3 per cent in the halcyon days of 1966-67.

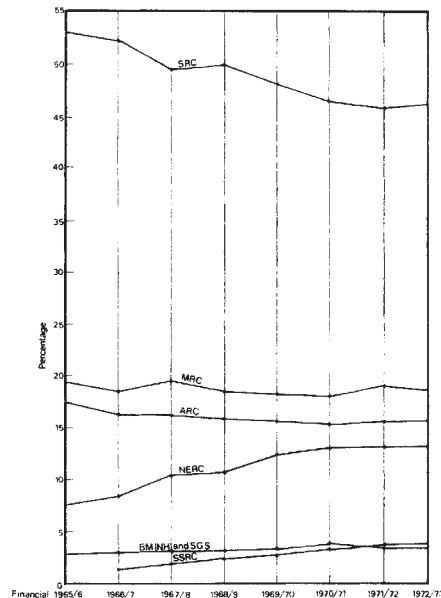
Even though the increased budget is adjusted to account for inflation, it is not automatically adjusted to take into account higher salaries and the increasing cost of building and scientific equipment for which, in particular, increasing sophistication adds costs over and above those allowed by inflation.

The CSP views the prospect of a possible real decrease in the level of support of scientific activity with some distress and it points out that this is likely to occur at a time when the "demands on science are accelerating".

Stated British government policy on the financial support for science in Britain during the next few years is inconsistent with the views of the ministers for science of the OECD countries, says the report. Last year the OECD, which includes Britain, agreed that the 1970s would "require the expansion of research, development and innovation activities to meet social needs such as environmental policy, health, education and urban development". One of the fears of the CSP, unless there is a change in policy, is

that in a few years time important activities will have to be sacrificed with the result that the research councils will not be able to meet pressing demands for new research.

Since the previous report of the council in 1967, the Natural Environment Research Council has received an increasing percentage of the total budget allocated to the research councils (see figure). This, says the CSP, is in accordance with its policy quickly to bring the state of research in the environmental sciences up to that of the other councils. The Social Science Research Council since its inception in 1966 also experienced a rapid increase in its budget during the first few years of its life but that increase has levelled off in the past two years. The CSP says that even more support should be given to the SSRC, especially because more than half its budget goes on



Distribution of the science votes.

International Chess

THE team from the Soviet Union recorded its eleventh successive victory at the recent biannual Chess Olympiad held in Skopje, Yugoslavia. The team (consisting of Petrosyan, Korchnoy, Smyslov, Tal, Karpov and Savon) was certainly the strongest in the competition since it included three ex-world champions and on paper did not seem to require the services of yet another ex-world champion, Spassky, who was tired after his match with Fischer. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union had rather greater difficulty in fending off its rivals than in earlier years and managed to take the lead only in the later stages of the finals. They succeeded in this largely through the fine form of Tal and Karpov who achieved the best individual scores on their respective boards.

The Hungarian team came second and the Yugoslavs were third. Curiously, this placing of the first three teams was the same as it had been in the previous Olympiad held in Siegen two years ago. It is noticeable that the most successful teams in these events are generally from Eastern Europe.

The first Chess Olympiad was held in London in 1927 when sixteen teams took part, but since the resumption of these events in 1950 there has been a marked increase in the countries eager to participate in them. One result of this expansion has been that the length of the tournament itself has had to be

increased and the Skopje event lasted about four weeks. A second result was the necessity to organize the tournament into sets of preliminary qualifying sections rather than on an all-play-all structure. At Skopje there were eight teams in each section, and only the top two teams from each section assembled to form a "finals" group of sixteen teams.

The United States team came as low as ninth this year due largely to the withdrawal of three of their star players (including Fischer) on the pretext of insufficient financial inducements. Their performance was a far cry from former years—for instance the American team came first in no less than four Olympiads during the 1930s. The Soviet Union, of course, did not compete in these earlier tournaments and has only demonstrated its chess supremacy since the Second World War.

The only players to challenge the dominance of the Eastern European nations at Skopje were the West Germans and they finished fifth in the competition. Their success was chiefly due to their top board, Hubner, who scored the best percentage of all the top boards, although he was rather fortunate to win a game against Petrosyan on the time limit owing to a faulty clock.

The chess Olympiads have retained their popularity over the years as they give the opportunity for all the best players in the world to assemble together under one roof in order to display their particular skills under the guise of national prestige.—J.P.