

training research students whose numbers increase every year.

The new Advisory Board for the Research Councils will differ from its predecessor in that many of its members will represent customers and contractors in Lord Rothschild's terms. Its functions are to advise on civil science with particular reference to the research council system and its articulation with the universities and government departments; to advise on national and international activities, to advise on the allocation of the science budget among the research councils and other bodies and to promote liaison between the councils and the users of their research.

ANGLO-SOVIET SCIENCE

Hopes Revived

THE ten-day visit to Britain by a delegation from the Soviet State Committee for Science and Technology which ended last week, sponsored by the DTI and the CBI, will, it is hoped, revitalise the plans for cooperation in science and technology between the two countries first established by agreement in 1968 and reestablished under the Permanent Soviet-UK Intergovernmental Commission for Cooperation in the Fields of Applied Science, Technology, Trade and Economic Relations, which was established in January 1971.

Since September 1971, the scientific and technological activities of this commission have lapsed somewhat. But the visit to London of the Soviet delegation, led by Mr Dmitrii N. Pronskii, head of the foreign relations department of the State Committee for Science and Technology, seems a promising omen for reestablishing the commission.

In January 1971, when the joint commission was established, it took within its scope the working groups on specific technological problems which were established during 1967-68 under the auspices of the CBI and the Soviet State Committee. These had joint chairmen from Britain and the Soviet Union and dealt with cooperation in such fields as the automobile industry, industrial pollution, patents, standards, scientific instruments, medical equipment and instrumentation, information technology and machine tools. A prime purpose of the joint commission, as originally envisaged, was to review annually the work of these groups in the light of the 1968 agreement.

None of the working groups has met for more than a year, however, and some of them have lapsed into what is called a "care and maintenance" basis. Their revitalization, however, would be a matter for the joint commission to discuss when it next meets.

Another possibility for cooperation which has not so much lapsed as never become implemented, is that envisaged by article three of the 1968 agreement, which provides for exchange visits between Britain and the Soviet Union of applied scientists and technologists "to gain experience in industrial research institutes and industrial enterprises". Theoretically, this should supplement the more active arrangement between the Royal Society and Soviet Academy of Sciences, and should provide a framework within which experts not covered by the Royal Society-Academy agreement (which is primarily for "pure" scientists) could gain short-term experience in applied research institutes not belonging to the academy.

In the few cases where exchanges have been arranged within this framework, they have been "self-financing" as far as the British side is concerned, the scientists concerned paying their own fares to Moscow but being fully sponsored by their Russian hosts during their stay. A few visits of Soviet technologists to Britain has also taken place on a similar basis. Clearly, the implementation of the framework of article three on a more regular basis would be greatly welcomed by applied scientists and technologists in both Britain and the Soviet Union, and it is hoped that the joint commission will raise this matter at its next meeting.

The timing of this next meeting (originally intended for January 1972) was one of the chief topics of discussion at the recent talks. Accordingly, the agreement by both sides to reconvene the commission at an early date is a promising sign of future activity. The problem is not, as has been supposed, one of introducing new "machinery" of technological cooperation and exchange, and no such new arrangements have, in fact, been proposed. What is needed is the better implementation of the existing possibilities. The need to discuss these possibilities has been accepted by both countries. It is fairly clear that the next meeting will take place in Moscow, and a tentative date of spring 1973 has emerged from last week's talks.

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Meeting Rothschild

THE Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are to have a joint body to advise them on research and development. The Joint Consultative Organization, as it is known, will replace the ARC's present advisory committees and will advise the council, the ministry and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland on

the scope and scale of all their government financed research and development.

The new organization, which meets the requirements of last July's white paper on government research and development, will link the research council and the government departments more closely than before. It provides for five research and development boards, reporting to the council and the departments, covering animals, arable crops and forage, horticulture, food safety and nutrition technology, and engineering structures. The boards will decide the priorities within their own field, and the detailed consideration of individual projects will be left to research and development committees which will be appointed by the board.

The new arrangements also provide for *ad hoc* working parties which can be set up to investigate specific subjects in depth, and for *ad hoc* ways and means panels to advise the boards and committees on the availability of resources when new projects are proposed.

The Agricultural Research Council was at pains to point out this week that the proposals are still embryonic. The number of committees that will support the boards has yet to be decided and full details of the machinery and membership of the various bodies have not yet been worked out. It is intended, however, that scientific representation on both the research and development boards and committees will be strong, including the directors of the council's and ministry's research institutes and senior scientific staff.

The organization's work will be purely advisory; its recommendations will be passed to the departments and the council which will each decide how to spend its own money. There are no plans for a body directly to coordinate the work of the council and the departments, but it is intended that the secretary of the ARC will be represented on the requirements board of the ministry and that the Chief Scientist of the ministry will be represented on the council. In this way it is hoped that the actual decisions on what research should be supported and to what extent will not result in overlapping between the ARC and the ministry.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food seems to have gone a long way to meet the recent criticisms of the Institution of Professional Civil Servants that its new chief scientist would not be master in his own house. The IPCS says it is satisfied with the arrangements now proposed. The ministry says the present arrangements were always those intended—but does so in such a stuffed shirt way that its good sense if not its credibility must be in doubt.