HIGHER EDUCATION

Carnegie Reappraisal

by our Washington Correspondent

THE Carnegie Commission on Higher Education has come up with the eminently sensible suggestion that federal funds for science should be provided more steadily than they have been in the past, and that research funds for the social sciences, humanities and arts should be substantially increased. Unfortunately, however, the report fails to provide much justification for those suggestions, putting them forward as an article of faith. And that is unlikely to cut much ice with the keepers of the Federal government's purse strings.

The recommendations are contained in the latest of the commission's analyses of US higher education, a look at the purposes and performance of American colleges and universities. (*The Purposes and the Performance of Higher Education in the United States*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, $2.45.) The chief thesis of the report is that higher education in the United States is going through a period of reexamination almost as intense as that of a century ago, when the universities first started expanding and began to include research and service to society as part of their functions. The commission believes that the performance of the universities in some areas, for example, in advancing human capability in society at large, has been superior, whereas they have failed in other areas, for example, in enlarging educational justice for the postsecondary age group as a whole.

The value of university research "while clearly substantial, is impossible to calculate with any precision", the report states. The commission does, however, quote one study which comes up with the unusual measure that advances of knowledge have, during the past few years, contributed almost a quarter of the growth of total national income and more than one third of the increase of national income per person employed. "Such contributions require an adequate and steady supply of research funds, particularly from the federal government", the commission states, and considers "quite shortsighted" the recent reductions in funds available for basic research in the universities.

The commission clearly comes down on the side of those who argue that research funds should be distributed on the basis of productivity and proven excellence, rather than to meet arbitrary geographical criteria, for it recommends that "funds for basic research should be concentrated on highly productive centers and individuals". It also suggests, without any argument to justify the suggestion, that federal research funds spent in the universities should climb back to the level of about 0.3 per cent of gross national product, the only stated rationale being that such a level prevailed in 1967–68, the year of peak funding for science and technology.

Such recommendations are unlikely to evoke much dissent, at least in the universities, but the commission treads on more controversial grounds in its analysis of the place of secret research on campus. It flatly states that "all secret research should be eliminated from all campuses as a matter of national policy, except under quite unusual circumstances". The rationale behind that suggestion is that secret research is at odds with the inherent nature of academic life, "for secrecy is abhorrent to the search for truth when results must be open to analysis and comment to test whether they be truth or not". Aside from that suggestion, however, the commission misses a good chance to shed some philosophical light on the subject of secret research, and in particular it does not provide any discussion of where secret research should be carried out.

It can, however, be argued that the report is an overall look at the purposes and performance of higher education, and that it is not designed to provide a blueprint for university development. That being the case, the final chapter, discussing possible future trends in higher education, should be the most interesting. In short, the commission argues that the universities are subject to two opposite forces. One, largely internal to higher education, is the pressure to return to what the commission calls an "emphasis on values", and "an adventure in trying to shape society —not be shaped by it". The other is the move towards closer ties to society, with public authorities increasing their ties to higher education through research funding, student support and so on.

It is no surprise to find that the report suggests that the latter force will prove to be the stronger. Nevertheless, the commission sees no "special problems for the continuation of 'pure scholarship' provided academic freedom is protected against internal and external attacks upon it, and a reasonable supply of resources is available".

NSF takes the Reins

A SMALL science and technology policy office has been established in the National Science Foundation to provide support for Dr Guyford-Stever in his new role as science adviser. Dr Russell Drew, a former member of the staff of the Office of Science and Technology who is now head of the Office of Naval Research Branch office in London, has been appointed head of the office. He will be joined by at least four of his former OST colleagues, Daniel De Simone, Edward J. Burger jun, F. Gilman Blake, and Hylan B. Lyon jun. The functions of the OST were formally transferred to Dr Stever at the end of June.

The final size and budget of the Science and Technology Policy Office have not yet been decided (the NSF budget for 1974–5 contained no money or staff positions specifically for the new office), but Dr Stever is due to testify before the House Committee on Science and Astronautics on July 17, so presumably the details will be worked out by then.

Training Grants Saved

BIOMEDICAL scientists have won at least a partial victory in their long and vocal fight to keep alive the training grants and fellowship programmes of the National Institutes of Health. Dr Charles C. Edwards, the Federal Government's top health official, told Senator Edward M. Kennedy's Health Subcommittee last week that the Administration is reconsidering its plans to phase out the programmes. A decision on how much money will be available for them in the 1974 fiscal year (which began on July 1) is expected soon.

The Administration's proposal to phase out the training and fellowship programmes was announced in January, when the budget was unveiled, the chief argument used for ending the programmes was that since funding levels for biomedical research have levelled off, there is no longer any need to train large numbers of young medical scientists. The laws of supply and demand should be sufficient to ensure that the numbers of new scientists are matched to the numbers of jobs available.

But those arguments have been bitterly attacked by groups such as the National Cancer Advisory Board, the Association of American Medical Colleges, the Federation of American Scientists and many individuals. The day before Edwards announced the reprieve, for example, a group of scientists took the opportunity during hearings on medical ethics held by Kennedy's subcommittee to argue for the programmes to be reinstated because of the danger of losing good scientists.