

OLD WORLD

Medical Research Council Surfaces Intact

A SLIGHTLY grudging admission that things may turn out to be all right after all characterizes the Medical Research Council's first annual report since the government's white paper on a *Framework for Government Research and Development*, published last July (MRC Annual Report, HMSO, £0.90).

Staunchly defending the need for policy making in fundamental and applied research to be kept together, the council states that the Department of Health and Social Security has recognized this need. In its own inimitable verbosity the council declares that "good grounds exist for the hope that a system will develop within the new framework which will take full account of the problems to be faced and which will provide for coordination and collaboration between the departments and the council without detracting from the council's independence".

With a slight air of defiance which suits well the council that fought the Rothschild changes hardest, the MRC says that the white paper "may affect the practical policies that the Medical Research Council adopts". But it can neither "alter the inherent characteristics of scientific research" nor diminish the council's responsibility to advance medical science.

The council concedes that "there is a need to improve the planning of short-term research designed to answer questions of immediate significance" but warns that there must be no significant diversion of resources from longer term research to short term objectives "if the effects of such major afflictions as cancer, mental disorder and cardiovascular disease are to be moderated".

But once it has got past the flagwaving, the council explains that under the new organization four members of the council can be nominated by departments that have an interest in the council's work. The Secretary of State for Education and Science is to decide which departments name the four members. Meanwhile the council is reviewing its own board and committee structure, so that full details of precisely how the departments and the MRC plan to work together are not yet available. It has, however, been agreed that the departmental Health Services Research Board will act as an adviser to the council, while the council's committees and boards will advise the departments.

Turning from politics to science, the council states that arterial disease, environmental factors in disease, mental health and microbial disease are being kept under continuing review "because

of their social importance", while it wants to expand research on cancer, drug misuse and dependence, particularly in relation to smoking and alcoholism, and population problems, because "there is now both the need and the opportunity to take positive steps".

The council also hopes that the closer involvement of government departments that will follow the white paper will allow for more clinical research.

The report also shows that the MRC's rate of expenditure is increasing ever more slowly. The transfers of funds to

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

DTI tells all

EXPENDITURE on research and development by the Department of Trade and Industry is to increase by £9 million this year. In the first of its annual reports on its research and development activities, the DTI reveals that its expenditure on research and development was £57 million last year and is to rise to £66 million in 1973-74. The report also provides a detailed account of the working of the new requirements boards which were set up last year in the wake—although not at the instigation—of the government's white paper on research and development.

This new account of expenditure meets an undertaking given by the government to the Select Committee on Science and Technology that all departments would publish annual reports on their research and development activities.

The report emphasizes that the requirements boards purpose is first to identify those areas which will most benefit from government-supported R

and D, and second to determine the objectives and balance of research and development programmes to support departmental policies. "The initiative for new research may come from the boards themselves" the report says, "or from DTI customer divisions, or they may be bids for support from potential contractors".

Nine requirements boards have been established so far, and various special committees—some appointed on an *ad hoc* basis are to look after work that does not fall directly to any one of the boards—for example work at some of the research associations or at the Analytical Research and Development Unit at Harwell.

Contracts are placed with the DTI's own industrial research establishments, the UKAEA, the research associations, industrial organizations, the universities and research councils. The boards have also taken responsibility for the £1.69 million of work—on oceanographic sciences and universal resources—that the Department took over from the Natural Environment Research Council on April 1 under the changes outlined in the white paper.

Analysis of DTI Research and Development Gross Expenditure by Main Objectives

Objective	1972-73	1973-74
	£000*	
1 Nuclear R & D (safety)	74	165
4 Exploration and exploitation of the earth	685	996
4.1 Soil and substratum	—	1,690 †
4.2 Seas and oceans		
5 Protection and promotion of health (e.g. control of pollutants)	1,976	1,859
6 Planning of environment	320	525
8 Promotion of industrial productivity and technology:		
8.0 General	4,884	5,113
8.1 Fuel (including electrical power)	75	122
8.2.1 Chemical	224	244
8.2.2 Metals	445	734
8.2.3 Electronics	1,087	1,652
8.2.4 Aerospace:		
Civil aeronautics	13,910	17,510
Space technology	9,055	13,930
8.2.5 Other transport	2,016	2,245
8.2.7 Mechanical engineering products	3,853	3,005
8.2.9 Miscellaneous products	2,203	2,321
8.9 Other research	1,345	1,633
9 Computer science and automation	12,425	8,749
Miscellaneous (grants to Research Associations, etc.)	3,140	4,183
	57,717	66,721

*The figures given for both 1972-73 and for 1973-74 are estimates.

†Work transferred from NERC on April 1 following last year's white paper *A Framework for Government Research and Development*.