

## Short Notes

### Education

ONLY 3.7% of Britain's expenditure on educational research goes on further education. This is one of the facts revealed today in a report, *Resources for Educational Research and Development*, published by the National Foundation for Educational Research.

The percentage of the total education budget spent on research and development on education in Britain (0.12%) is higher than in some European countries. In the United States, however, \$250 million was spent in 1968, amounting to 0.31% of the total available for education.

The league table of sponsors of research into education is, not surprisingly, headed by the Schools Council which during 1968-70 spent £609,000 a year on this type of research. The Department of Education and Science comes next with an annual expenditure of £464,000. The Nuffield Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, the Leverhulme Trust, the National Foundation for Educational Research and the Ford Foundation complete the table of supporters. The report points out that there is uniformity in the machinery within these organisations for dealing with applications for grants but that the outcomes of research applications may vary widely. The report adds that the reason why applications fail to win approval is not always clear and "it is impossible to establish how decisions are made concerning research applications".

### UKAEA

NUCLEAR fusion and plasma physics on a European scale were boosted this week with formal signing of a contract of collaboration between the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority.

The contract merges the authority's fusion work into the existing five-year programme of Euratom which is due to run until 1975.

The aim of the programme is to build large fusion experiments and finally a prototype fusion reactor. Studies of a large Tokamak experiment are currently under way at Culham, the UKAEA's fusion laboratory, led by Dr Paul Rebut of the French Commission de l'Energie Atomique. A detailed proposal for construction of the large experiment is likely to be put to the Council of Ministers in about a year's time. The cost will probably be between £10 and £20 million.

This week's contract also provides for Euratom to pay one quarter of the cost of the existing British research programme—currently running at £17 million over three years.

The signing of the Euratom contract

was announced by Sir John Hill, chairman of the UKAEA, introducing the authority's annual report. Commenting on the recent incident at Windscale when 34 men were contaminated with radiation, Sir John said that the accident was "a very small one". It was, he said, the sort of incident that would cause no comment if it occurred in an ordinary chemical factory.

### Mercury Pollution

THE Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has recommended that all OECD countries should make a concerted effort to reduce the discharge of mercury compounds into the environment. The organisation has also called for governments to exchange information on mercury usage and on measures taken to abate pollution. The next step according to the OECD is to attempt to obtain agreement on the maximum mercury levels to be allowed in industrial discharges or products.

Ten thousand tonnes of mercury were produced world wide in 1969 and the OECD countries produced 66% of this. By 1972 this output is estimated to have increased by 20%. But only about 20% of the mercury is recycled.

Mercury is used mostly in electrolysis in order to produce chlorine and caustic soda. In agriculture it is used as a bactericide and fungicide for seed. As far as this latter use is concerned, the discharge of mercury into the environment can be halted if some of the newer (mercury-free) seed dressings are brought into common use.

### Research Spending by MAFF

THE programmes of all agriculture, fisheries and food research establishments are being reviewed to highlight those projects which are of specific interest to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The ministry's first annual report on its research and development activities, published this week, reveals that public expenditure in this field was £40 million in 1972-73. Seven and a half million of that was money transferred from the Agricultural and Natural Environment Research Councils' budgets to the ministry. But this money has been spent entirely with the research councils from which it came, and the report reveals that the whole of the transferred funds will be spent on commissioning work from the research councils up to 1976.

The report also calms some fears expressed last year when the white paper *A Framework for Government Research and Development* was published. "Commissions will not be confined to short-term applied work," the report states. "Depending on the objective, they may embrace basic as well as applied research and be of any duration".

Details of the ministry's revised

organisation for fisheries research are given, with the information that the emphasis on fisheries work has changed during the year. Entry to the EEC has resulted in more work on inshore resources to ensure that the interests of British fishermen are fully protected; next year's law of the sea conference may radically change fishing limits and work is underway to predict the effects on the British industry of the changes under consideration; and work on fish disease, monitoring marine pollution and reviving the North Sea herring fisheries have all received a boost.

### Facts and Figures

STATISTICS released last week by the Department of Education and Science reveal that the numbers of undergraduates and postgraduates in British universities have increased from 114,758 in 1957-58 to 258,640 in 1971-72. In the same period the number of professors has increased from 1,505 to 3,487 with lecturers increasing in numbers from 7,336 to 19,192. But senior lecturers have enlarged their ranks threefold in the fourteen year period. There were 6,032 of them in 1971-72, but only 1,925 in 1957-58.

### Guinea Pigs

ANYONE interested in a ten-day holiday—with pay, or at least pocket-money—should contact the Common Cold Unit in Salisbury. Not only is the unit prepared to feed and bed volunteers during their stay but travelling expenses will also be met, and a princely sum of £0.35p a day will be doled out to each volunteer. And, believe it or not, the chances of catching a cold are only one in three. The infections, if they do occur, according to the holiday brochure put out by the Medical Research Council "are normally minor and brief".

It all sounds too good to be true. The vacancies at the holiday home in Salisbury are in October. If any reader feels that the onset of the new term with hordes of keen graduate students is too much then the Common Cold Unit will be glad to provide a haven. There is no reason to be lonely, for volunteers are put up in "comfortable well-heated flats—in pairs or threes".

## Nature in 1974

As from January 1974, *Nature* will be published once a week, as announced on August 17 (*Nature*, 244, 381). The subscription will be £22 in Britain and elsewhere except United States and Canada where it will be £28. New orders placed before the end of the year, however, will be accepted at this year's prices of £16 and £20 respectively.