

Short Notes

Geophysics Comparison

AN interesting, even if outdated, comparison of the systems of teaching and research in Earth science departments in Britain and the United States is to appear in the next issue of *Comments on Earth Sciences: Geophysics*. In 1970 a questionnaire was distributed to 25 British based Earth scientists who had spent a substantial part of their careers in the United States. The questionnaire asked these scientists to grade, on a scale of -2 to +2, different aspects of Earth science departments in the two countries. A -2 mark implied that the system in the USA is very superior whereas a +2 mark implied the superiority of the British system. It comes as no surprise to most, perhaps, that the system in the USA came out in most aspects to be better, in the opinion of the 25 scientists polled. In particular, it was felt that in the United States there is much more encouragement and opportunity for the scientists to present papers at professional meetings. The British system is only considered to be superior in a few aspects, one of which was that the quality of students, at least in 1970, was better in Britain. Surprisingly, there also seemed to be more technicians available in Britain than in the United States.

Professor Keith Runcorn of the University of Newcastle on Tyne, who with Professor N. D. Watkins and Dr Peter Smith organised the questionnaire, said last week that it is important to realise that the opinions reported did refer to three years ago and that the tight money situation in the United States might bring out different opinions if the poll were carried out now.

The questionnaire has, however, had one effect. The Education Committee of the Geological Society of London and the Committee for Higher Education in the Earth Sciences are jointly organising a symposium next May on post-graduate teaching in the Earth Sciences. It is proposed to discuss the implications of the questionnaire at this meeting. It would be of real value if a more up-to-date questionnaire could be made available by then. It will inevitably be asked to what extent the financial squeeze in the United States and the growing awareness of the defects of the British system of post-graduate teaching has affected the situation in the past three or four years.

Student Grants

BOTH the Department of Education and Science and the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals had something to say about student grants last week. The committee issued some appropriate advice to the department about student grants. The department,

on the other hand, increased the allowance in respect of the first child of a student who has no wife or husband, from £2.02 to £4.81 a week.

The department points out that its main awards scheme is designed to "discourage students from taking on commitments—such as marrying and raising a family—after their course has started". Under this scheme many students find that they are not eligible for dependent's allowances as these are only provided for students who are both married and over 25 years of age (21 for women) or who have supported themselves for three years before their course started. The students who are left out in the cold by these conditions can apply to their local education authorities but if the LEA turns down the request the student then has to apply to the Supplementary Benefits Commission. The new arrangements will ensure that uniform treatment is accorded such students in future.

There is no doubt that the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals feels that students are under-supported. It points out that in recent years the government has begun to threaten the principle that grants should be available to cover the basic maintenance costs "by fixing grants which fall short of basic living costs".

This, says the committee, is in direct conflict with government policy which requires universities to make economic charges for board and lodging. In this respect the committee points out that student protest directed against the universities "is misconceived". "It wastes time and money on conflicts which are not created by universities and which are not in their power to resolve."

The advice from the committee to the DES is that student grants should be fixed at realistic levels and reviewed annually to take into account changes in the cost of living. Such statements are bound to find favour with students although the department might well find the exuberance of the committee embarrassing.

Scientific Information

THE Office for Scientific and Technical Information (OSTI) after eight years within the Department of Education and Science will be transferred to the *aegis* of the British Library next April. Once this has been done OSTI will extend its activities, which now include the natural and social sciences, to cover also the arts and the humanities.

But there are some aspects of OSTI's present work which will not go along to the British Library next April. Responsibility for the coordination of national effort in scientific and technical information will remain within the DES, as will the allocation of postgraduate training awards in information science, while

the Science Research Council will take over the support of critical data compilation.

Daresbury Decision "imminent"

A DECISION from the Department of the Environment on whether the nuclear structure facility planned for Daresbury can be built is "imminent" a spokesman for the Science Research Council said this week. A public inquiry on the facility was held in July this year at which Professor Alick Ashmore, Director of the Daresbury Laboratory, gave evidence along with a number of his staff and other SRC witnesses. Other witnesses who spoke for the project, which will provide the SRC with a 20 to 30 million volt electrostatic accelerator, included the Cheshire County Planning Officer.

The inquiry resulted from Mr Geoffrey Rippon, Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment, calling the plans in, after Cheshire County Council had approved them. Objections came chiefly from the Daresbury villagers as the proposed accelerator's tower would be seen from the village, particularly from the church. Feeling was that with Runcorn and Warrington both expanding fast the Daresbury area should be protected as a small island of relatively unspoilt countryside.

Assuming Mr Rippon approves the plans soon, only six months will have been lost as a result of the inquiry. If any major changes are recommended, however, the whole project would have to be seriously rethought. At the inquiry Dr R. G. P. Voss, deputy director of Daresbury, argued strongly on technical grounds that the accelerator should not be turned over on its side—the position used to date for most other electrostatic accelerators which have been built, for example, the 15 million volt machines built by the High Voltage Engineering Corporation of Burlington, Massachusetts. If Dr Voss's case has not carried the day, it is possible that the old arguments as to where the facility ought to be sited will have to be reopened.

Tea and Sympathy

TWO new additions to the Soviet cuisine were announced this week, a high-protein, high-vitamin content "delicatessen pâté" of Antarctic krill, and an instant tea produced from waste clippings of the tea-bush, said by the tasters to be indistinguishable from a well-known American brand made from "the usual leaf".

Credit where Credit is Due

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Acknowledgment at the end of a *Sunday Times* colour supplement article October 14.