

WORD is getting about that next year's federal grants for research in Canada will be greater than they have been for some years. How much greater no one will say until the official announcement is made (possibly in February), but they will probably increase at least a little in real terms.

Since 1975 will be the year of the new federal granting structure, this may do something to restore the flagging faith of Canadian scientists in their government's interest in science—flagging chiefly because of the steady decrease in research funds available relative to costs and inflation.

At the same time, student enrolment has risen steeply. In six years, starting with 1968, the total Canadian student population increased by about 30%. But in the same period, biology enrolments alone, for example, increased almost 130%. And in eastern Canadian universities the increases were even greater—45% for total enrolment and 190% for biology. During the same period there was an increase of 70% in the number of full-time biology teachers.

But neither operating budgets nor research grants have kept pace. One chairman of a biology department reported a doubled student enrolment in five years coupled with a decline of 20% in his operating budget.

Since 1969-70, the total increase in parliamentary appropriations to the National Research Council (NRC) of Canada for research grants and graduate scholarships has been only 7%. Yet during the same period the cost of research is estimated to have risen by about 50%, and inflation in the cost of scientific equipment and materials has been even greater.

Thus the effective investment in research covered by the NRC grants has actually been reduced by more than a third. The Medical Research Council did little better.

Pronouncements by the government that reorganisation of the granting councils is going to take place this year have done little to reassure the scientists. Last February's Speech from the Throne, in which the announcements were made, "indicates only a concern for procedure and administration", said Dr J. A. Morrison, Director of McMaster University's Institute for Materials Research. "If the present trends continue, there may not be any academic research to administer within five years."

Now it looks as though the government intends to modify its policy somewhat. Late last year, the government approved a supplementary grant of \$2.5 million for the Medical Research Council. And in a House of Commons session last November, C. M. Drury, Minister of State for Science and Tech-

## Canadian government ponders MOSST's mission

from David Spurgeon, Ottawa

nology and former Treasury Board President, indicated that the situation was being studied sympathetically. Given the increase in prices and inflation, he acknowledged, "it would be necessary to raise the amounts [of grants] for university research."

Another minister, Hugh Faulkner, the Secretary of State whose department is responsible for grants for the social sciences and the humanities, tried to reassure academics on the reorganisation of the granting bodies in a speech to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada; this is another matter that has been vexing them recently.

"No radical changes in the granting policies and practices are sought," he said. "... I can assure you that in drafting the bill, which will be tabled in the course of this session of Parliament [probably not before April or May] every possible effort is being made to take into account the fundamental concerns of the academic community."

The most effective guarantee of the acceptability and effectiveness of these councils will lie in the quality of those appointed to them, the minister said, and "the government intends to give its closest attention to this matter before making its final decisions."

Such reassurances were needed because, altogether, 1974 was not a very good year for instilling in scientists confidence in the government's approach to science policy. Part of the problem was that everybody was trying to figure out what the new Ministry of State for Science and Technology (MOSST) was up to. Conceived in controversy and born in discord (in 1971) the MOSST seemed to be suffering from an identity crisis.

The case was admirably—if rather

*Drury: last-ditch effort.*



critically—set out in a report published by another government creation, the Science Council of Canada, which has the independence to hire consultants, who do studies for it which it then publishes. This one was called *Knowledge, Power and Public Policy* (Science Council of Canada Background Study No. 31, Information Canada, Ottawa). Its authors were Peter Aucoin, a political scientist, and Richard D. French, a science historian.

The study examined the concept of the ministries of state, which were established with the authority of a 1970 bill to be responsible for designated policy fields not encompassed within the jurisdiction of any single existing government portfolio. The two such ministries studied were science and technology, and urban affairs.

"The ministers of state", say Aucoin and French, "would be faced with a novel task. The organisations that would serve them would not be departments in any traditional sense, but rather ministries whose initiatives would inevitably and consistently involve the responsibilities of other ministries. Fundamental to the notion of a ministry of state is the idea that the activities of research and policy analysis can provide an adequate basis for successful policy formulation and co-ordination. The logic underlying such a ministry derives from the 'knowledge-is-power' hypothesis: namely, that research, information and analysis will carry the day in Cabinet and Cabinet committees against the traditional sources of political and bureaucratic power."

They do not see the concept as a great success so far. Concerning the two ministries studied, they say: "Neither Ministry of State can be said to have had the kind of policy success that was envisaged when they were created." And concerning the MOSST: "The performance of the ministry in relation to the scientific and technological community can hardly be considered a success to date [early 1974]."

Aucoin and French conclude that "the most promising strategy for the MOSST may well be a more modest, more pragmatic, more incrementalist, and less visible role than heretofore", one with a non-threatening service posture rather than a directive one.

There are signs that the suggestion is being heeded. Some see Mr Drury and his deputy as having been sent to make a last-ditch effort to clear up the ministry's problems, in an attempt to determine whether it really can survive or not. And Drury is reported to have commented privately, "If you want to know what will happen to the MOSST, read the Aucoin-French report and use your common-sense." □