

# international news

## Less cash for British science

by Eleanor Lawrence

THE Science Budget recently announced for 1975-76 by the Chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils (ABRC), Sir Frederick Stewart, holds little joy for the research councils. There is still a fall in total expenditure of 1% on the figure for 1974-75 and all the research councils except the Social Science and Natural Environment Research Councils will have less money in real terms compared with this year. Even more telling is the observation that the level of spending for 1975-76 represents 6% less than expectations of a few years ago.

The total of £171 million, approved by the Secretary of State for Education and Science but still to be passed by Parliament, is split up into £13.1 million for the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), £28.9 million for the Medical Research Council (MRC), £19.2 million for the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and £96.4 million for the Science Research Council (SRC). The Social Science Research Council receives £8.7 million and the remainder goes in grants to the Royal Society and the Natural History Museum.

The ARC, the MRC and the NERC also receive substantial commissions from the appropriate government departments, under the terms of the 1972 White Paper.

But, after the present period of contraction, the ABRC is proposing a period of growth up to 1980, albeit at the modest rate of 3.5% a year for the MRC, the ARC, the NERC and the SSRC, and only 0.7% for the SRC. This reflects the feeling that the time has come to look more closely at the proportion of Science Budget taken up by 'big science' projects (in astronomy and high energy physics for example) which need costly equipment and installations



**SMALL MEANS MORE**

that will be used by only relatively few scientists. The Mark VA radiotelescope has already been vetoed and the SRC will now have to decide whether it can afford two other projects, the Northern Hemisphere Observatory (estimated to cost £12 million) and the major accelerator project (EPIC) estimated to cost around £25 million.

The ABRC's view is that, in these uncertain times, overall scientific capability should be maintained even at the expense of some of the SRC's prestigious and intellectually exciting

big science. Also, with the decrease in university funding the research councils may find themselves having to pick up bigger bills for the multitude of small projects in universities financed by research council grants but with facilities provided by the university.

Even the cautiously optimistic forward look of the ABRC could fall foul of present and forecast economic crises. The call of certain politicians for decreased public spending generally could erode even the proposed modest rate of growth. □

Annual percentage growth of the Science Budget and research councils' allocations

	1966-67	1967-68	1968-69	1969-70	1970-71	1971-72	1972-73	1973-74	1974-75	1975-76	1976-77-
ARC	7.3	12.2	7.3	3.2	7.0	3.1	3.7	4.0	-3.7	-0.6	3.5
MRC	11.6	14.9	5.1	6.9	8.1	3.6	3.6	2.7	-1.7	-1.0	3.5
NERC	17.8	20.6	13.5	20.4	10.4	5.3	4.9	4.4	-3.0	+0.2	3.5
SRC	13.2	6.9	5.4	2.9	3.8	4.8	4.1	3.2	-2.2	-2.2	0.7
SSRC	—	47.3	47.9	25.9	30.3	16.0	10.0	8.6	5.7	+6.8	3.5
Total	13.3	11.2	7.4	6.1	7.1	4.7	4.2	3.9	-2.1	-1.3	2.2

Transfers to departments under the terms of the 1972 White Paper have been included in figures for after that date.