

ciations were also received from a number of participants from all over the world.

It is incomprehensible to us why such real and true information about the ninth FEBS Congress did not appear in your journal. We think this would have indeed served international scientific relationships well.

Regarding Ms Peller's visa, the facts can be summarised briefly as follows. Ms Peller's request for a visa arrived in Budapest very late. In spite of this it was dealt with and the visa sent to Vienna, just as were a number of other visas of members of the Israeli Biochemical Society. Ms Peller arrived in Vienna a few days before her visa came through and she had not the patience to wait for it; the visa was left at the Hungarian Embassy in Vienna. I would like to mention that more than 2,000 active members from 38 countries participated in this congress and everybody who arranged their visa in due time was able to enter Hungary.

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Nutritional research

SIR,—The very real issue which concerns both John Rivers (January 10) and John Yudkin (January 31) in their recent correspondence on the Neuberger report is the balance which must be maintained between applied nutritional research into topics of human and social concern and the more basic type of research usually associated with nutritional biochemistry. There is a risk, however, that the intensity of their criticism might lead the non-nutritionist to believe that the policy makers, particularly those associated with the Medical Research Council (MRC), have shown little concern over this matter. This would be far from true and it is to correct this possible misconception that we are writing this letter.

In 1971 an MRC subcommittee, of which incidentally Professor Neuberger was a member, recommended a change in policy at the Dunn Nutritional Laboratory and this was subsequently approved by the council as follows: "The council recognise the need to lay foundations for more research designed to investigate specific nutritional problems both in the United Kingdom and overseas and they have agreed that in the future research programme of the laboratory there should be a change in emphasis from basic biochemistry towards applied nutritional studies, in particular clinical and epidemiological investigations. Biochemical research will continue in close relation with applied studies".

This policy statement became the basis of our present research pro-

gramme, all of which is related directly to a specific human or clinical problem. These studies have, however, to rely heavily on a firm backing of fundamental research, for in all too many nutritional disorders we lack the basic information to mount really effective applied programmes. Obesity is a good example. We just do not know why individual people lay down different amounts of fat on apparently similar energy intakes and expenditures. At the Dunn, obesity is being investigated on a broad front, using a whole-body calorimeter together with epidemiological studies into the functional significance of different degrees of obesity in terms of morbidity and exercise potential and metabolic studies on the relative economics of different enzyme pathways.

There is considerable interest concerning the role of dietary fibre and this, too, is the subject for a bivalent approach, defining more accurately the metabolic functions of the unavailable carbohydrates and quantifying, by epidemiological and clinical investigations, the practical benefits or disadvantages which might accrue from increasing the fibre content of the diet.

There is also concern about the nutritional status of elderly people, especially those living alone. Recent evidence has suggested the possible existence of sub-clinical riboflavin and vitamin C deficiencies, but in our present state of knowledge we do not know the real significance of the findings. Again, we have an epidemiological investigation under way to reveal the environmental and sociological factors which are causing these abnormalities, linked with laboratory research to define what they mean. Only in this way can we plan effective action should this prove necessary.

Bone disorders are also a problem of the aged and the role of vitamin D in these is likewise under intensive study.

These are just a few of the community-oriented research projects in the UK and overseas in which we are involved and in which we are trying to achieve the same sort of scientific balance.

It is perhaps unfortunate that on first appraisal the Neuberger report does seem to contain more on biochemistry than on 'social' nutrition, but closer scrutiny will show that it quite specifically states that there is a need for more research in this area as well as on other aspects of human and clinical nutrition. The positive point which comes out of the report and the criticisms it has invoked is that nutritional science is very much alive and of importance, not just in an international context but for the health and welfare of people in the UK as well. Nutrition has to be a broadly based science and

it is up to nutritional scientists to make certain their subject is able to develop along balanced lines. This is what the debate should be all about.

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SIR,—As a nutritionist who worked for more than 10 years in the Nutrition Division of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, I feel I must take issue with several statements in the Joint ARC/MRC Report on Food and Nutrition Research.

I strongly support those who have already expressed the view that the Report is excessively biased towards the cellular and subcellular level of nutrient activity, and virtually ignores the fact that nutrition is concerned primarily with the food that people eat. The opportunity has been missed for stressing the inseparable interrelationships between agriculture and nutrition, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Thus one question that urgently needs answering is whether this country can increase its food production beyond the present level that meets only about half of our consumption, and in particular how in doing so it can make the most useful contribution to human nutrition? Such a possibility of collaboration between the two Research Councils is not mentioned.

I am one of those nutritionists who have long believed that, however much research still needs to be done in such areas as the effects of nutrients on metabolism, we already know enough to seek to apply our present knowledge to large scale improvements in the health in our own country and in the rest of the world. But to do this, we need a far more aggressive attack on the problem of how to affect people's eating habits than the lukewarm attitude indicated in the report by such statements as: "On the evidence of published literature, the effect of advertising on food consumption patterns appears not to have been studied," or "It may also be desirable to find ways of changing patterns of food consumption when supplies are limited." Do we need another war, or a series of world food crises, to persuade us that this is a problem crying out for research?

In considering training for research in nutrition, the Committee has clearly not surveyed the facts, for it says that it considers that first degrees in nutrition and food science "make relatively little contribution to research potential." This is simply not true. In my work with FAO, I have for example met graduates in nutrition from Queen Elizabeth College carrying out research