correspondence

Food for thought

SIR,—Dr Magnus Pyke in his article "All the food that's fit to eat" (October 23) notes that the "Society of Public Analysts, now the Society for Analytical Chemistry", was established in the same year as the Sale of Food and Drugs Act 1875. In fact, the first president and council of the new society were elected in December 1874, and were instrumental in influencing certain amendments to the 1875 Act, which was first introduced to the House in February 1875. The society was known as the Society for Analytical Chemistry from 1954 to December 1974, and from January 1975 has continued its activities as the Analytical Division of the Chemical Society.

Yours faithfully,
F. D. GRIMMER

*The Chemical Society,
London W1, UK*

Aiding Vietnam

SIR,—In his report "Vietnamese Journey" (November 6) Arthur Galston put forward various suggestions for an American aid programme to help Vietnamese scientists. These included sending scientific literature, equipment and visiting scientists to Vietnam.

On the British scene two of these recommendations have been in operation for several years. The Medical Aid Committee for Vietnam has sent considerable quantities of current medical literature to doctors in Vietnam since 1967, and in 1973 began sending scientific literature to Professor Hieu. Many British scientific institutes have assisted us in this work by making donations, including the Biochemical Society, the Institute of Physics, the Royal Statistical Society and the Nutrition Society. Similarly many libraries, including the Library Association, now contact us when they have material which is surplus to their requirements and which we consider suitable for dispatch. All literature is sent free of charge, courtesy of the Soviet Red Cross.

Regarding scientific equipment and chemicals, the Trade Union Committee for Reconstruction in Vietnam has sent material worth some thousands of pounds to Professor Hieu for use in both the north and south of Vietnam.

On a more institutional level, Professor N. W. Pirie last year visited North Vietnam on behalf of the Royal Society and this year the British Government made a donation of scientific, medical and English literature to three institutes in Hanoi.

Several scientific institutes in the UK have expressed a desire to continue to supply current literature to Vietnam. This could easily be arranged, either through the British Council or the Ministry of Overseas Development, and would not require excessive funds. Our committee put forward these suggestions to both the British Council and the Ministry several months ago and we are waiting for their decision.

Perhaps now that more British scientists are aware of the problems facing their Vietnamese colleagues as a result of Professor Arthur Galston's article, there will be greater developments in the British aid programme to Vietnam.

Yours faithfully,
A. HAY

*Medical Aid Committee for Vietnam,
London WC2, UK*

Journal guidelines

SIR,—It is good that you saw the purpose of the document on "Authors, Editors and Referees" issued by the Scientific Information Committee of the Royal Society—that is, to initiate well informed discussion on this fundamental element of the communication system of science, and to bring into the open the actual procedures that are used (November 6). Indeed, it is only by showing that these procedures are honest and just, giving a fair weight to the interests of all parties concerned and to the needs of the scientific community at large, that we can justify our resistance to the demand to disclose the names of referees to authors, and similar populist follies.

You are also correct in pointing out that the proposed 'guidelines' are not appropriate for your own journal. We are all happy with the thought that *Nature* is almost unique in the world of science. And I would not apply precisely this code to a review journal such as *Reports on Progress in Physics*. But the question whether editors of conventional primary research journals are well advised to deviate very far from the suggested code is worth open

and collective debate and should not be confined to laboratory coffee clubs or to the committee rooms and editorial boards of individual learned societies.

May I suggest that by discussing this document in an editorial, quoting only points with which you disagree, you underestimate the intelligence and good sense of your readers, who might like to decide for themselves whether it had some merit in general. Since the whole 'code' is scarcely longer than this letter, why not publish it in full for wider discussion?

Yours faithfully,
JOHN ZIMAN

*University of
Bristol, UK*

Here it is:

(i) Every paper submitted to the journal for publication should be refereed.

(ii) Referees are appointed by the Editor, and report to him.

(iii) The name of any Referee may only be disclosed to the Author by permission of or at the request of the Referee, with the Editor's agreement.

(iv) The Referee may not disclose the contents of a paper submitted to him, nor make use of these for his own scientific work before publication, without explicit permission of the Author, to whom the name of the Referee must then be disclosed.

(v) The Referee's report should contain a definite recommendation concerning publication based upon a reasoned judgement of the general form and scientific contribution of the paper as a whole. He may recommend acceptance outright or subject to revision of certain sections along specified lines, or may propose that the paper be substantially rewritten to improve the presentation or to strengthen the scientific argument. The substance of all such critical comments should be communicated to the Author for action, to the eventual satisfaction of the Referee. But failure to accept the Referee's view on all minor points of criticism should not be a bar to publication.

(vi) No paper should be rejected on the adverse report of a single Referee.

(vii) In the case of conflicting opinions, the Editor may appoint further Referees or an Adjudicator who may read all communications between the Author and Referees (whose names need not be disclosed to him).

(viii) A definite procedure should be established for Editorial decision within a stated period.

We disagree with i, vi, and viii (but see our statement of editorial procedures on page 1 of the November 6 issue) and would like to hear what others think.

ED.