

EEC

Research: no stop ahead?

IF THE words of the European Commission are anything to go by, the EEC's involvement in science and technology needs to intensify. Whether or not the Nine member countries of the Community automatically allow such a development is increasingly open to doubt, but the Commission's ideas and hopes for the next few years are now contained in a document which it approved at the end of last month and sent to the Council of Ministers and European Parliament for their consideration.

The document, *The common policy in the field of science and technology*, is in three parts. The core, appropriately enough, is the middle part, and this details the guidelines which the Commission has adopted for the next phase—that is, 1977–80—of Community science and technology policy. With ten chapters and two annexes, it is a detailed if wordy conspectus directed not only at the Council but also “to all those affected by the European research policy”. According to brief final remarks, key areas of Community concern—“such as economic competitiveness, secure energy and raw material supplies and the preservation of a humane social and physical environment”—are becoming “more and more dependent” on a common science and technology policy.

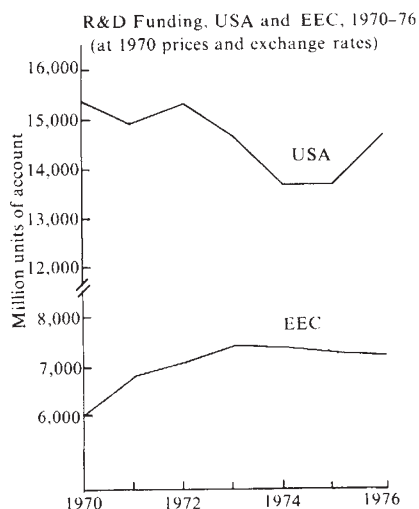
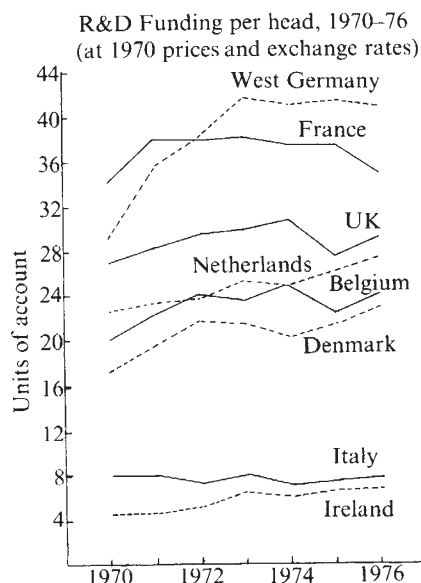
The earlier part of the document contains three draft texts which the Commission proposes that the Council should adopt. One is a resolution on the guidelines that make up the middle part. This says that coordination of R&D shall be

“gradually developed and intensified”; that special attention should be paid to the European Science Foundation's activities; that proposals be made for the better use of R&D results; and that a full review of EEC science activity be undertaken by the end of 1979.

The second text provides for a decision on promotion of industrial R&D projects. This would be done through financial assistance to small- and medium-sized firms cooperating in the sphere of innovation. The third text, which reflects the Commission's feelings that research in forecasting and assessment is essential, provides for a decision on a five-year research programme costing 4.4 million units of account and employing 10 staff. The aim of the programme would be “to contribute to the definition of long term R&D objectives and priorities”.

The final part of the document, from which the accompanying graphs are taken, analyses public financing of R&D and has 15 graphs and four tables that summarise the main trends in the Community over the past six years. They belie the promise of the guidelines. According to the document, there is a general stagnation in R&D funding in all Community countries, an increasing gap between the Nine and the USA, and a gap between collective Community funding of R&D and funding within the individual member countries themselves. Some 64% of Community R&D funds is concentrated on energy; health takes 15–16%, and industry 12–14%.

Chris Sherwell



JET

Is it enough?

A new development came last week in the saga over JET. Chris Sherwell reports

IN WHAT in the absence of confirmation otherwise looks suspiciously like an embarrassing climbdown, Britain last week withdrew one of its last remaining sanctions over the controversial decision on where to site the European Community's Joint European Torus (JET) fusion project. The Council of Foreign Ministers is due to make a final choice between Culham in Britain and Garching in Germany—unless it can come up with a third site as a compromise—at a make-or-break meeting later this month.

Britain has hitherto kept a reserve on the expenditure of about £145 million for the 1977–80 joint research programme of the Community, even though the research programme has itself long been agreed, as a bargaining chip over JET. The official reason has been that the research programme contains a good deal of fusion work, and Britain did not want to see decisions taken “piecemeal”. But an announcement last week from Brussels, which was welcomed by the European Commissioner concerned, Dr Guido Brunner, disclosed that Britain had withdrawn her reserve “in the interests of the Community”, but apparently in recognition that it had become more of a hindrance than an aid to progress on JET.

Whether the move will help Culham get JET is another question. Brunner spoke of “improving the climate of decision-making”, but Britain's handling of matters like these in the past does not exactly augur well. At the energy ministers' meeting in March, for example, a concession over a scheme involving Euratom loans turned out to be rather costly when there was little of the expected progress on another important matter, the minimum safeguard price for oil. On that occasion too Britain's obstruction had by then blackened its reputation. The same could happen again over JET.

Moreover, the new concession may not be enough. In the view of some, a satisfactory decision on JET was possible when the research ministers met in March. The argument is that the political price Britain has to pay to win JET increased at that meeting when, as presidential chairman, she mishandled things and failed to call for a vote—a vote which, it is widely recognised, would then have gone in Garching's favour. □