

NIH's budget strategy of attempting to stabilize the number of new and renewing competitive awards at about 5,000 remains virtually intact. Furthermore, Congress has replaced much of the money for research training grants which the Office of Management and Budget wished to cut.

Technically, the 4 per cent reduction is only a provisional figure, valid up to March. Unable to agree on a detailed appropriations bill, Congress agreed last month to a "continuing resolution" for the next three months. In practice, however, since debate on the budget for the 1983 fiscal year begins later in January — and no substantial objection to the provisional 1982 totals are expected from the White House — the 4 per cent reduction is likely to run to September.

It has been a confused budget year for NIH. Before leaving office in January, President Carter proposed a biomedical budget for the institutes of \$3,770 million, a figure left virtually untouched in the Reagan Administration's budget review in March and representing an increase of about 5.6 per cent over 1981. However, realizing that the budget deficit in general was going to be much larger than initially anticipated, the Reagan Administration in September recommended an across-the-board cut of 12 per cent, which would have reduced the NIH budget to \$3,310 million.

The net result of last month's continuing

resolution is that, rather than having to reduce the number of new awards for competing research projects to 4,230, as the proposed September revisions would have required, NIH expects to be able to make almost 4,800 of these during the current financial year. This is little short of the 5,000 which was adopted as a goal two years ago, following several years in which the number of such awards, which are provided to support investigator-initiated research projects, had fluctuated widely.

The budget resolution procedure thwarted a move supported by several legislators in the House of Representatives to direct additional research funds to three institutes: the National Institute of General Medical Sciences, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. These were felt to be suffering more than the others from the squeeze on research funds, in terms of the quality of the research projects that were being refused funding.

NIH officials are optimistic that the 1983 budget which Mr Reagan submits to Congress next month will again contain a small increase for NIH. Secretary of Health Mr Richard Schweiker is said to have argued successfully against major cuts in biomedical research that had been proposed by the Office of Management and Budget.

David Dickson

Molecular biology

Trimming costs

Molecular biologists who are used to relying on the European Molecular Biology Organisation for providing fellowships and other useful means of mobility within Europe may have to pay closer attention to the politics of its budget next December — for the 1982 budget has seen a 3 per cent fall (in real terms) for the second year running.

The secretary of the organization, Dr John Tooze, says that management costs have been trimmed to the absolute minimum, and that for 1982 cuts will have to be undertaken in the EMBO programme itself. The 1982 budget will be DM 3.5 million (£825,000), numerically 8 per cent above last year but 3 per cent below EMBO's calculated inflation figure.

The EMBO scheme accounts for 400 fellowships in any year, plus 40 courses and workshops and a small lectureship programme — which often takes prominent American and other visiting scientists around Europe on a lecture tour. It is this lecture programme which is likely to be cut this year.

If the budget were to be cut again for a third year, the fellowships and workshops would be hit, says Tooze. Then the smaller countries (of the 17 member states of EMBO) would certainly object. These countries are probably the main beneficiaries of the programme, and they in fact constitute a two-thirds majority of states on the council which votes the budget of EMBO each year. Decisions can be taken by such a majority but the remaining states — Britain, France, Germany and Italy — contribute nearly 60 per cent of the budget. The danger is that if the small countries kick up a fuss, the big four could refuse to pay. This year a compromise has been reached. It may not be so easy next year.

Robert Walgate

Microbial collections

Bugs in hazard

Once again, a British microbial culture collection is threatened by lack of funds. At the end of last year the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced its intention to withdraw support for the National Collection of Industrial Bacteria housed at the Torry Research Station in Aberdeen. This is the third time in two years that culture collections have been threatened by withdrawal of funds. The Brewery Research Foundation and the agriculture ministry have already stopped supporting the national yeast culture collection and the Commonwealth Mycological Institute and Natural Environment Research Council have said that they wish to cut support for the national fungi collection.

Although the problems of the yeast and fungal collections have been at least

New director chosen for NIH

Washington

Dr James B. Wyngaarden, chairman of the department of medicine at Duke University in North Carolina, is expected to be nominated by President Ronald Reagan as the new director of the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland.

Although yet to be formally announced — and subject to approval by the US Senate — Dr Wyngaarden's appointment is thought to have been unofficially approved by the White House, and the delay in making an announcement is the result of the lengthy security and financial checks which all presidential appointees undergo.

Dr Wyngaarden would probably be a popular choice at NIH's headquarters, and with the biomedical research community in general. Those who know him say they expect him to provide strong leadership and vigorously to defend the \$3,600 million research budget of NIH, the principal source of federal funding for biomedical research in the United States.

Dr Wyngaarden has been a close professional colleague of Dr Donald Fredrickson, who resigned as NIH director last July after six years in the post. Together with Dr John B. Stanbury, the three were co-editors of an influential collection of essays, *The*

Metabolic Basis of Human Diseases.

First published in 1960, the book is about to go into its fifth edition, and is considered by many to be a classic in its field.

Dr Fredrickson said last week that he had "no doubt" that Dr Wyngaarden would fill the NIH position extremely well. "He is a good physician, an excellent scientist, and understands the institutional aspects of medical research very well; I have every confidence that he will be an excellent director".

A graduate of the University of Michigan, Dr Wyngaarden is no stranger to Washington science policy circles. He was a consultant to the Office of Science and Technology Policy between 1966 and 1972, and a member of the President's Science Advisory Committee from 1972 until its abolition in 1973. Before his appointment at Duke, he was professor of medicine and chairman of the department at the University of Pennsylvania from 1965 to 1967.

NIH scientists hope that a speedy confirmation of Dr Wyngaarden's appointment will help to accelerate other senior appointments at NIH. Six of the twelve institutes lack a permanent director, and approving the new appointments will be one of the first tasks awaiting the new director.

David Dickson