contracts, is involved, but first responsibility for investigation of alleged misconduct rests with the recipient institution. Were it not that institutions have shown themselves in the past few years often (but not always) incapable of treating allegations of misconduct as seriously as they deserve to be, OSI's role in cases such as that surrounding Dr Thereza Imanishi-Kari's research at MIT would have been much less direct. If the research community wishes to get OSI off its back, it should ensure that mechanisms by which institutions investigate allegations of misconduct are more incisive. Sadly, professional societies in the United States seem embarrassed by the whole business, and nothing has been heard from the US National Academy of Sciences since the beginning of the Imanishi-Kari business.

Instincts

Healy's instincts would also be correct if she were offended by the way in which OSI functions. There is ample reason to believe that people against whom misconduct is alleged may be unjustly pilloried. OSI's investigations are conducted in camera and those accused of misdemeanours are not legally represented. OSI's justification of this procedure is that the matters to be decided are largely scientific, not legal. (Even so, OSI is more inclined to rely on documentary rather than laboratory evidence, when it would often be helpful — and quicker — to commission replications of disputed experiments.) But what if the outcome is the ruin of a person's career in research? Can it be fair that what is called in the United States "due process" should be so waywardly denied? There might be some excuse if OSI could offer speed instead, but that is hardly the case. Sadly, OSI's proposals for modifying its procedures do not promise every change that is required. At some stage, there must be a more radical reform.

Healy, despite last week's setback, is best placed to bring that about, but only with the support of the Congress and of Dingell in particular. But is not Dingell the arch-villain, the congressman most determined to bring the research community to heel? In the synthetic demonology of the past few years, that may be how he has been made to seem, but there is no reason to believe that Dingell is moved by an animus against research. There is also no reason to suppose that he would not listen to a reasoned case from Healy for the reform of OSI and its repositioning within the NIH system.

What form should such a proposal take? Analogies with the courts are unavoidable, and OSI should become a kind of appeal court to which all parties to allegations about NIH-funded work would have access — whistle-blowers as well as those accused of misconduct. OSI itself should consist primarily of a panel of scientists respected for their integrity, but also for a healthy realism about the ways of the real world, who are willing to devote a substantial part of their time to these matters.

Access to this remodelled OSI should be open to all, but should initially be confidential. NIH should offer whatever scientific resources are needed for investigations even of extramural cases to be carried out. As things are, OSI has relied too much on documentary evidence; in the Gallo case, for example, it would have been preferable that OSI, rather than Gallo himself, should have expeditiously investigated the nucleotide sequence of samples of virus recovered from early material recovered from his deep freeze for evidence of the provenance of authentic HIV. But having reached a conclusion from which some of those concerned dissent, OSI should be prepared to defend its position publicly, in what would essentially be a quasi-judicial process in which all those concerned and their lawyers would be entitled, if they chose, to have a say. □

Hedging the issue

The British government seems about to end decades of wrangling over the fate of Britain's hedgerows.

SINCE the 1950s, successive British governments have seemed unable to decide whether farms should be given grants to maintain and develop the hedges on their property, or grants to rip them up. Until 1985, the answer was "both". In that year, the government bowed to pressure from groups such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England and ended the funding of hedgerow demolition. The argument that such destruction was necessary for the efficient exploitation of agricultural resources no longer seemed tenable in the face of Europe-wide food surpluses.

The government's white paper (policy document) *This Common Inheritance*, published earlier this year, aimed to continue the trend towards preservation. Under the proposed scheme, farmers intending to remove a hedgerow would be obliged to notify their local authority, which would then decide whether the threatened hedgerow was of sufficient wildlife, historical or aesthetic value to warrant preservation. If so, then the farmer would be issued with a grant to pay for the upkeep of his small corner of the national heritage.

It did not take long for conservation groups to point out that all a shrewd farmer would have to do would be to declare his intention to tear down all his hedges to be certain of at least one local authority grant for the upkeep of a hedge whose maintenance had previously been a negligible part of his annual expenditure.

In the light of this piece of common sense farmers will no longer automatically qualify for a maintenance grant if the local authority decides that a hedge they want to pull down is worth saving. As Mr Tony Baldry, the junior minister at the Department of the Environment, puts it: "In some cases the most environmentally beneficial course of action may be to leave a hedgerow in an unmanaged state for the immediate future." □