AMRC and MRC expenditure, 1982-93

candidates, to principal research fellowships, also available up to retirement.

In addition to providing a more structured career ladder for successful research scientists, Wellcome is also thinking about providing counselling facilities to those for whom it is decided not to renew research fellowships. One frequent complaint is that, at present, scientists seldom receive any guidance about their future career prospects when a project grant comes to an end.

Wellcome's proposals, which are still under discussion between the trust and the scientific community, have met with an enthusiastic reception from groups such as the Association of Researchers in Medicine and Science, which has been complaining vociferously in recent years about the difficulties faced by the increasing number of scientists working on short-term contracts.

They have also been welcomed by the government. In its recent white paper (policy document) on science, the government continues to argue that responsibility for providing stable careers rests with universities and research institutions. However it does say that it recognizes that the flexibility of universities is currently limited by the terms under which it can employ research staff; and praises the trust for its attempts to improve the career prospects of scientists.

But Wellcome itself is also wary of being taken for granted by the government, and of the danger that politicians may use the growing influence of the research charities to justify cutting back on its own support for medical research (for example, by requiring them to pay for an increasing proportion of the overhead costs of university science departments).

Diana Garnham, general secretary of the Association of Medical Research Charities, points out that charitable funding tends to be short-term, since the income of most charities varies from one year to the next. "That is why most of it tends to be project oriented; but it also

makes it essential that the government continues to underpin the longer-term needs of university departments." Medical research in the UK has been strong precisely because of the multiplicity of sources of funding, says Garnham; the effectiveness of charity money has in the past only been possible because of the government's support for the science base. "Our strength has grown out of the dual support system," under which grants to universities cover basic overheads, and research councils and charities pay the additional costs of research. "That is why we are going around telling the government it should not change the way it does things."

Whitehall has clearly been listening to these views. Proposals to transfer responsibility for university overheads away from the Department of Education (a move which would have had substantial impact on the ability of charities and foundations to fund university research projects) was rejected in the white paper, and for the time being the dual support system remains in place.

But the charities themselves realize that the boundaries are changing. And that the new environment in which they are operating in the 1990s imposes on them the need for far greater social accountability for the way in which their research funds are used than in the past. The challenge they face now is how to meet their growing responsibility for the health of the research community in the most effective way, even if this means not necessarily pandering to the interests of the most vociferous (or most wealthy) interest groups.

Increased peer review (breaking up the traditional old-boy networks of grant allocation), a greater sense of overall research strategy, and an enhanced attention to the desire of scientists for the stable career structure which universities on their own are no longer able to provide, are three steps in this direction. Others will inevitably follow.

David Dickson

A new trend for Japan

Tokyo. Charity and philanthropy in the Western sense, which are so much tied to Christian values, are alien to Japan. Many research foundations do exist but they tend to be small and are often established because of personal links between powerful researchers and companies. There is no equivalent of large research foundations supported by rich individuals like Howard Hughes (of the United States) or charitable organizations like the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and Cancer Research Campaign of the United Kingdom.

Instead, there is a myriad of little foundations which have narrowly defined purposes, tend to be very domestic in outlook, and are wrapped in the bureaucratic control of the government. Every foundation in Japan has to be linked to a government ministry or agency, and although there is no legal requirement that retired ministry officials should get a job in the foundation, it is an open secret that if a retiring ministry official is offered a job (a process called *Amakudari*, or 'coming down from heaven') permission to establish the foundation tends to proceed much more smoothly. But the ex-bureaucrat then tends to limit the scope of the foundation to suit the wishes of his former ministry.

This bureaucratic control and the lack of the Christian sense of giving for the general benefit of mankind has left Japan starved of the powerful research foundations found in the West. But there is a gradual change as more and more Western companies with Western values set up shop in Japan.

Ciba Geigy, the Swiss pharmaceutical multinational, was one of the first foreign companies in Japan to establish a research foundation — the Ciba-Geigy Foundation (Japan) for Promotion of Science. Unlike the foundations of Japanese pharmaceutical companies, almost exclusively designed to support Japanese scientists, the Ciba-Geigy offers a handful of fellowships for young European scientists to come to Japan (see *Nature* 361, 762; 1993).

Japanese companies are beginning to follow this example. For example, Yamanoichi Pharmaceutical is planning to reorganize its foundation for research on metabolic disorders this year to establish an international section to fund non-Japanese researchers, says Teruhisa Noguchi, executive vice president for research and development in the company. But Japan still has a long way to go before its foundations provide a significant source of employment for Japanese, let alone foreign, scientists.

David Swinbanks