French research slated for budget increase in 1996 — although slight

French researchers are breathing easier following the September release of the government's 1996 civilian research and development budget. Public spending in this sector is expected to reach FF53 billion (US\$10.7 billion) next year, a slight increase of 1.4 percent over this year's figures. (The figures do not take into account inflation, now running at about 2 percent.) Research organizations such as the national biomedical research agency INSERM and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) have fared better than other organizations, such as those supporting research in tropical and marine biology, for example. The more sobering news, however, is that there will be little money available for new posts.

This budget is not a complete surprise, says Pierre Tambourin, director of life sciences at CNRS. Both François Bayrou, minister of national education and research, and Elisabeth Dufourcq, his new secretary of state for research, had promised that they would vigorously support research. For Dufourcq in particular, a relative unknown in research circles and whose appointment was met with some antipathy by the scientific community, the figures suggest she may be more tenacious than was at first thought in defending public research organizations at a time when the government is under increasing pressure to reduce public spending.

INSERM is slated for a 5.4 percent increase next year, which will take its annual budget to \$493 million, CNRS will receive \$2.6 billion in 1996 (only 24 percent of which will go towards life

sciences research), an increase of 4.8 percent over this year.

Some feel that the figures are hardly occasion to celebrate. "If we look carefully, everyone's operating budget is smaller," claims Laurent Dianoux of the Syndicat National des Chercheurs Scientifiques, a national trade union for researchers. Much of the increase will serve to reimburse the deficit that has accumulated in budgeted salaries for researchers moving up the career ladder in these institutions (80 percent of government funding already goes to pay for salaries). The picture is also not so rosy when you take into account the two percent increase in sales tax imposed by the government in August.

But what concerns scientists most is the hiring freeze in the research sector for 1996. Although Dufourcq has often stated that creating employment opportunities is a priority for the government, she says that there will be only eight new positions created next year covering all research organizations. At INSERM, for example, 55 researchers were recruited in 1995. This will drop to 33 for the coming year, but these will only replace departing scientists. "For medical research, if this situation continues, the effects will be dramatic," cautions Axel Kahn, director of INSERM's genetics and molecular pathology research laboratory at the Cochin Molecular Genetics Institute in Paris. "We cannot have research being carried out only by ageing scientists in disciplines that are constantly evolving."

CATHERINE TASTEMAIN

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A chance to win big has meant a big loss in donations to some charities.

British charities lose out to lottery fever

British charities probably have £14 million (US\$21 million) less to spend on medical research this year as a result of the impact of the National Lottery on charitable donations, according to the Association for Medical Research Charities.

Although the National Lotteries Charities Board announced in September that medical charities would be included in its next round of grants, which begins next Spring, charities say they are unlikely to recoup the income they have lost since the lottery was launched in November 1994. The Charities Board is one of five organizations that together distribute profits from the National Lottery to so-called good causes.

Diana Garnham of the Association for Medical Research Charities says smaller charities are reporting a consistent drop in donations to collecting tins of between 30 and 38 percent. Calculations suggest, she says, that income from such sources among all charities has dropped this year by between \$13.5 million and \$21 million, or by 4 to 9 percent. Larger medical charities, which rely more heavily on other sources of income, such as legacies, have been hit less hard than smaller ones.

One of the charities hardest hit is Tenovus, a cancer charity based in Cardiff, Wales. A spokesman said Tenovus had raised a significant amount with a scratch-card game but that when the National Lottery launched its scratch card, sales of the charity's card began to drop. After five months, Tenovus had to stop running it before it made a loss.

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