

## NEWS AND VIEWS

### More for British Science

THE Civil Estimates for 1967-68, issued earlier this week (see page 1066), suggest that the total expenditure from public sources on research and development will increase by roughly 4 per cent in the financial year ahead. Although details are as yet available for only 90 per cent of the British Government's expenditure in this field, the total is likely to increase from £433 million in 1966-67 to between £450 and £460 million in 1967-68. These figures do not, of course, include the expenditure of private industry and the foundations on the support of research and development. Although the rate of growth in the public sector has evidently slackened off, the increase in the coming year will outstrip the GNP, which is not expected to increase at all.

Table 1. RESEARCH COUNCIL SPENDING (£ MILLION)

	1966-67	1967-68
SRC	33.9	36.6
NERC	6.2	7.7
MRC	11.9	14.2
ARC	10.3	11.9
	<hr/> 62.3	<hr/> 70.4

Now that the full details of the estimates for the year ahead are available, it is clear that the rate of growth of support for basic research will be even greater, and more like 14 per cent over the year than the increase of 9 per cent suggested by the figures in the Vote on Account published a few weeks ago. The budgets of the four research councils concerned with the natural sciences will increase from £62.3 million in 1966-67 to £70.4 million in the financial year immediately ahead, as shown in the Table. The expenditure of the Social Sciences Research Council will grow even more rapidly, as befits a new organization. The Department of Education and Science will also be spending more in its direct grants to scientific causes. Thus expenditure on the Office of Scientific Information will grow from £290,000 to £370,000.

### Beating a Retreat

THE Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals has now agreed to recommend to universities that they should charge the increased fees for students from overseas suggested by the Department of Education and Science at the end of last year. In a statement earlier this week, the committee said that it had been mollified by an undertaking from the Secretary of State for Education and Science that there should be consultation on the long-term problem of university fees, and that the hardship fund intended to help overseas students with special problems would in reality be generous. The fund, whose existence was announced at the height of the clamour against discriminatory fees some weeks ago, is intended to help students already embarked on courses (*Nature*, 213, 853; 1967).

Although the vice-chancellors have for all practical

purposes conceded what the government has been asking for, they make a great show of their displeasure. The making of a public statement is in itself a sign of this. They also repeat their complaint that a discriminatory fee structure is bound to have unfortunate repercussions within the university system and without. They complain that they were not consulted before the original statement on fees for students from overseas, and that the University Grants Committee "appears to have been bypassed". The Committee of Vice-Chancellors even puts on record its disagreement with the official view that the University Grants Committee was consulted by saying that it understands the UGC was "consulted some six months ago and not consulted on the specific decision which the government announced on December 21".

In the immediate future, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors is likely to press for a general increase of university fees from something like £70 a year at present to nearly twice that amount at the end of the decade.

### Research into Environment

THE first report of the Natural Environment Research Council (H.M.S.O., 8s.) covers the first 10 months of the existence of the council, up to March 31, 1966. This was a period of some administrative chaos, which explains why there is little solid information in the report and why it has taken so long to appear. The council took over the Nature Conservancy, the National Institute of Oceanography, the Institute of Geological Sciences and the Hydrological Research Unit, and assumed responsibility for fisheries research, marine and freshwater biology, seismology and geomagnetism, long-term forestry research, and the awarding of grants and postgraduate training awards to universities. These activities are now run by five main committees, soon to be joined by a sixth when the council takes over responsibility for the British Antarctic Survey on April 1. Sir Graham Sutton is the chairman of the council, and the chairmen of the main committees are Lord Howick (Nature Conservancy), Professor J. C. Mitcheson (Geology and Geophysics), Professor M. J. Lighthill (Oceanography and Fisheries), Mr. N. A. F. Rowntree (Hydrology) and Professor M. V. Laurie (Forestry and Woodlands).

The budget of the council for the period of the report was almost £3.8 million. Just over £1 million went to the Institute of Geological Sciences, £853,000 to the Nature Conservancy, £440,000 in grants to universities, and £288,000 for training awards and fellowships. Since the period of the report, the Geological Survey has been amalgamated with the Overseas Geological Survey, and a start has been made in creating a centre of geochemical research in London. The plans for this centre are complete, although it has yet to be given a name. It will be in the Gray's Inn Road premises previously occupied by the overseas division of the Geological Survey, and will bring together the two mass spectroscopy sections at present in Oxford and the survey's premises in Young Street, London. When complete, the centre will have a staff of 80-90 people.

The British Antarctic Survey, previously the responsibility of the Commonwealth Office, moves to the council at the beginning of April. Whether there will be any change in the management of the survey has