

says there would not be enough work for a full-time ultrasonics expert, recommended by the committee for testing pressure vessels, and that this and other work will be contracted out when it lacks the appropriate experts on its own staff.

The inspectorate is nevertheless still short of nuclear inspectors. Thirteen posts out of a total of 102 remain to be filled and salaries are a problem. Although nuclear inspectors' pay is as good as or better than that of other inspectors, it is below that in the industries from which it has to recruit. The problem — that the inspectors' salaries are linked to civil service pay — cannot be solved by removing the inspectorate from the Health and Safety Executive, which the inspectorate says would complicate licensing procedures.

The committee is said also to have misunderstood the role of the chief scientist at the Department of Energy and of the UK Atomic Energy Authority in advising the government on nuclear matters. The Department of Energy says that its chief scientist is responsible for nuclear advice but that there were exceptions when Dr Walter Marshall held

the post as well as that of deputy chairman of the UK Atomic Energy Authority. Dr Marshall's version of this difficulty is different. He said last week that during his spell as chief scientist at the department, he felt no conflict of interest but, with the minister's agreement, meticulously kept the chairman of the authority informed of the advice he gave on nuclear matters.

The response so far to the report has been laconic and avoids detail. A more considered reply is likely to be published by the Department of Energy some months from now. Another contribution is likely to come from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission when it makes its views known on the structure of the electricity supply industry on 2 March.

Judy Redfearn

## UK science research On the move

The Science Research Council's attempt to foster mobility among British academics has made a modest beginning. The first four awards under the council's Special

Replacement Scheme were announced last week. The scheme is designed to release senior academics from routine duties for five years, replacing them with younger people, usually postdoctoral researchers. The four awards will be followed by a further eleven before July, after which the council hopes to make ten awards a year.

The first four awards go to people who will be released from some or all of their administrative and teaching commitments for up to five years, enabling them to concentrate on their research interests. Each of the four departments is advertising a vacancy for a lecturer, whose appointment will be financed wholly by the Science Research Council for the first five years of his tenure. In every other respect, however, those appointed will be fully-fledged members of the academic staff.

Here the similarity ends. Some of the senior academics will return to their original position after five years. During that time, the department, which has guaranteed tenure to the new appointee, will have either found money elsewhere or lost a member of staff (by foul means or, more probably, fair). In other cases, the senior person will himself be retiring.

The Science Research Council, which has designed the scheme for flexibility, makes no stipulation about the areas of research involved, although it does intend to be represented on the selection boards for new appointees. In the cases so far announced, one professor should gain a member of staff in his own field of research, while another's department is to advertise for applicants for any of its research areas. Much discussion takes place behind the scenes between the council and the university concerned, and Sir Harry Pitt (ex-vice-chancellor of the University of Reading) is go-between and honest broker for the scheme.

The Science Research Council, through its boards and subcommittees which allocate grants among the applicants (30 of whom are now being considered), hopes to ease stagnation in research areas that it feels deserve encouragement. Awards have been given to Professors D. H. Everett (physical chemistry, Bristol), J. G. Powles (physics, Kent), M. Symons (chemistry, Leicester) and R. Butterfield (civil engineering, Southampton).

Philip Campbell

## Authority more critical

The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority made a forceful response last week to the critical report of the House of Commons Select Committee on Energy (see *Nature* 19 February, p.621) Dr Walter Marshall, the bulky and voluble Welshman who succeeded Sir John Hill as chairman at the weekend, was quickly in action with his account of where the select committee had gone wrong.

The committee's wrath was directed chiefly at the Central Electricity Generating Board, but it also asked that the authority's role in the development of

generating board, and less likely to continue indefinitely in the field than, say, the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

On the select committee's opinion that the authority should not be the public shareholder in the National Nuclear Corporation, the publicly supported construction consortium, Marshall says that the only effect of such a change would be to replace him by a civil servant as a director of the corporation. At present, he says, the authority's representation is the only source of independent criticism on the board.

The recommendation that the authority should quickly make an assessment of the Canadian CANDU heavy-water reactor system is similarly unwelcome. Marshall says that the committee has underestimated the difficulty of adapting even well-established reactor systems to British safety regulations, and estimates that a proper assessment would require two years of hard work. He points out that the select committee overlooked the authority's role in the development and management of the nuclear fuel cycle.

Dr Marshall's succession as chairman of the authority — he has been waiting in the wings for several years — presages a change of style. He is both outspoken and ebullient. He has his roots in the research establishment at Harwell (where he will keep an office). Last week he was saying that there will be no cause for changing the role of the authority until fast reactors are commercial realities some time in the next century. But he plans that the authority should become more skilled at explaining what it is about.



No-doubt Marshall

nuclear power in Britain should be restricted to research on long-term projects (fast reactors and fusion devices) and others where interested parties chose to commission work.

Marshall argues that this conclusion is mistaken. Thus he justifies the authority's work on the safety of pressurized water reactors (now costing £10 million a year) on the grounds that the authority is more independent than the would-be builders of the plant, the

## Community research

### Project sharing?

Brussels

The European Parliament has now called for more community research. This arose at a meeting between the Parliament's Science and Energy Committee, the Dutch Minister for Science and Technology, Anton van Trier, and Dr Guenter Schuster, the director general for research, science and education of the European commission.