

OLD WORLD

Dual Support System Questioned

THE dual system of supporting research in Britain comes in for close analysis in the Social Science Research Council annual report published last week (*SSRC Annual Report*, HMSO, £0.47).

Professor R. C. O. Matthews, the council's chairman, argues that the dual system, where research funding comes from both research councils and the University Grants Committee, is, in its present form, limited in its usefulness. In particular, the system has its drawbacks when a particular area of research needs a stimulus. The usual procedure is to make it known that applications in the appropriate field will be looked on with favour. But such a system, says Professor Matthews, is contrary to the dual support system in that university research grants from a research council should not in normal circumstances pay for the salary of the principal investigator or pay for buildings. The councils can pay for senior research officers but the "absence of tenure makes such appointments unattractive to those who are able to secure university teaching posts".

The nub of Professor Matthews's argument is that shortage of finance for ancillary facilities or research staff at the relatively junior level may not be the chief obstacle to expansion of research in a particular area. "Where this is so, announcement that research grant applications in the area will be welcomed may not be very effective in promoting an expansion of research in it."

The report also raises the problems which will be caused by the differing rates of expansion of the science vote (not more than 3% a year in the next five years) and the rate of expansion of the universities' recurrent expenditure (5.25% a year). The dual support system, argues Professor Matthews, will not be put under any undue strain in the next quinquennium, because of the tightness of university budgets. The research councils will have to continue to support, for as long as they last, research programmes which previously a university would have been expected to take over after an initial period.

Finance from the UGC, says Professor Matthews, is geared to teaching needs and "research emerges to a large extent as a byproduct of teaching". And this is likely to become more pronounced in the years ahead.

Another side effect of the dual system of support is that expansion in particular disciplines will be tied to an increase of

students in that discipline because UGC finance is directly related to student numbers. Thus student preferences, argues Professor Matthews, will have an influence in the long term on the areas in which research is carried out.

Professor Matthews also argues for the rate of increase of the Social Science Research Council budget to be kept well above the 3% overall increase in the science vote. Rates of growth of different subjects can only be expected to be similar if there was equilibrium initially, but as the SSRC at present only receives 2% of the total vote a strong case can be made for increasing it to at least 4%.

The expansion of the science vote and the UGC budget in different areas could well lead to a gap opening up between the numbers of postgraduate places available at universities and the studentships available to fill these places.

This real fear has, in fact, been recog-

nised by the Advisory Board of the Research Councils which has set up a joint committee with the UGC to keep these matters under close attention. But as far as the SSRC is concerned there is, at present, no worry about a divergence of views between it and the UGC. Professor Matthews says that the views of the SSRC and the UGC are closely in line and that the SSRC intends to increase the numbers of studentships available "at no less than the percentage rate at which the number of places in universities is increasing". The only factor which will jeopardise this pledge is an insufficient rate of growth of its budget.

In 1972-73 the SSRC allocated £2.45 million in research grants to be compared with £1.66 million the year before. The council also awarded 2,343 postgraduate awards to a total value of £2.38 million, an increase of 180 students and £270,000 over 1971-72.

MARINE POLLUTION

Dearer Petrol, Cleaner Seas

COMPLETE elimination of intentional pollution of the sea by oil, chemicals, garbage and sewage is the aim of a four-week conference just started in London.

One new convention is up for discussion, while an amendment to an existing 1969 agreement will allow countries to take action when their coastlines are threatened by tanker accidents that occur outside their territorial waters.

Proposals for the control of oil and chemical pollution include designing future tankers with separate ballast tanks large enough to obviate the need to fill cargo tanks with seawater as ballast for the return trip. One way is to build ships with double bottoms.

For existing tankers it is planned to transfer to the new convention the agreements made in 1969 for limiting the amount of oily water that can be discharged by a tanker. Other proposals include installing meters on tankers to record precisely how much oil is loaded and unloaded, and how much discharged on the voyage, while masters and owners may in future be required to keep oil record books.

A further radical proposal is that countries where tankers dock should be able to prosecute the owners and master for pollution caused on any part of the voyage. At present, tankers can only be prosecuted for pollution caused in

territorial waters.

These tough measures, if agreed, could go a long way towards improving the state of the oceans, as, for the first time, the convention covers chemicals.

But, as usual in pollution matters, there is a disagreement between the developing countries and the richer nations as to how forceful the new convention should be. All these proposals cost money. Building tankers with segregated ballast tanks could add between 4% and 8% to the price.

Further complicating factors are the need for several countries to ratify these conventions before they come into operation. The 1969 amendments to the 1954 Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil have still not been ratified by enough countries for them to come into effect.

In addition, the United Nations Law of the Sea Conference planned for Santiago or Vienna next year may preclude any real decision being taken in London this month. It has already been agreed that decisions taken at this meeting will not prejudice next year's conference. And as a number of developing countries, notably the Latin Americans, will be pushing for 200 mile patrimonial seas and for the right to set their own pollution standards in these waters, it is possible that hard decisions could be deferred.