

THE ROTHSCHILD AND DANTON REPORTS

(Government Green Paper—A Framework for
Government Research and Development)

The following comments on the above reports were submitted by Council to the Chief Scientific Adviser to H.M. Government and to Mr. J. Sweetman, Clerk to the Select Committee on Science and Technology, House of Commons.

The Council of the Nutrition Society have considered the Government Green Paper [Cmnd 4814] and wish to submit their observations and comments. The Nutrition Society has 1200 members, comprising a broad spectrum of interest in nutrition and including members of University Departments, Research Councils, Government Departments, Industrial Laboratories, Medical Practitioners, Agricultural (or Animal) Nutritionists and Dietitians.

The Council of the Nutrition Society have noted the use of the terms 'basic' and 'applied' research in the Rothschild Report and consider them an oversimplification of the existing situation both at the bench and in the field. A more sensitive distinction is drawn by the Dainton Report with the categories of 'basic, strategic and tactical science'. This categorization, however, does imply a spectrum of endeavour ranging from basic to tactical research, but the position is more complex than this since the three categories of work are strongly interwoven and only in extreme circumstances can they be separated by a greater emphasis on one or the other. The Council also noted that according to the Rothschild Report the major part of the 'Research and Development' work, i.e. 'applied' research should be done on a customer-contractor principle, as R & D is in the manufacturing industries. Unlike industrial research where one can set out a definite objective and time-limit, do a cost-feasibility study, assess customer demand and profit, and then continue research to the pilot plant stage, little if any research in the biomedical field can be done in this way. The Council agree with the comments of the Agricultural Research Council Directors (*The Times* 19 January 1972) that even in research in food production the customer-contractor principle cannot and should not be applied without modification in an organization where market forces do not uniformly operate in the same way as in industry and where long-term support is necessary.

The Council have the following comments.

(1) Although they are more in agreement with the Dainton Report, they welcome particularly the forthright Report by Lord Rothschild since it has provoked the entire scientific community to scrutinize its attitude towards scientific research and the public, and brought about an unprecedented amount of protest due to a real concern about the future of research in this country.

(2) The Council are pleased that consideration is given to improving the status and facilities of the Scientific Civil Service with the proviso, however, that this should not happen to the detriment of the integrity of the Research Councils.

(3) They are seriously concerned that, if the proposals by Lord Rothschild were implemented, the work of the Research Councils and their control over scientific, administrative and financial matters would be seriously eroded without any great benefit to the Government Departments. For instance, while 25% (and later possibly 50%) of the financial allocation of the Department of Education and Science would be withdrawn from the Medical Research Council, this would amount in the year 1973 to only an 0.2% increase in the budget of the Department of Health and Social Security.

(4) They note the paradox that in the years 1973-6, when the transfer of disposable funds from Research Councils to Ministries would be effected, the economic growth of the country, according to Government announcements and forecasts of Economic Agencies, should be recovering and the Gross National Product greatly increased. In 1973 [Cmnd 4829] the expenditure of the DHSS is estimated as £2 848 000 000 and, in view of the then growing economy, there should be no difficulty in finding the additional £5 600 000 (the sum asked for to be transferred from the MRC) without decreasing the allocation of the MRC. A similar consideration applies to the other Research Councils affected by the recommendations of the Rothschild Report.

(5) They further note that in the year 1973, when this country may accede to the European Market, the organization of science and research will be seriously weakened if the Rothschild Report were to be adopted, and that would happen at a time when efforts should be made to maintain the lead which this country has with respect to the situation in other European countries.

(6) They welcome the setting up of a hearing on the Reports of both Lord Rothschild and Sir Frederick Dainton by the Parliamentary Select Committee on Science and Technology, to obtain a considered opinion of all sections of the scientific community.

Therefore the Council recommend:

(a) that the unity of control of scientific research should be maintained and that the Research Councils should be allowed to exert their unified policy within the Department of Education and Science and be accountable to this Department as they do now;

(b) that the Scientific Civil Service, for example in the DHSS, should benefit from the expected growth of the Gross National Product in that their percentage increase in budget allocation should go up from 5.1 to 5.3%, or if the expected economic growth is still delayed the differential over the MRC increase [Cmnd 4829], namely 0.8%, should be partly diverted (0.2%) to R & D within the DHSS. A similar contingency should be made available for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food;

(c) that immediate steps are taken to improve liaison between Government Departments and Research Councils and that the representation of Government Departments on the Research Councils, which already exists, should be strengthened to give confidence to the Government Representatives that their policies will be adequately considered;

(d) that the public relations of the Research Councils should be greatly improved so that the work of the Research Councils is not only done, but is also seen to be done;

(e) that a similar public relations effort is made by the Government Departments;

(f) that, finally, a liaison is established with the Academies and Government Agencies of the other nine countries of the European Economic Community to obtain an over-all picture of the organization of scientific research prevailing in countries to which we shall be economically bound. This will be possible since European federation of some Learned Societies already exists and the Research Councils are already collecting this information. They are able to do so over the entire range of scientific research.

For the Council of the Nutrition Society

E. KODICEK, MD, PhD, FIBiol

President

G. L. S. PAWAN, DSc, MRCPath, FIBiol,
FRIC, FIFST

Secretary