

ciation of Universities and Colleges of Canada has called for a larger share for the SSHRC. It cites, for example, the fact that 57% of faculty are social scientists, yet the granting council receives less than 12% of the pot.

The budget increases are a product of a strong Canadian economy. But they won't offset the effects of inflation, and they aren't quite as generous as the government claims. The Coalition for Biomedical and Health Research, for example, has calculated that the new funding levels give each council the buying power of its 1985 budget. "Ask any academic. It's never adequate," says Frederick Lowy, president of Concordia University in

Montreal. "There are flaws, but at least we're headed in the right direction, finally."

Ottawa says that the councils will receive \$280 million more over 3 years. But that figure is calculated by recounting this year's increases twice more, as part of the boosts for 1999–00 and for 2000–01. In reality, the councils will receive increases of \$67 million this year, and \$14 million more over the next 2 years.

SSHRC President Marc Renaud hopes to bolster stipends to graduate students and to open Dutch-style science shops in which academic teams work with community organizations to improve public health and boost scientific literacy. "It's not enough, but it's an

occasion to get started on a few things," he says. NSERC President Thomas Brzustowski hopes to beef up support for graduate students and university-industry partnerships with its additional funds. Some of the money will be used to satisfy increased demand stemming from infrastructure projects funded by the new Canada Foundation for Innovation (*Science*, 28 February 1997, p. 1256). The MRC hopes that its boost will reverse a declining success rate for applicants that last fall stood at 19.6%, the lowest in the council's 38-year history.

—Wayne Kondro

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U.K. UNIVERSITIES

Government Stalls on Dearing Challenge

LONDON—Last summer, within weeks of taking office, Britain's Labour government was handed a hot potato: a major report calling for fundamental reforms in Britain's higher education system. The government responded quickly on some issues and promised a full response on the rest by the fall. It took until last week for the Department for Education and Employment to issue its official response, however, and researchers were unsurprised to find that the main message was that the government needed more time.

The department offered no decisions on most of the report's recommendations for university research, saying that these would have to await the outcome of a comprehensive review of all government spending, due to be completed this summer. And although the response contained supportive words for academic research, it shot down one of the report's main recommendations for funding university facilities and offered no substantial alternative solution. "The response leaves all the key issues unanswered and raises questions about the government's real commitment to maintaining a world-class science base," says physicist John Mulvey of Oxford University, spokesperson for the lobby group Save British Science.

The higher education report, commissioned by the previous Conservative government with all-party support, was written by a panel chaired by educational troubleshooter Sir Ron Dearing, now Lord Dearing (*Science*, 1 August 1997, p. 628). The report suggested some root and branch reforms, many with expensive price tags, to fund university research in the face of a huge growth in student numbers and growing pressure on existing sources of funds. "Expenditure on research in the U.K. compares unfavorably with competitor countries. The lack of increased investment by government in research is surprising over a decade when the opportunities for discovery and technological progress have

continued to expand rapidly and global competition has increased," the report said.

The Dearing report was especially concerned about a shortage of funds for academic research facilities, which it said amounted to somewhere between \$220 million and \$1.1 billion. "Multinational companies are dissatisfied with the state of research facilities and equipment in higher education institutions," the report said. "Some are relocating their collaborative projects with universities outside the U.K. as a direct result of decay in the research infrastructure." Dearing suggested that the government should set up an \$800 million loan fund financed by govern-

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—Lord Dearing

ment and industry to make equipment purchases. "The fund would support departments or institutions with a track record of conducting top-quality research," the report said.

The government dismisses that idea, however, arguing that industry will be willing to fund infrastructure only on a case-by-case basis rather than through a pool. It offered no substantial alternative, however, and that stance has drawn barbs from both industry and academia. "We believe this is a matter of urgent attention now, and not after the deliberations of the [comprehensive spending review]," says a spokesperson for the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry.

"Renewal of research infrastructure and equipment is now urgent: Unless there is a strong response by the government, a major national asset will be damaged," says Dearing.

The Dearing report also devoted much attention to Britain's "dual support" system for university research. Funds for infrastructure are distributed to the universities by the higher education funding councils for England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, while the subject-based research councils provide grants for specific research projects and part of the overhead costs. "The dual-funding system is creaking. We think it is a logical position that research councils fund all costs," the report said. Accordingly, it called on the government to allocate an estimated \$180 million to the

research councils to meet all the costs associated with their research projects.

In its response, the government says it "recognizes the strains" on the dual support system, but it has deferred any decision until after the spending review. A recent study commissioned by the Office of Science and Technology, the Higher Education Funding Council for England, and the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals suggests that the

research councils will need much more than Dearing estimated to pay indirect costs—perhaps as much as \$800 million.

The government did have at least one firm response to a Dearing recommendation. The Dearing report argued for a new high-level independent body to advise the government on policies for public funding of research in higher education, on the level of such funding, and on the performance of the public bodies that distribute it. But the response says the government is "not convinced" that there is a need for such a body.

—Nigel Williams

