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Research And Development

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24 November 1971

Volume 826

Mr. Neave

asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the Government are now able to make a statement on research and development.

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Mrs. Thatcher

My noble Friend the Lord Privy Seal has today presented to Parliament a Green Paper "A Framework for Government Research and Development" (Cmnd. 4814), which covers two reports, one on governmental research and development by Lord Rothschild, the head of the Central Policy Review Staff, and the other on the research council system by a working group chaired by Sir Frederick Dainton, the Chairman of the Council for Scientific Policy. The Government hope there will be wide public debate of the issues raised.

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Medical Research

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21 December 1971

Volume 828

Mr. Rose

asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many medical research scientists are currently employed by the Medical Research Council; and how many of these were asked to submit, or submitted, evidence to the **Rothschild Committee**.

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Mrs. Thatcher

1,100, of whom 68 are part-time. I am not aware that any submitted evidence to Lord Rothschild or was invited to do so; but in his report Lord Rothschild acknowledges the advice and help of the Chairman and Secretary of the Medical Research Council, among many others.

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Mr. Rose

asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how many medical research scientists are expected to be employed by the Medical Research Council following the full implementation of the recommendations of the Rothschild Committee;(2) to what extent the implementation of the Rothschild Committee Report will affect the object of the Medical Research Council of pursuing an independent policy for the advancement of knowledge towards the relief of human suffering;(3) whether she will reject the customer-contractor principle in relation to applied medical research set out as recommendation 1 in the Rothschild Report;(4) if she is satisfied that the implementation of the customer-contractor principle in medical research is compatible with the Medical Research Council's two functions of supporting a broad

base of research over its whole field of activity in the hope of finding the unexpected road of building a foundation for future advance; and if she will make a statement;(5) whether she will confine the customer-contractor principle solely to those projects which have particular practical objectives so as to safeguard and preserve the independence of the Medical Research Council in advancing overall medical knowledge by research;(6) how many of the 76 medical research units and 30 Medical Research Council supported research groups would be closed as a result of the cutting down of the research budget proposed by the Rothschild Report;(7) whether the 1,248 individual grants given by the Medical Research Council annually will be maintained as a result of the cut-back of money available to the Medical Research Council as proposed by the Rothschild Report; and whether the overall expenditure on these grants will be reduced;(8) whether she intends to carry out the recommendation of the Rothschild Report which will transfer £11 million out of the total current Medical Research Council funds of £22.4 million per annum; and what guarantees she intends to put into effect in order to preserve the ultimate control by the Medical Research Council of the £11 million so transferred;(9) whether it is now the Government's policy to reduce independent medical research by half;(10) whether she will now increase the global sum available for medical research in view of the Rothschild recommendations which will halve the sum directly available to the Medical Research Council;(11) what is the date by which she intends to put into effect those parts of the Rothschild Report acceptable to the Government;(12) whether she will now consult with those concerned on medical research on the recommendations of the Rothschild Report and make a statement on such consultations before taking any action on the Report;

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Mrs. Thatcher

The Government published Cmnd. 4814 to allow wide public debate of its contents and as a basis for discussion with the scientific community. As the Green Paper indicates, the Government consider that the customer/contractor principle should be implemented in respect of applied research and development carried out or sponsored by the Government whether by the research councils or elsewhere, and believe that, subject to this principle, it would be right to preserve the research councils under the sponsorship of the Department of Education and Science and that authoritative advice should be available to me on the allocation of my Department's science budget. All the other recommendations in the Rothschild and Darn-ton Reports are open for discussion, including the precise nature of the contractual relationship between research councils and customer departments. As part of the process of consultation, informal discussions have already taken place under my Department's auspices between officers of the Medical Research Council and other Government Departments. The extent to which this principle may be applied to different

aspects of the council's activity and its effect on the council's management responsibilities, staff numbers, grants and establishments cannot be predicted in advance. The date of any change will be announced in the White Paper.

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