

small number of lectureships are unsympathetic and ponderous.

I agree that it would be better if we could all plan appointments much further ahead than we do at present. I think this is unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future. May I suggest, therefore, that it would be very helpful if overseas postdoctorals who are interested in returning here keep in touch with their former head of department and, more important, make an arrangement with a former colleague who would provide information concerning any vacancy that might be of interest.

Yours faithfully,

P. N. CAMPBELL

Department of Biochemistry,
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Engineering standards

SIR,—In "Round Britain (July 31) you report, and seem to approve, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals' pressure to increase the academic standard of British engineers by encouraging employers to insist on higher degrees. My job is engineering design and project management in an advanced field (fast reactors), and I can sympathise with the CERN engineers who despair at the often woefully inadequate capabilities of British industry; but I should need a lot of convincing that this has anything to do with the number of years people spend at university. Most would agree that where fast reactors are concerned the ranking order of national success is France, USSR, United Kingdom, with USA, Japan and West Germany following somewhere. I am pretty certain that this does not correlate well with the national proportions of engineers holding higher degrees, but perhaps the vice-chancellors would like to give us some statistics?

Success in advanced engineering projects obviously demands a reasonable level of theoretical ability, but it depends much more on the attitudes and policies prevalent nationally and within industrial firms, and on the ability of engineers to handle unfamiliar and very complex technical and organisational problems with imagination and good judgement. I suggest that to encourage large numbers of men to spend two or three years calmly researching esoteric problems is not likely either to improve government and public attitudes to engineering or to develop the necessary flexibility in the men concerned.

For my money I would support the Open University against all the dignity of the vice-chancellors; its technology courses are designed to stimulate thoughtful, imaginative and socially responsible attitudes. It is being squeezed financially by the government

that conceived it, and it is also not yet receiving the recognition it deserves from professional bodies. In these circumstances to channel extra resources into expanding post-graduate engineering departments would be short sighted indeed; what is needed in British engineering is more excellence and public acceptance at first degree level, not more narrow specialisation.

Yours faithfully,

JOHN A. GATLEY

Knutsford,
Cheshire, UK

All at sea

SIR,—Recently (May 8) you reported on some of our work in your editorial "For those in peril on the sea". Scientists and crew aboard research vessels co-exist under tension, created mostly by the needs of scientists and felt mainly by crew; tension which can and does erupt into unpleasantness. This costly problem is now recognised by the Canadian and German governments, for example.

Our most basic finding is that this situation results from locking two warring sub-cultures—academicians and people of working-class orientation—on a ship at sea where they cannot avoid each other as on land. The single most important cause of tension is the "data hunger" of scientists and their degree of sensitivity to the relaxation needs of the crew.

Many scientists, yourself included, have criticised our findings. Unfortunately, they all did so having read only a news release (which mentioned only Bernard). Published work should be read before criticism. We question your saying, "for half the price of placing an anthropologist . . . (you) would have been happy to tell" ONR about shipboard life. The total cost was less than three days' 1972 ship time (and covered part of a larger project to describe human relations numerically).

It is important for scientists to realise that mariners' views differ intrinsically from your editorial. For example, you compare the chief scientist with a referee, and believe that captains always want to get ships to port a day early. But captains also see themselves as referees, and believe that scientists always want to get ships to port a day late. Whether any of these sentiments are true (in fact ships do dock both early and late) is irrelevant. The important thing is that these sentiments are believed by those concerned, and insensitivity by others to these beliefs causes conflict.

Anthropologists rarely learn much that the natives, like yourself, do not know. Your observations affirm some of our work. We hope to hear from

other members of the ocean science community on conditions aboard any nation's vessels. A dialogue might help prevent Bransfield-like incidents.

PETER D. KILLWORTH

Cambridge, UK



RESULTS of competition No. 1. Readers were invited to supply the minutes of an illicit seminar held by scientists somewhere in the Western world. Though we withheld judgement for as long as possible, we were finally forced to recognise that there simply wasn't a welter of witty replies held up in the post somewhere. It may have been that the subject was too baffling for many to cut their teeth on. Winner from the half a dozen entries was E. Jarvis, of Clapham, London (entry below). A further prize goes to Scott Gilbert, of Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, for a near miss.

AMSS in session

THE Anti-Metric Society of Scientists held a meeting at a secret location in Mile End Road.

It was resolved that they would not budge an inch in their efforts to resist metrication and that they would continue to fathom out ways to circumvent its introduction. The problems were more than pint-sized but there was still much mileage in their opposition activities.

Contingency plans were drawn up to ensure that members would at least obtain their pound of flesh; an issue would be made of diamond cutters for reducing litre glasses to pints and pocket saws for cutting down metre rules to yards.

The ladies' committee announced that Valentine Cards inscribed 'I love you a bushel and a peck' would be available to members by the dozen.

Competition No. 2. An easier test this time, with a longer time limit of six weeks to allow for mental as well as postal blockages. A prize of £10 awaits the winner (or winners):

There was a young lady called Bright,
Who travelled much faster than light,
She went out one day

In a relative way,
And arrived home the previous night.

Ms Bright and her épéeist companion Fisk are already immortalised in limericks with a scientific flavour. Competitors are asked to submit further examples based in similar vein, on fundamental scientific principles, observations and so on. □