

departments might respond. For example, public confusion over the energy crisis might have been mitigated by a co-ordinated clear statement from the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources on its implications at some early stage. We feel that Information Canada should be alert to this kind of need, by keeping its finger on the public's pulse. The nation's majority is not necessarily silent, but it does not usually speak with one voice; feedback from the public should be an important concern of Information Canada. Public opinion research is not exactly a primitive science, and Information Canada should employ its techniques and skilled practitioners both to gauge the effectiveness of government information programs and to determine, as far as is possible, the information needs of the public.

Such a professional approach to the public's need to know should enable Information Canada to acquire considerable expertise in the area of information techniques as applied to the Canadian scene, and enable it to build up a store of experience and knowledge of this highly technical field from which all government departments could benefit. At present the cost effectiveness of Information Canada's techniques in this area are extremely dubious. Until the position of Information Canada's role vis-à-vis that of government information services is clarified, the potential for waste, duplication and omission in all government departments remains serious.

With regard to the approach of certain information personnel to their jobs, the Committee was struck by the assumption that their mission was one of education or social service rather than information. This is most clearly seen in the case of the Mobile Officer Scheme which is being tested in Nova Scotia and Manitoba, and which will be dealt with more fully in a later Chapter. While it may be desirable to have direct contact between the Information Officer and his client, the notion that the government has a mandate to go out and thrust information upon people, whether they need it or not, whether they want it or not, is questionable in terms of both cost and communications effectiveness. While the missionary zeal of many Information Canada officers is admirable as an expression of social concern and their desire to communicate directly with the public, it is felt to be wasted effort insofar as the aims of a government *information* agency is concerned. Both the Committee and witnesses from Information Canada agreed that communicating on a person-to-person basis is the least cost efficient means of getting a message across. While there are well-defined groups or regions in the country to which information may be specifically directed, the notion that information must be tailored to suit every conceivable interest should be discouraged. When one considers the enormous variety of interests, opinions, and needs covered by such blanket terms as "youth", "the disadvantaged", "ethnic minorities", "urban dwellers" or "native peoples" it is obviously not realistic to shape information to fit ambiguously defined sub-groups and still keep down costs. Even with the most careful attention to defining such groups and assessing their specific needs, there is no guarantee that an information