

their consultant colleagues. It might have been better to go the whole hog and ask that all those who teach in teaching hospitals should have the same status.

What the Todd Commission has to say about the reorganization of the teaching hospitals in London is almost certain to produce the most noticeable protests, if only because it will now be necessary to think of amalgamating institutions which have for years thrived on their jealous sense of independence. This has its roots in the doctrine of medical education by apprenticeship, and it is undeniable that the sense of individuality which the medical schools have enjoyed has given British medicine a good deal of its strength. But now that teaching needs roots in the laboratories, the medical schools are plainly hopelessly too small and too fragmented. Most probably the proposal that the twelve colleges in London should be amalgamated into six is that best calculated to win acceptance, but here, again, there is at least a possibility that a still more radical solution might have been preferable. Is it, for example, entirely beyond the bounds of good sense that all twelve medical schools in London should be amalgamated into one? Those who shrink from the ructions that lie ahead will naturally shrink from that suggestion and if what matters is to get things done, and they are probably right. That is the hallmark of the Todd Report—it is enlightened but practical. The sooner its proposals are adopted, however, the sooner another Royal Commission will be necessary.

## British Computer Boom

DELIVERIES of computers by firms in Britain were a record in 1967—an optimistic omen for the newly formed International Computers, Ltd. Computers and associated equipment made in the United Kingdom and delivered last year were worth £96.1 million, an increase of 23 per cent on the 1966 figure. The home market absorbed £60.5 million of this, an increase of 30 per cent on the previous year, and £35.6 million was exported, up by 12 per cent on 1966. On the other hand, deliveries of factored machines—machines sold by firms other than the manufacturer—fell by 15 per cent to £31.1 million. Most of the factored equipment was imported material for the home market.

These statistics are from a Ministry of Technology survey of the computer market in the United Kingdom,

and are based on enquiries to the computer industry. The figures issued by the ministry include a breakdown showing how the total deliveries were made up of digital computing systems, analogue and hybrid computers, data transmission equipment, industrial electronic control equipment, and peripheral equipment. The figures are available for each quarter in 1966 and 1967, and according to the ministry include rentals.

At first sight, the statistics provide a useful survey of the state of the British computer industry. The manufacturers are not so impressed, however. They point out that without definitions of exactly what the ministry understands by the several classes into which Britain's computer output is divided the figures are meaningless.

The decision to publish quarterly statistics for the delivery, import and export of computers reflects the growing tendency to judge a nation's standing in technology by the extent it is using computers. There are dangers in this, of course. As Dr Jeremy Bray, Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Technology, pointed out in January, the figures vary greatly from quarter to quarter because of the nature of the industry, and therefore cannot be taken as indicating a trend.

Nevertheless the figures are published and at first sight look encouraging. The difficulty is to know to what extent the introduction of highly expensive digital computing systems, which seem to be largely responsible for the increase in deliveries last year, gives a true indication of technological progress. The table shows their contribution to computer sales for the period when statistics are available. These large off-line machines are chiefly for accountancy and documentation applications, and are not directly concerned with the improvement of manufacturing processes. More important is the increasing use of computers for the scheduling of production on the shop floor and the control of stock. Although systems for this kind of work are cheaper than the large machines used in accountancy, their economic worth may prove to be just as great. For this reason the drop in deliveries of industrial electronic control equipment to the home market, revealed by the ministry's survey, is ominous.

## Foot and Mouth in Europe

At the fifteenth session of the European Commission on the Control of Foot and Mouth Disease of the FAO, held in Rome from March 26–28, a Russian observer allayed the fears of representatives from elsewhere in Europe that the strain of foot and mouth virus now active in the Soviet Union (A22) would spread. Dr M. A. Khoudiakov insisted that in 1967, there were only sporadic outbreaks of the disease, and that they were being contained by a combination of slaughter, vaccination and quarantine.

The commission, which consists of veterinarians from the seventeen member nations which contribute to its meagre budget, was set up in 1963–64 to organize the control of foot and mouth disease in Europe. The Soviet Union, together with the other countries of Eastern Europe and France, Germany and Spain, is not a member and has not previously sent an observer to the meetings. But the epizootic in Britain and the publicity given in December to outbreaks of A22 in the Soviet Union following the visit of Dr G. M. Bol-

Table 1. DELIVERIES OF BRITISH-MADE DIGITAL COMPUTING SYSTEMS AND INDUSTRIAL ELECTRONIC CONTROL EQUIPMENT

		Digital computing systems £'000s		Industrial electronic control equipment £'000s	
		Total	Export	Total	Export
1966	1st quarter	10,494	3,294	745	32
	2nd quarter	11,434	4,387	1,398	140
	3rd quarter	13,094	4,477	1,094	158
	4th quarter	10,416	3,009	923	39
1967	1st quarter	12,381	4,645	716	31
	2nd quarter	14,539	5,109	795	80
	3rd quarter	17,635	6,198	612	74
	4th quarter	17,826	5,464	428	148



drini, the secretary of the commission, to the infected areas, have no doubt prompted the sending of a representative this year. By mutual agreement, a vaccinated buffer zone is being maintained along the common frontier of Russia with Poland, Czechoslovakia and Rumania. The Baltic states are completely free from the disease, and Dr Khoudiakov emphasized that there is strict inspection of meat for export. The Rumanian observer confirmed that there was excellent co-operation with the Soviet Union in maintaining vaccination in the buffer zone, with the result that Rumania was completely free of foot and mouth in 1967.

The vaccination campaigns which the commission has mounted over the past six years have prevented exotic strains of the disease from spreading from Africa and the Middle East across the Bosphorus and into south-east Europe—A22 and the African strain SAT have not won a foothold, for example. In the circumstances it is unfortunate that wealthy nations such as France, Germany and the Soviet Union choose not to join the commission and contribute to its finances, which are very small at present.

At the opening of the session, the Director-General of the FAO, A. H. Boerma, congratulated the British veterinary services on their energy, self-sacrifice and endurance during the epizootic. Ironically enough, he went on to say "The steady improvement in vaccine production techniques and the increase of production capacity, as well as the extension of the application of systematic vaccination programmes in various countries, have resulted in the successful protection of the cattle population distributed over large European areas".

## Demand for Further Education

OVER three million students in Britain were enrolled on courses of further education in 1966, according to statistics compiled by the Department of Education and Science. This represents a 5 per cent increase since 1965.

The demand for further education has shifted from evening classes to full-time courses. The number of students taking advanced level courses leading to a qualification increased by 8.5 per cent between 1965 and 1966 and there was a substantial growth in enrolments for CNAAs first degree courses.

The levies and grants of the Industrial Training Act were doubtless one factor behind the 39,000 students released by their employers for block release courses, as against 33,000 in 1965, and the 625,000 students who went on day release. The Department of Education and Science has drawn up a league table showing the relative performances of various industries in terms of the number of employees under 18 years who were granted day release. The league table is topped by such industries as mining, engineering, shipbuilding and car making, which sent nearly 50 per cent or more of such employees on day release. Insurance, banking and finance come firmly bottom of the league with a mere 3.1 per cent.

The department comments on the "continued reluctance of employers in many sectors of industry to grant day release for women as freely as they do for men". On present figures a man under 18 has four times as great a chance of being sent on day release as a woman under 18.

## More Flying

THE number of passengers using the airports in Britain exceeded 24 million in 1967, according to figures just issued by the Board of Trade. Although this represents an increase of 6 per cent over 1966, the growth rate in 1967 was lower than the average for the last four years, which has been 11 per cent. This decline was caused by a sharp fall in the number of passengers during the summer holiday season. During the second and third quarters of 1967, the increases over 1966 were 2 per cent and 5 per cent respectively, compared with 13 per cent in the first quarter and 8 per cent in the last. As in the past, well over half—14.5 million—of the air passengers in 1967 used airports servicing London. This is very close to the 14.3 million predicted in the report on the Third London Airport published in May 1967. The total weight of freight landing and leaving British airports dropped to 490,000 tons, 6 per cent less than in 1966 but still 17 per cent more than in 1965. Again over half of this traffic was at London.

## Victory on Points

THE argument over the kind of decimal marker to be used when Britain adopts the decimal system in currency and the metric system in units has been resolved in favour of the decimal point. A difference of opinion had arisen between the British Standards Institution, which favoured the use of the decimal comma, and the Decimal Currency Board, which favoured the decimal point (*Nature*, 217, 995; 1968). In the absence of an international agreement, the Ministry of Technology Joint Committee on Metrication went along with the decimal currency board. Although the BSI had already stated its preference, and the construction industry had already begun the process of metrication on the basis of the decimal comma, the BSI has now backed down.

Last week the BSI said that industry had no alternative but to adopt the decimal board's recommendation. But it made it clear that the decision had been taken with regret, against its better judgment. Actually, the decision was a finely balanced one—although the comma is used in Europe, it is by no means universal. The use of two systems, although it does detract somewhat from the elegance of the international system, is unlikely to cause ambiguity. But if international agreement is reached to use the decimal comma after Britain has changed both money and units on the basis of the decimal point, it could then be much harder—and more expensive—for Britain to change.

## Coal Board Merger

THE National Coal Board has announced a plan to merge the activities of the Mining Research Establishment at Isleworth, Middlesex, and the Central Engineering Establishment at Stanhope Bretby, near Burton-on-Trent. The object of the merger is to increase the efficiency of research and development work and to prevent any overlap.

The Mining Research Establishment was set up in 1952 for the investigation of underground problems and was made the responsibility of the board's scientific