

more than half of the total, and this record was maintained in 1967. In the first quarter of 1968, the other universities seem to be making further gains, with 60 per cent of the applications.

The story in the scientific classes is less encouraging. Posts in the chemical, geological and biological sciences have been fairly easy to fill, but there remain significant shortages, the report says, of mathematicians, physicists and research engineers. This is partly a reflexion of imbalances in educational output, the commissioners think, but they can hardly claim that it does not also reflect the opinions of talented graduates in these disciplines of a career in the scientific civil service. The report also says that "the limited degree of flexibility in determining starting salaries is an inhibiting factor in all cases where demand exceeds supply". In these edgy days before Fulton, this is as near to a direct criticism of the service as the commissioners allow themselves. They are sharper about the universities, however; many of the candidates with higher degrees "do not appear to have derived sufficient benefit from their extended stay at university, and a PhD is not necessarily a reliable pointer to suitability for the Scientific Officer class". Many of those with thirds and pass degrees, they add, would have been the better for a more practical course of study.

Defence Research

THE Select Committee on Science and Technology continued its investigation of the British defence research effort by attempting to discover what part the Treasury plays. Some members feel that it is an entirely negative part, and the Treasury representatives who gave evidence on May 23 did not entirely succeed in dispelling this impression.

Briefly, the role of the Treasury is to operate as a financial longstop, examining such things as the defence budget costings, the annual estimates, the staff complements at the Ministries of Defence and Technology and the financial procedures and managerial efficiency of the departments. It also examines and approves (or, presumably, occasionally disapproves) individual research and development contracts. This is done by a group of people which includes no scientists or engineers, but just, as the witnesses put it, "talented administrators". The civil research projects of the Ministry of Technology, for example, are overseen by the Science and Technology Division of the Public Sector Group. With a name like that, one might expect to find some scientists and technologists in the division, but apparently there are none; the witnesses explained that the concern of the division was not to question the technical feasibility of projects, but to supply economic expertise.

Mr Eric Moonman attempted to find out how people were selected for this division. The witnesses said that there were no formal or written instructions. The staff were simply administrative civil servants. Mr Parkyn was concerned that there was no incentive for scientists on defence contracts to save money. If they spent less in a financial year than was budgeted for, the money could not be set aside for the next year, but instead reverted to the Treasury. Did this not encourage extravagance? The witnesses thought not, and suggested that any other system would be much harder to operate.

Parliament in Britain

by our Parliamentary Correspondent

Flats Collapse

MR ANTHONY GREENWOOD, Minister of Housing and Local Government, gave the membership of the committee which is to investigate the collapse of the block of flats at Canning Town in London. Mr Hugh Griffiths QC would be chairman of the committee, and he would be assisted by Sir Alfred Pugsley, professor of civil engineering at the University of Bristol, and Sir Owen Saunders, professor of mechanical engineering and vice-chancellor of London University. The task of the committee is to "inquire into the circumstances affecting the collapse of the flats at Canning Town on May 16; to ascertain and report the cause or causes; to consider the implications of the findings; and to make recommendations". (Written answer, May 21.)

Heavy Water

MR DICKSON MABON, for the Scottish Office, declined to give any directive to the North of Scotland Hydro-electric Board to go ahead with plans for a 200-ton-a-year heavy water plant. Mr Alisdair Mackenzie, who had asked for the minister to issue such a directive, said that the plant would be based on an interruptible power supply. Mr Mabon said that the board was always ready to enter into discussions with any industry which wished to begin operations in the area. (Written answer, May 22.)

Porton

MR TAM DALYELL asked a long series of questions about the Microbiological Research Establishment at Porton. In a series of replies, Mr John Morris for the Ministry of Defence said that Porton had developed a portable resuscitator, a mobile laboratory pathogen unit which was being widely demonstrated, and a needleless injector. It was producing for sale to the WHO an antigen for testing human and monkey serum for evidence of infection with the vervet monkey disease agent, and had a programme of research on decontamination. Information about the work on monkey disease had been widely distributed to forty laboratories all over the world. (Written answer, May 22.)

Planning College

MR ALAN WILLIAMS, Under-Secretary at the Department of Economic Affairs, declined to commit himself on the possibility of establishing a National Planning College, as suggested by the TUC. The Fulton Committee would be reporting in just over a month, and it would be better to wait until then before deciding. Mr Stratton Mills (Con.) suggested that the answers from the Government Front Bench raised grave doubts about whether the planners were fit for their jobs. Mr Williams retorted by promising that if a planning college were set up, a planning kindergarten would also be set up, for the Opposition. (Oral answer, May 23.)

Hypersonic Flight

MR WEDGWOOD BENN, Minister of Technology, said that research on hypersonic flight had been reduced at RAE Farnborough over the past two years. The Plowden Committee had recommended that preference should be given to more modest types of aircraft, and so the research on hypersonic flight had been reduced to a level sufficient to maintain an interest in the field. (Written answer, May 23.)