

twenty different countries, which involves a waste of time and money and which has resulted in a backlog of several years' work in most patent offices. Since the early sixties, the possibility of creating a single European patent law has been discussed, one of the problems being to find an acceptable compromise between the different types of systems. In Britain and West Germany, for example, there is a full examination and a chance to raise objections before any patent is granted, while in France patents are simply registered without testing or approval.

A draft convention was in fact published in 1962 by the countries of the EEC, but its adoption was held up by the Dutch refusal to go ahead unless Britain and other countries were included. Under the terms of this convention, provisional patents are granted once an invention has been shown to be novel, but it has to be more carefully examined before a final patent is granted. Any patent lapses after twenty years. One interesting clause states that no patents can be granted for plant and animal varieties or for biological methods of producing plants or animals. The latest memorandum, approved at the Council of Ministers meeting at the beginning of March, is based on this draft convention.

In line with the EEC's decision last December (*Nature*, 220, 1268; 1968) to invite outside countries to collaborate with the Common Market countries in well defined fields of technology, seven countries—Austria, Denmark, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Britain—are to be included in the invitation to discuss the proposed system. Ministerial talks are expected to start soon, according to a spokesman from the European Economic Community.

UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE

Where the Students Go

THE number of overseas applicants for places at British universities in the academic year 1968-69 fell by 20 per cent. At the same time, admissions in science and technology from home and overseas fell short of estimates by almost 1,200 and in medicine and dentistry the shortfall was 295, according to *The Sixth Report of the Universities Central Council on Admissions* (UCCA, 8s). The drop in overseas candidates from 9,643 in 1966-67 (9 per cent of the total) to 7,704 (7 per cent of the total) no doubt reflects the rise in fees for overseas students from £70 to £250. The first preference of overseas candidates, however, remains much the same as in the previous two years and follows an interestingly different pattern from that of home students (Table 1).

Table 1. PREFERENCES OF HOME AND OVERSEAS STUDENTS, 1968

Subject	Home students		Overseas students	
	Preference order	%	Preference order	%
Engineering and Technology	4	13.8	1	31.0
Science	2	20.1	4	8.2
Medicine	5	7.9	3	22.3
Social Studies	1	28.9	2	24.5
Languages	3	15.0	5	5.5

Table 2 shows the actual number of first year students admitted by all the universities for October 1968. The shortfall in science and technology, which reflects a shortage of suitably qualified applicants, and the surplus of students admitted in the social sciences has become almost a traditional feature of British universities, but the surplus of social science places was smaller than in 1967 when admissions exceeded estimates by 563. As in previous years, there was a surplus of suitably qualified candidates in the arts, social sciences and medicine.

Table 2. ACTUAL AND ESTIMATED ADMISSIONS TO UNIVERSITIES BY OCTOBER 1968

Subject	Admissions	Estimate as of May 1968	Surplus and shortfall
Education	872	77	+101
Medicine	4,564	4,859	-295
Engineering and technology	9,902	10,357	-455
Science	15,208	15,946	-738
Social science	12,202	11,779	+423
Agricultural and veterinary studies	1,146	983	+163
Total, all subjects	58,481	59,583	-1,102

The UCCA clearing operation for candidates not accepted to begin with involves 21,347 candidates. Of these 9,190 were considered by UCCA to stand a chance of getting a place and were referred to the universities. More than half of them were dealt with after September 4 and by October decisions on all had been received from the universities. Altogether, 4,564 were accepted. The competition in the various fields is clearly reflected by the proportion of applicants accepted in the clearing operation. In medicine, for example, only 293 out of 1,154 applicants were placed, but in physics, chemistry and mathematics, about a half were found places. The number of candidates applying for universities through UCCA continues to increase. Since 1965 the number of applicants has risen by about 10,000 a year to 110,400 in 1968 and 53,644 were admitted. But during the three years 1966-68, the proportion of men and women, 70 per cent and 30 per cent, has remained constant.

NUTRITION

Unfed to School

THE House of Lords discussed on March 11 the possibility of a research project on malnutrition among schoolchildren, largely on the basis of a report by Dr G. W. Lynch of Queen Elizabeth College which suggested that many children are too undernourished to concentrate on their school work (*Medical Officer*, January 24, 1969). Dr Lynch's studies have revealed that many children in London eat nothing for 18 hours of every school-day. Twenty-five per cent of a sample of eighty children between 9 and 11 went to school without breakfast. Parents seem to assume that children eat a substantial lunch at school, but children tend to refuse to eat some school food, particularly vegetables.