

NEWS AND VIEWS

Unfinished Business

THE disappearance of the British Parliament on vacation has left several important issues in abeyance. By the time the political season begins again, and certainly by the time that Parliament reassembles in October, a great many tasks will need urgently to be attended to. In science and technology, perhaps the most glaring need is for a decision on the future of the Atomic Energy Authority; although it seems to be unlikely that a radical change in the structure of the authority will be made in the months immediately ahead, the fact that a successor to Lord Penney (who moves to Imperial College in October) has not yet been appointed is one sign that there are decisions to be made. (The annual report of the authority, which usually appears in the summer, is being held up until the autumn, but this is probably more a sign that Lord Penney wishes to make its appearance his final public comment on the authority's business than a symptom of uncertainty.)

The report of the Advisory Council on Scientific Policy, expected about May this year, is also late, although it is known that the final draft has now gone to the Secretary of State for Education and Science. In the weeks and months immediately ahead, the council is likely to be preoccupied with the fixing within the government of targets for spending by the research councils into the early seventies. A year ago it seems to have been agreed that government expenditure on civil science should continue to increase, but at a declining pace. In particular, it has been laid down that in three consecutive years increases should amount to 10, 9 and 8 per cent respectively. Having established the point that plans for spending on research should be settled in broad outline three years in advance, the advisory council is now faced with the need to combat the Treasury's instinct to continue the progression 10, 9, 8 in such a way as to entail a continuing reduction in the pace of growth. The appearance of the council's report on the cost of what is called "sophistication", also due soon, is expected to make an important contribution to this question.

Another matter that will be looked at closely in the autumn is the operation of the Science Research Council, then to be blessed with a new chairman in the person of Professor Brian Flowers. The Science Research Council is, of course, the largest of the four research councils concerned with the natural sciences.

Women not Wanted

FOR a nation suffering from a shortage of doctors, Britain seems to be remarkably prodigal of willing helpers. Last week a twenty-two year old girl left Britain to take up a place in a medical school in Prague, after she had failed even to be interviewed for a place at a British school. The girl, Miss Diana Pearce, who had three A levels and ten O levels, had been applying to London and provincial hospitals for

the past four years. She will now, presumably, be learning Czech in order to qualify as a doctor. Miss Pearce is unusual only in her determination; at various London hospitals last year the number of women applicants for each place varied between twenty and forty. Only about twenty per cent of the places at medical schools are for women, and competition for them is significantly higher than for men.

When Miss Pearce returns from Czechoslovakia, fully qualified, she will still not be able to practise in Britain. This is a predicament she will share with doctors holding qualifications from every country outside the Commonwealth, South Africa, Eire and Burma. If she only intends to remain in Britain for a short time, she may be registered temporarily with the General Medical Council. If, however, she decided to stay, she would have to acquire one of a number of British qualifications, a process that could possibly take as much as two or three years.

At the same time, two foreign doctors working in Britain have had their temporary registrations cancelled. One of these, a Polish woman doctor, had married an Englishman, and by signifying her intention to remain in Britain had disqualified herself from temporary registration. The other, whose case is still under review by the General Medical Council, and whose name has not been revealed, apparently had his registration cancelled while he was in process of taking examinations for British qualifications. He had already passed one examination. If the Council refuses to rescind its decision he has said that he will go abroad.

The reason why, under Act of Parliament, the General Medical Council will not allow licentiates of foreign medical colleges, including those of the United States and Europe, to practise in Britain without these preliminaries is that reciprocal agreements have not been made with its counterparts in these countries. Before the Second World War agreements did exist with Belgium, Italy and Japan, but these lapsed during the war.

Cheap Digs for Students

THE University of Lancaster is going ahead with a scheme for cheap student accommodation that may prove a model for universities in the future. In its new building, to be completed in 1969, there will be no large communal rooms, but only self-contained flatlets. Each of these will house ten or eleven students, in single or double rooms. While the flats will have dining-room kitchens, students will be able to eat in their colleges, with which the new building will be integrated. Because of the lack of expensive communal facilities in the new building, and because it will stand in the university's own grounds, the cost will be only £700 per student, compared with £1,200 at other institutions. This in turn will mean low rents—three pounds for a single room, ten shillings less for a double room. Even so, the university hopes to make a profit, and so has been able to finance the scheme through an insurance company, instead of the University Grants Committee. £500,000 will be borrowed, and repaid over thirty years at an annual rate of £43,000. The cost of heating, light and maintenance will bring this sum to £66,500, while the revenue from 605 students will be £68,500, if all goes according to plan.