Schools Council did, however, consider the Welsh proposals directly relevant to engineering.

METRICATION

Slow Change for Schools

THE most important questions raised at the Royal Society's conference on metrication in schools on September 19 were those of responsibility—who should be responsible for deciding when metric and specifically SI (le Système International) units should be used in schools and in teacher training colleges ? When should the examination boards set questions in SI units ? Who should advise manufacturers of school equipment what to make and when, and publishers what to publish and how soon ? The conference last week was a sequel to that held on March 20 (*Nature*, **217**, 1205; 1968) at which the delegates—chiefly school teachers and members of the examinations boards—recommended that SI units be used exclusively in public examinations in mathematics and science not later than June 1972, and that in primary schools there should be a change of emphasis in favour of the metric system of weights and measures from September 1969.

Some progress has been made since then. The Royal Society has prepared draft pamphlets on metrication in primary and secondary schools which are intended chiefly as guides for teachers. At the conference, the pamphlet for primary teachers was criticized for its unimaginative layout and general dullness. It will have to be revised, but both pamphlets should be ready for publication fairly soon. Meanwhile, the Schools Council has already published *A Teaching Guide for the Introduction of Decimal Currency and the Adoption of Metric Measures* (HMSO, 4*s*.) which discusses, somewhat coyly, a selection of relevant classroom experiences and gives some useful practical advice to teachers. Mr C. G. Nobbs of the mathematics committee of the Schools Council stressed that the council will act only in an advisory capacity and will not attempt to dictate policy.

The English examinations boards have still not finally committed themselves to the dates when they will be using SI units exclusively, but GCE O and A-level papers will probably be metric by about 1971–72. Most examinations boards will set alternative sets of papers in technical subjects for an interim period between about 1970 and 1974. The Scottish examinations boards are a step ahead. They intend that SI units should be used exclusively from 1972 in ordinary examinations and from 1973 in higher certificate examinations.

For the rest, a great amount of sporadic activity seems under way. Mr R. Jardine of the Ministry of Technology reminded the conference that the Committee on Metrication of which he is secretary has already asked for the setting up of a metrication board to plan for the next step after decimalization of the coinage. Then the Royal Society has prepared a draft report on the use of units and symbols in physics and chemistry, and the Association of Science Education is well ahead with plans to publish a simplified version for teachers. The biggest uncertainty is to know how quickly and fully the schools will be able to adopt these new proposals now that they have been asked to keep any increase in their budgets to within three per cent.

MEDICAL EDUCATION

Students Echo Todd

from our Social Medicine Correspondent

WHILE the medical students in Paris continue to press vigorously for the postponement of examinations and the right to work in hospitals, medical students in Britain are quietly spelling out the changes they would like to see in medical education. The latest publication of the British Medical Students' Association (to which 95 per cent of medical students belong) is a welcome addition to the literature of this subject, for until now it had largely been the teachers and administrators who have decided what direction these changes will take. To be sure, the report sometimes criticizes certain aspects of the current syllabus without suggesting workable alternatives, but it will be welcomed, if only because it reflects a genuine desire of students to infuse and re-kindle an aspect of medicine which has remained virtually static over the past 100 years. Nobody should be put off by the Marcusian reaffirmation of the belief of the International Federation of Medical Student Associations that "the opportunity for medical students to contribute actively in bringing reform and change in medical education is a fundamental right in any democratic system.

What the British students would like to see is a closer link between preclinical subjects and their clinical relevance in patients. They ask for more integration of subjects, less duplication in badly planned curricula and, most of all, an opportunity to feel that they are actively contributing to the care of patients. Planning and conduct of the medical curriculum should be entrusted to a Statutory Curriculum Committee similar to that proposed for the new medical school at Nottingham. This would include senior and junior members of staff from preclinical and clinical departments as well as student representatives. The chief objective of this committee would be the fullest integration of teaching material. The students also ask that more attention should be paid to the general principles of science with the objective of encouraging an understanding of scientific method and technique which can be applied later in medicine. This ideal of an undergraduate course designed to produce "educable" young people able to keep on learning echoes one of the conclusions of the Todd Commission on Medical Education (*Nature*, **218**, 121; 1968).

The students' report says, for example, that the number of hours devoted to anatomy could be reduced. Practical work would be done with greater enthusiasm if it were related to practical medical problems and if less time were spent on repetitive experiments of the "cookery book" type. The emphasis in the report on the importance of research is encouraging. The general feeling seems to be that the second MB in its present form should be abolished and replaced by several examinations placed periodically throughout the course, with continuous assessment of the standard of the students' work between examinations. This problem of assessment is not, of course, peculiar to medical students, and the solution may well come from outside the medical profession.

To ease the load in teaching hospitals and to give clinical students a chance to see some of the more common complaints, it is suggested that students