

21. On the second point Your Committee have been told that many probationers have had no education beyond the elementary stages. There is frequently a gap of from five to six years between the time the girl leaves school and the time she enters the hospital, during which she has received no kind of education. In view of this, the proportion of failures does not appear to be excessive. Your Committee would point out that the evidence on the difficulty of the examination is somewhat conflicting.

22. Your Committee are not, however, altogether satisfied as to the adequacy of the protection of nurse probationers from an undue amount of their time being absorbed by the ordinary work of the hospital. They are of opinion that much of the criticism as to inadequate training and failure in examination would be met if a better balance were struck, particularly in the first year, between the time allotted to instruction and that spent on the routine work of the wards, on which great stress is necessarily and properly laid. Your Committee recommend that the General Nursing Council should seriously consider this matter, and should take steps to ensure that in all training schools probationers should be guaranteed a minimum number of student hours. Your Committee realise that practical difficulties will arise in giving effect to this recommendation, and that a certain amount of elasticity is essential, but they are convinced that much can be done on these lines to secure a better standard of training.

23. Your Committee are impressed with the necessity for the adequate inspection of all hospitals approved as training schools, and they recommend that the General Nursing Council should carry out its expressed intention in this matter with the least possible delay, as it is by inspection and advice rather than by a cast-iron syllabus that efficiency in education is best maintained.

THE SCHEME OF ELECTION.

24. Under paragraph 4 of the Schedule to the Act of 1919, the constitution of the General Nursing Council is laid down as follows:—

Nine persons are to be appointed, two by the Privy Council, two by the Board of Education, and five by the Minister of Health.

Sixteen persons, being persons registered as nurses, are to be elected in accordance with the prescribed scheme.

25. In accordance with the provisions of this paragraph, the Council have submitted a scheme for the election to these sixteen seats. This scheme divides the electorate into compartments in accordance with the different parts of the register. Eleven seats are reserved for nurses on the general part of the register, and five for those whose names are contained in the supplementary parts. Your Committee are satisfied with this division and, therefore, they have concerned themselves only with the eleven seats allotted to nurses on the general part of the register. These eleven seats have under the proposed scheme been sub-divided into further compartments in order to secure on the one hand a balance between the number of matrons and nurses, and on the other hand a balance between the various types of experience, namely General Hospitals, Metropolitan and Provincial, Poor Law Hospitals, the Public Health Service and District Nursing, nurses in private practice, sister tutors, and as to two seats, any registered nurses.

26. An important witness put it to Your Committee in his evidence that the reservation of a certain number of seats on the Council was necessary to maintain educational efficiency and to secure that the requisite types of experience should be properly represented. Your Committee wish to state at the outset that they have been impressed with the importance of the educational duties laid upon the Council, and though they have given due regard to the

disciplinary powers given to a body entrusted with the government of a great profession, they are of opinion that educational responsibilities must be given first place in considering the constitution of the Council.

27. The main objection that Your Committee have heard to the sub-division proposed for the eleven seats appears to be based upon the fact that six out of the eleven are restricted to matrons. This objection Your Committee consider to be justified, not on the ground that it is in the least undesirable that the Council should include this relatively large proportion of matrons representing (as they do) distinctive types of educational experience, but rather on the grounds expressed in paragraphs 29 and 30 below. It is undoubtedly an important factor in the situation that all the nurses' societies who have given evidence before Your Committee, including the College of Nursing and the Royal British Nurses' Association, the two main bodies representing nursing opinion in this country, have expressed themselves as in favour of a free election to these eleven seats.

28. Your Committee have considered the objections placed before them in regard to a compartment scheme of election. They are not, however, satisfied that the present scheme was found, in fact, to be impracticable, cumbrous or unintelligible. There are undoubtedly valuable types of experience which must be adequately represented at the initiation of a new scheme. There is no question that it is very desirable during the early stages to have the best technical advice, particularly in a body whose functions are mainly educational.

29. On the other hand, several witnesses have expressed their opinion that the nurses could be trusted to elect representatives of the necessary types of experience if left with a free choice, and that nurses generally fully recognise the value, both to the sick and to themselves, of the maintenance of a high educational standard in all branches of their profession. Moreover, it was urged that in Scotland and Northern Ireland there was no analogous system of reservation and that a free election in each case had resulted in satisfactory councils. One witness brought forward the fact that under the compartment system a candidate wishing to represent a particular class of nurses may, though specially qualified to do so, be prevented from standing by reason of her having previously been a matron.

30. Your Committee cannot fail to recognise the advantages that accrue from a free election. It secures for the elected body a measure of confidence and support which it might not otherwise be able to obtain. It puts the profession on its honour to elect representatives that will be a credit to the profession. Such advantages cannot lightly be set aside.

31. In view of these arguments Your Committee do not recommend any disturbance of the composition of the present Council, as it would seem distinctly desirable that they should remain in office during the next few years, but Your Committee do recommend that at the next election the restrictions on voting other than those which relate to the representatives of nurses registered in the supplementary parts of the register should be removed, and that the eleven places allotted to nurses on the general part of the register should be thrown open to any nurse registered on the general part of the register.

We print in the following pages the Précis of Evidence forwarded by Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, by request, to the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the General Nursing Council, on which her evidence before the Committee was based. In our next issue we shall deal with the evidence itself, as well as with that of other witnesses before the Committee.

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