

Do we require more recruits?

SIR,—In your editorial of July 6 you chastise the GOC for contemplating the need to stimulate recruitment to the profession; and then, based upon the number of advertisements for optometrists and the number of applicants to teaching departments, you urge that the UGC should make more places available for undergraduates.

I feel that you are right to give short shrift to the GOC's deliberations. In an article in the *Ophthalmic Optician* (July 2, 1983) it was made clear that although the average expected-full-time-equivalent working life of women was around 70 per cent of the men's it was conceivable that their expected aggregate working life in the profession might well be longer! The profession does itself no good at all in continuing to whinge on in a male chauvinist manner about the 55 per cent of women currently being admitted to training.

However, I was most concerned about your assertion that there was a need for more recruits to the profession. I thought that research (THE OPTICIAN, September 1983) had shown that the recent recruitment rates were reasonable but that if anything the greatest risk came from too many people entering training rather than too few.

Since that report was written there has been a small increase in the intakes to training institutions and I have now heard a rumour that one department is to further increase its numbers substantially. I believe that such a move, if true, is likely to be motivated by the self-interest of the training institution concerned rather than by a sober and responsible assessment of the future needs of the profession and its members.

An increase of 25 students per year will make little difference before 1990, but the consequences by 2000 will be a 4 per cent reduction in the number of sight tests per optometrist and by 2010—a 6 per cent reduction. Without these student increases optometrists will *not* be overworked by the turn of the century, but with them some may well

be unemployed.

With the present climate of uncertainty we may well need a whole string of 'situations vacant' for optometrists whose present positions are threatened. It hardly seems the appropriate time to encourage *more* people to enter the profession.—Chris French, Cheadle, Cheshire.