

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FORESTRY GRADUATES

Sir — I refer to I. L. Baumgart's excellent article (Vol. 27 (2), p. 156) concerning the need to increase the number of forestry graduates. While he raises many important points, I fear he has overlooked a few others.

He identifies the need for 39 graduates annually, and then suggests that the Forestry School should produce this level. This reminds me of the army ordering 39 pairs of boots, of assorted sizes, in order to fit 39 soldiers — and then wondering why the last few men to choose their boots complain!

He fails to note that perhaps only a quarter of graduates are of an academic calibre that would qualify them for postgraduate work, research science, or public education. I sincerely do not wish to denigrate the majority of students who, though not academically inclined, have valuable qualities that make them ideal for the vital type of work traditionally done by forest rangers. (I hasten to add that graduates of Ranger School are also very proficient at their jobs!)

May I suggest that it is a great mistake to attempt to use graduates of the Forestry School to bridge the chasm between forestry and the general public, or to market our future timber mountains in the most effective way. For these tasks, a different type of mind is required — the sort of mind that one would expect to find in an Arts faculty.

Lastly, why does forestry (like medicine) limit its graduates to the anticipated demand? If geologists, lawyers, musicians, etc., did this, then our university rolls would be only one percent of the size, to the nation's loss.

PIERS MACLAREN

I. L. Baumgart replies:

I am grateful to Mr Maclaren for his comments. I hope that my paper will engender this type of discussion.

I agree that the numbers trained in professional forestry should not be restricted to foreseeable vacancies in the industry. It is for this reason that I considered that the 15-year estimate of the Forestry Council was too conservative at 272, and I increased the figure to 350, allowing for a "sophistication factor" (increased professionalism in the industry) and a contribution to international forestry by increased overseas appointments and consultancies. Further, the aim of the School of Forestry which I quoted indicates that its graduates are versatile, equipped to undertake a wide range of forestry careers — considerably more responsive to changing requirements than a row of army boots!

My estimate of 9 out of 39 graduates per year being suited to research by inclination and by academic calibre agrees closely with Mr Maclaren's figure of one-quarter.

I did not mean to suggest that graduates of the School of Forestry should have the sole responsibility "to bridge the chasm between forestry and the general public". Other disciplines, backgrounds and skills are also necessary. But I do believe that the professional forester must make some contribution to this process — and I guess that 2½% of the School of Forestry's output would be an appropriate share of the load.