

There appears to be no diminution in the demand for commercial instruction. Classes for such instruction were held at 41 centres, while the total average attendance was higher than for any other group of classes. Classes for such subjects as cookery, dressmaking, and millinery were also widely attended. The number of centres at which such classes were held was 86, the total average attendance being 3,278.

It is a matter for regret that but little progress has been made in connection with technical instruction in subjects relating to agriculture. With the exception of classes for wool sorting and classing, and training classes for teachers, very few technical classes for agriculture have been held during the year. The efforts that have been made in certain districts to establish such classes do not, generally speaking, appear to have met with the encouragement they deserve at the hands of the farming community so far as attendance at the classes is concerned. This is somewhat surprising in view of the repeated requests made by various bodies representing agricultural interests for facilities for such instruction. It is to be hoped that the interest, now becoming widespread, that is being taken in some districts in classes for instruction in wool sorting and classing may be the means of arousing farmers to the fact that there are also advantages to be derived from systematic instruction in other branches of agriculture. Provided students were forthcoming, there is little doubt that controlling authorities would, so far as was practicable, provide the necessary facilities for instruction.

About two thousand students were admitted during the year to technical schools as holders of junior or senior free places—an increase of about two hundred. Nineteen per cent. of these students held senior free places, a considerable improvement on the previous year, when the percentage was only 7.

The courses of instruction taken by free pupils were as follows :—

Courses of Instruction.						Number of Free Pupils.
Science and technology	..	..	..	..	..	516
Pure and applied art	..	..	..	..	..	137
Domestic economy	..	..	..	..	..	277
Agriculture	..	..	..	..	..	7
Commercial instruction	..	..	..	..	..	1,063
Total	..	..	..	..	..	2,000

Capitation payments on account of free places amounted for 1908 to £6,908 0s. 6d. being at the rate of about £3 9s. per free place.

It will be seen that, as in former years, courses of commercial instruction were attended by more free pupils than any of the other courses mentioned in the table. Last year about 60 per cent. of the free pupils attended commercial courses; this year there is a slight drop, the percentage being about 53. On the other hand, there is a decided increase in the number taking courses in science and technology. It is anticipated that in the near future there will be a considerable increase in the proportion of free pupils taking courses other than commercial courses. It is a matter for regret that the number of free pupils taking courses in agriculture still remains insignificant.

The day technical schools in the larger centres continue to be well attended, chiefly by free pupils. There seems little doubt that under existing conditions the establishment of these schools has met a distinct want so far as the larger centres are concerned. Though their curriculum is mainly secondary in character, they do not appear on that account to have adversely affected the attendance at the secondary schools in their vicinity. The opinion is expressed that a not inconsiderable number of pupils qualified to hold free places would on leaving the primary schools, have gone to work had they not been able to attend a day technical school. So far as the smaller centres are concerned it is a question whether the establishment of day technical schools would not result in undesirable overlapping. In the case of such centres the better plan to pursue would appear to be the adaptation of the courses of instruction at the secondary schools and district high schools so as to meet, as far as practicable, the needs of pupils for whom an education more or less literary in character would not afford the best preparation for their life-work.