

Chapter 9: Guyana

Mohammed S. Khan & Juliet Persico

Population (1993): 812,000

Population Growth Rate (1960-93): 1.1% per annum

Land Area: 214,970 square kilometres

GNP per Capita (1993): US\$350

Year of Independence: 1966

UNDP Human Development Index (1994): 0.649

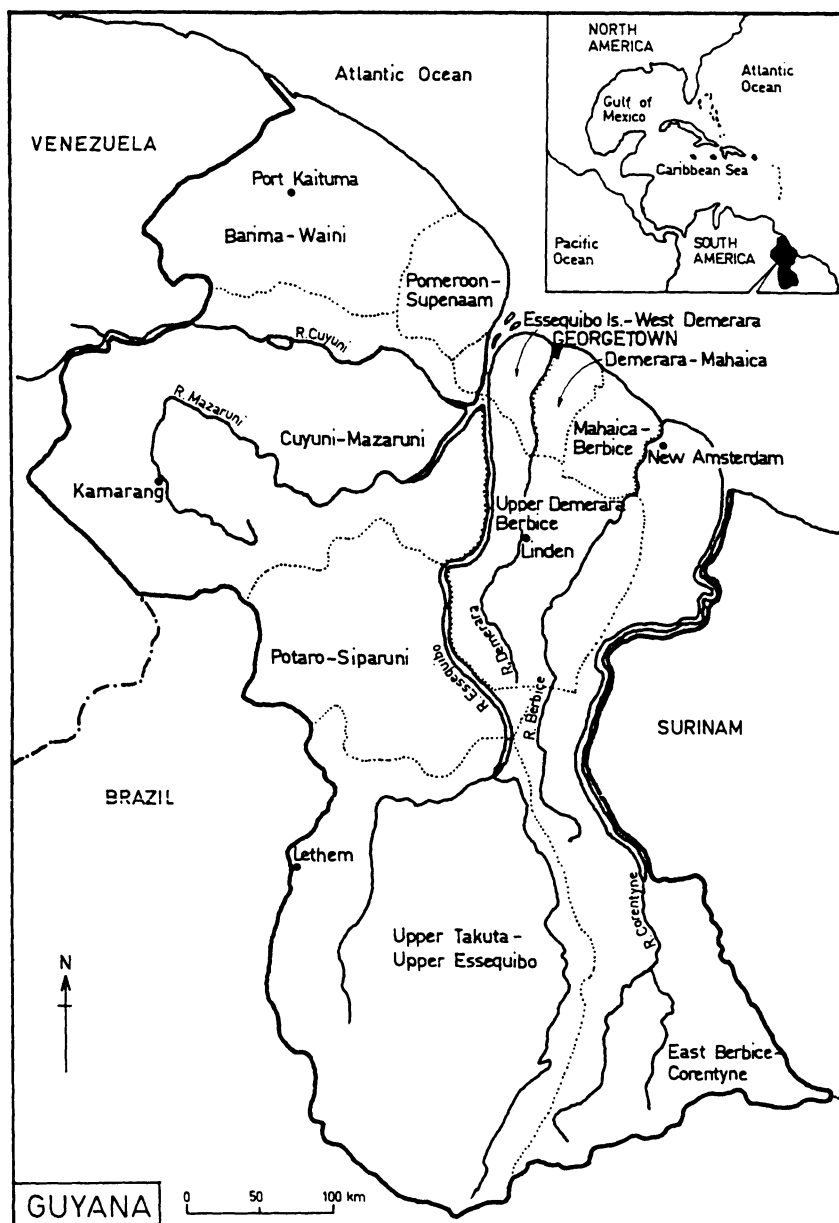
Guyana forms part of the northern Guiana shield, which extends from Suriname through Guyana to the eastern portion of Venezuela. The landscape is dominated by an extensive network of rivers which gives its name to the region. Guiana comes from an Amerindian word meaning 'land of many waters'.

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, colonial control over what is today called Guyana changed hands many times. In 1780 the British captured the territory from the Dutch, but three years later were expelled by the French. In 1796 parts of the territory were again surrendered to the British, but in 1802 these parts were returned to the Dutch. Finally, in 1814 the three main sections of the territory were ceded to Great Britain. They were later united as British Guiana.

The colony at this time specialised in the production of cane sugar and cotton using black slave labour. With the abolition of slavery in 1833, the African slaves established themselves as peasant farmers on government land and abandoned the sugar estates. In an unsuccessful attempt to solve the ensuing labour shortage, the colonists imported first Chinese and Portuguese Madeiran and later Indian indentured labourers. Descendants of the Indian labourers now form about 51 per cent of the total population. Descendants of the Africans form about 38 per cent, while the remainder are mainly descendants of the Chinese, Europeans and Amerindians.

Guyana's official language is English, and although the country is situated on the South American coast, it has much closer political and cultural ties with other English-speaking Caribbean countries than with its Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking neighbours.

Today's economy depends heavily on sugar, bauxite and rice. The



country is endowed with extensive minerals and forests, but these resources remain largely unexplored because of lack of infrastructure. Since the 1970s the country has experienced prolonged and serious economic difficulty. This started with the sharp increase in oil prices, and was exacerbated by a fall in the prices of key exports. Guyana's per capita income is now among the lowest of the countries of the Western Hemisphere.

The Education and Examination Systems

Despite the many problems facing the country, most children between the ages of four and 14 receive some type of schooling. Education is provided at all levels from nursery to university.

At the end of the primary cycle, pupils sit the Secondary Schools Entrance Examination set by the Ministry of Education. This is not a pass/fail examination, and all pupils are given places in junior secondary schools, senior secondary schools or community high schools. Approximately 15,000 pupils aged 10 to 12 sit this examination each year. The examination consists of two papers each in English language, mathematics, science, and social studies. The first paper comprises multiple choice items, while the second paper has essays and structured items.

The main secondary school examinations are the Secondary Schools Proficiency Examination set by the Ministry of Education, the Secondary Education Certificate Examination set by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), and the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary ('O') and Advanced ('A') level examinations set by the University of London.

The Secondary Schools Proficiency Examination is taken by students in community high schools, and is in two parts. Part 1, which is written at the end of the third year of the programme, consists of multiple-choice tests in English language, mathematics, general reasoning, and social studies, together with an essay in English. Approximately 6,250 students sit this examination each year. Part 2 examines only the pre-vocational subjects, and is taken at the end of the fourth year of the programme. Candidates can take up to two pre-vocational subjects from a choice of agricultural science, business education, craft, and industrial arts. The examination consists of multiple-choice tests. Schools are required to submit pupils' scores on continuous assessment in the practical aspects of the subjects selected during the two years prior to the examination. Approximately 3,250 students take this part of the examination each year. Upon successful completion of both parts, students are awarded a diploma.

The Secondary Education Certificate Examination set by the CXC, as well as the GCE 'O' level, is taken by fifth formers in junior and senior

secondary schools. The CXC offers examinations in about 30 subject areas. Most students take between four and seven subjects, including English language and mathematics. Approximately 5,500 school candidates and about 1,800 private candidates sit for the CXC examination each year.

The GCE 'A' level examination is taken by students in the sixth forms of secondary schools. The subjects offered include mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, accounting, and economics. Each year, about 120 candidates take this examination.

At the post-secondary level, the Ministry of Education offers the Guyana Technical Education Examination for students attending the four technical colleges. Vocational subjects such as electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, welding, plumbing, masonry, and land surveying are examined at both craft and technical levels. Approximately 1,400 students take this examination each year.

Another post-secondary examination is for the Trained Teachers' Certificate. This examination is taken by students at the Cyril Potter College of Education on completion of their training. The curriculum at the college includes education theory and practice, psychology, English language, mathematics, science, and social studies. Students can opt for training as nursery, primary or secondary teachers. Training for secondary schools includes prevocational subjects such as agricultural science and industrial arts.

Historical Evolution

The Secondary Schools Entrance Examination was introduced by the Ministry of Education in 1972. At that time, it consisted of multiple-choice tests in English language, mathematics, and verbal reasoning. Later, science and social science were added. During the early 1980s, verbal reasoning was dropped, and from 1986 an essay in English was included. Essays in science and social science were added in 1996. Inclusion of the essay papers reduced the proportion of multiple choice items in each subject from 60 to 40 per cent.

Prior to the introduction of the Secondary Schools Entrance Examination, pupils sat the Common Entrance Examination. That examination consisted of standardised texts in English, mathematics and verbal reasoning purchased from Moray House College of Education in Edinburgh, Scotland, and from the National Foundation for Educational Research in England. The Common Entrance Examination was launched in 1962, and operated until 1972. Before the creation of the Common Entrance Examination, pupils sat the Government County Scholarship examination, which was introduced in the 1930s to identify able boys and girls from the 'lower

orders' for education at the two elite secondary schools. A total of 12 pupils selected from each county were awarded scholarships every year to these schools. Only pupils with a high chance of success were permitted to write the examination.

In addition, the elite secondary schools and most private secondary schools usually conducted their own entrance examinations to select students. However, they also made use of the results of the Government County Scholarship examinations to award partial or full scholarships to students who had scored over 60 per cent in the examinations.

With the granting of aid to private secondary schools, the government was able to increase the number of free-place awards to secondary schools. The Common Entrance Examination was introduced in part to facilitate the selection of free-place awardees for government-aided secondary schools.

The Secondary Schools Proficiency Examination was introduced in 1977 to replace the Preliminary Certificate Examination, which was also set by the Ministry of Education. The examination was taken at the Grade 8 level, and consisted of tests in English language, English literature, mathematics (including algebra and geometry), and general knowledge. Students who remained in all-age schools after completing that examination also wrote the examination set by the College of Preceptors in the United Kingdom.

The Secondary Education Certificate examination of the CXC was preceded by the GCE examinations introduced in 1951. From that year until 1963, students sat either the University of London or the Oxford & Cambridge GCE examinations. Also, from the 1940s until 1960, some students sat the Cambridge School Certificate examination. However, from 1963 only the University of London GCE examinations were followed.

The Guyana Technical Education Examination replaced the examinations set by the City & Guilds of London Institute. The latter had been introduced in Guyana in 1949, and continued until 1982. The Guyanese qualification is accepted by the University of Guyana and by foreign tertiary institutions as equivalent to the City & Guilds certificate.

Mechanics of the System

Three units in the Ministry of Education are responsible for the administration and preparation of examinations. They are the Examinations Division, the Test Development Unit, and the Cyril Potter College of Education.

The Examinations Division is responsible for arrangements for the examinations. These include the receipt of entries, distribution of syllabuses and timetables, liaison with centres, identification of local examiners, supervisors and invigilators, distribution and collection of examination materials, and publication of results. The Division is headed by the Super-

intendent of Examinations, and the 19 other staff comprise two assistant superintendents, three typists/clerks, 11 clerks, and three ancillary staff.

The Test Development Unit is responsible for the test components of all the locally-set examinations, i.e. the Secondary Schools Entrance Examination, the Secondary Schools Proficiency Examination, and the Guyana Technical Education Examination. The unit has 10 staff, comprising a Chief Test Development Officer, six Test Development Officers, and three clerks or typist/clerks. Although the Test Development Unit is slightly larger than the Examinations Division, the fact that both have small teams of professional staff creates difficulties at times of recruitment. This is partly because of the workload, but also because of perceived limitations on career mobility within a small team.

The Test Development Unit also relies heavily on assistance by primary and secondary teachers and by university, teachers college and technical school lecturers. As well as promoting desirable linkages within the education system, this arrangement makes optimal use of the scarce manpower available in a small state. Teachers and lecturers submit items to the unit for possible inclusion in examinations. The items are then refined by the unit and pretested. Secondary school teachers and lecturers also serve on subject committees in their respective geographical areas. Representatives from each area make up the National Subject Committees which liaise with the Test Development Unit in the construction of tests for each subject and in the marking of scripts after the examination.

The Cyril Potter College of Education has overall responsibility for teacher training in the country. Consequently, it is also responsible for the examination for the certification of teachers. College lecturers prepare the tests, which are moderated by lecturers in the Faculty of Education at the University of Guyana.

Proper security arrangements are essential if the integrity of examinations is to be maintained. Persons to be involved in examination work — in setting tests and as examiners, supervisors and invigilators — are chosen carefully and are briefed on the need for confidentiality. If they have close relatives writing the respective examination, they are not permitted to work for that examination. At the Examinations Division, Test Development Unit and Cyril Potter College of Education, question papers are prepared and stored in special high-security areas. During the writing of examinations, question papers for outlying areas are stored in special boxes in police stations rather than schools, and a supervisor is appointed to oversee the collection and return of materials to the boxes.

Conclusions

Guyana has a substantial system of examinations which combines assessments set by local, regional and metropolitan bodies. Some metropolitan examinations have been localised, and students in Guyana no longer sit, for example, the City & Guilds examinations. Guyana is a member of the CXC, and benefits from the professionalism and economies of scale of that organisation. Also, some students still take the GCE examinations of the University of London. The examination system that has emerged since Independence can be regarded as truly reflective of nationalism, but also within a pragmatic framework which allows a continuing role for the non-local other bodies.

Various reforms are being considered for the future. They include replacement of the Secondary Schools Entrance Examination by a system of continuous assessment, and replacement of the Secondary Schools Proficiency Examination by a National Secondary Certificate. Also being considered is a National Secondary Schools' Certificate for secondary Form 5 pupils. However, the advantages, disadvantages and mechanics of this proposal still need to be worked out in detail.