

PART 1

THE STUDY

AIMS AND ASSUMPTIONS

1. In the Spring of 1979 the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned Guildford Educational Services Ltd. (GES) to undertake a preliminary study of problems relating to technical and commercial examinations in the developing Commonwealth.

2. The origin of this study was the report of the 7th Commonwealth Education Conference held in Accra in March 1977. The relevant extract is:

There is widespread questioning of established systems of technical examinations, some of them heavily used but external both to the teaching institution and to the country concerned. Sometimes these systems have been rejected without a substitute system being first established, and some governments are in need of help over the solution to this problem at a national or regional level. It is therefore recommended that a study be made of the problems encountered in technical examinations.

3. In discussions with the Commonwealth Secretariat it was agreed that the study should be broadened to include commercial examinations because these had some similar characteristics to technical examinations. It was also agreed that as qualifications were inseparable from examinations they should be included in the study.

4. The resources available for the study were limited and it was agreed that it should be undertaken as a 'desk' exercise to

- (a) establish the present position relating to technical and commercial qualifications and examinations
- (b) as far as possible identify and analyse the problem
- (c) suggest lines on which solutions could be based
- (d) provide a report which could be a framework for discussion and further study.

5. For the purpose of the study technical and commercial qualifications were defined as those which 'fell between but did not include trade tests at one end of the scale and university level awards at the other'.

6. It has also been possible, as a by-product of the study, to start to establish a data base within the Commonwealth Secretariat on technical and commercial examinations in the developing countries of the Commonwealth.

7. The study has been based on the following assumptions:

- (a) when an individual's career depends on passing an examination and obtaining a qualification, it is incumbent on those responsible, as far as possible, to ensure that the rules for the award of the qualification are consistent and fair, that the examination itself is valid and reliable,

and that the efficiency of the administrative arrangements is beyond reproach;

(b) there is likely to be a conflict between these various qualities and between them and the resources available, and there is no general 'right' balance which is universally applicable;

(c) the decision as to what is the right balance for a particular place at a particular time will be a local one, but those making the decision will wish to be aware of the likely consequences of the various courses of action open to them;

(d) in particular it is not the function of the study report to advocate a particular form of qualification and examination system, but rather to illuminate the factors which should be taken into account and suggest how some of the inherent disadvantages in the present situation might be overcome.

8. Throughout this report examinations are classified as follows:

(a) whether the examination questions are

(i) banked (i.e. prepared, field-tested and stored in a 'bank' for use as required)

(ii) traditional (i.e. specially prepared for each occasion)

(b) whether the examination is set and marked

(i) internally (by the college attended by the student) without validation

(ii) internally with validation

(iii) externally (by a body other than the college attended by the student).

9. In this report

(a) Part 1 describes the methodology adopted and the nature of the evidence

(b) Part 2 contains analyses of background factors

(c) Part 3 describes the present position in the developing Commonwealth

(d) Part 4 considers an approach to solutions

(e) Appendices I - VI contain supporting material.