

FACTORS AFFECTING QUALIFICATIONS AND EXAMINATIONS

IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

89. Factors which affect the provision of examinations and the award of qualifications in developing countries can be classified as being associated with development, geography, culture, opportunities for individuals, and resources.

Development

90. Development implies rapid, constant and fundamental change in social goals, expectations and institutions; in economic goals; in a country's physical and human infrastructure; in the application of technology and in manpower needs. These aspects of development can cause particular difficulties in relation to qualifications and examinations.

91. One problem is how to achieve a continuity of course and examination standards in a period of change. Such continuity is important to maintain the reliability of course, examination and qualification as an entry to employment. As the needs of the country change so the syllabuses on which the examinations are based are likely to change, and continuity may be very difficult to achieve. This continuity may, indeed, have a low priority in the political aims of the country, but the credibility of a qualification (or the lack of it due to constant change in the qualifications available) can have an important influence on individual employment opportunities. Continuity is also important in examination administration, whether in a college or in a national system. Problems can arise if there is too much reliance on expatriate personnel with short-term contracts.

92. A related problem is how to award a qualification which will retain its value throughout the working life of the holder or how to provide opportunities for up-dating. This problem is common to all societies undergoing technical change, but is exaggerated in developing countries because of the rate of change and the proportion of workers affected.

93. Developing countries also tend to have a longer 'technological tail' than developed countries. In agriculture, for example, the most modern tractor-drawn equipment may be used side by side with ox-drawn ploughs. In commerce, some firms may be using computers or word-processors while others still rely on very ancient typewriters. Boiler equipment in industrial plant can be ancient or very modern. This means that a syllabus which is valid for a developed country may only partly cover the needs of a developing one.

94. Modern societies depend on a very wide range of professional and manual skills, but the numbers required in any profession or trade will in turn be dependent both on the size of the community and the stage of development which it has reached. In the early stages of development large communities may require only a comparatively few people in some of the skilled trades. For example, if electricity is not available to a high proportion of the population only a few electricians will be required, and similar considerations will apply to motor mechanics or aircraft engineers. However, as a society develops, as more of the population are brought the benefits of electricity, as more vehicles come on the roads, so the need for qualified personnel will increase. In a developing country this position will not be static, and it may move quite rapidly from a situation

in which it only has a handful of new entrants to a particular trade in any one year to one where it needs several hundred.

Geographical Factors

95. Most of the developing countries of the Commonwealth are in the tropics, many are remote, quite a few have poor internal communications or, even if the internal communications are comparatively good, long internal distances to overcome. Others may have a widely distributed rural population which may not be easy to bring together in viable groups for technical or commercial education and training.

96. The syllabus content can be affected by the climate (e.g. as in building) and the predominant primary products (e.g. mining or agriculture). It can also be affected by the remoteness of either the country or the trained man within it, who may have to have a wider range of, say, engineering maintenance skills than he might in a developed country where technical back-up from the manufacturer is very readily available, or specialist maintenance help can quickly be obtained. In many ways the plant engineer in a cotton ginnery, for example, may need to have the versatility of a marine engineer in a ship at sea.

97. Large internal distances between educational centres in particular, can affect the ease and the cost of getting groups of teachers and industrialists together for syllabus preparation and revision, for the moderation of examination papers and for the co-ordination of markers. Not only are the direct costs of travel and accommodation increased by the distance between centres, but the additional time taken by the skilled manpower concerned may be a hidden cost in relation to their primary employment. In other words the costs of carrying out the normal activities of examining can be extremely high in developing countries.

98. Internal distances and poor communications can also make the distribution of examination papers a very uncertain business. This is particularly serious if, for reasons of security, it is necessary for all the examination candidates to sit the same examination on the same day. Less serious, but still inconvenient, is the return of scripts for marking.

Cultural Differences

99. The culture of a country will affect both the validity of the syllabus and of the examination paper itself. The extent to which this happens will vary according to the extent to which the subject matter is culture-free and with the mode of examination. These cultural differences are not only as between the developing country and the UK but between one developing country and another, and, if based on language, may be between different communities within the same country.

100. Commercial examinations are most dependent on aspects of local culture. Laws and customs governing commercial transactions are likely to be specific to a particular country or community. Questions involving currency are unlikely to be 'exportable'. Where there is an oral requirement (as in shorthand examinations), if the dictated passage is given a different inflexion from that to which the students are accustomed, the examination will not be valid and the results are likely to be very poor.

101. At first sight it might appear that technology is culture free. Ohms Law is Ohms Law the world over, as is any chemical substance. A machine does not operate differently because of the culture of the person who

presses a switch. In practice, however, there are a number of differences, which can be classified as cultural, between one country and another. For example the standards of UK examinations in electrical installation are related to an industrial agreement between employer and employee organisations, and the content is based on regulations which have not necessarily been adopted in all countries. Skills can be grouped differently depending on the way in which industry has been developed locally. Again, in the UK it has been extremely difficult to develop a cadre of electro-mechanical craftsmen because of industrial relation difficulties but this problem may not arise in many developing countries.

102. A more general cultural difference which may have some effect on the provision of examinations and qualifications is the position of an individual as a member of his or her family and of society as a whole. One way in which this manifests itself in some cultures is the pressures on the individual to try for the highest possible qualification even where there is no chance of success. Unless there is very strict control of entry to examinations (which in itself may cause conflict) this can lead to appallingly high failure rates which may well be falsely attributed to other causes.

103. An obvious major cultural difference is language. If it is decided that any level of examination should be held in a language other than English there are immediately a number of problems. The first is that the local country is dependent on its own resources for the setting and marking of papers and the determination of standards. The second is that the qualification will not easily be recognised for progression to higher courses in another country. A third, rather more subtle, problem is that much of the hard professional investigation into examinations has been done in English speaking countries or those which speak other European languages. How far some of the conclusions will be valid for examinations taken in other languages is difficult to gauge. Despite these problems there may well be very good reasons for a country to decide that its craft qualifications, for example, should be based on the local language as very often this will be the language in which work is conducted.

Opportunities for Individuals

104. As societies develop economically there are increasing opportunities for local people to obtain well-paid and responsible jobs in commerce and industry; and as societies develop educationally the education system provides chances for individuals to match their attainments to the job opportunities available. It is difficult, however, in a rapidly developing country, for there to be a reasonable balance at any one time between the job opportunities and the people available to fill them, and this in its turn creates problems for technical and commercial qualifications and examinations. These problems are at their worst when there are fewer good jobs than there are local people qualified to fill them.

105. A developing country has to decide whether it should aim only to have as many qualified people as it can absorb within its own industrial and commercial sectors, or whether it should allow any individual to develop or extend his or her capability to the maximum. In the first case a country can find itself with a lack of skilled manpower (with a consequent need to rely on expatriates) if there is an unexpected surge in development. In the second case it risks educating and training a frustrated group of people who cannot obtain work consistent with their abilities. The decision a country takes may well affect its attitude to independent colleges, especially in the commercial field and to the extent to which it encourages, tolerates or prevents individual candidates from entering examinations from outside bodies or as external candidates in any national examination system.

106. There can equally be problems for individuals, especially when a qualification is important for getting a job and if there is a pressure of younger age groups pushing up. In these circumstances if a student does not pass his examination and get a qualification in his year of opportunity he may have lost his chance forever because that chance has to be given to people in the next age group. This can increase the pressure on students to adopt illicit methods to achieve success in examinations in order to obtain employment in a highly competitive job market and in turn this creates greater security problems. These problems can affect the way in which students prepare themselves for examinations and their attitudes to the examination paper, examination administration, the examining body and the qualification for which they are striving.

Resources

107. Any developing country has many calls on scarce resources and will have to decide how much it can spend on a comparatively minor activity, although it can have far-reaching results in the eventual quality of the technical and commercial manpower of the country.

108. As the analysis of operational requirements (paragraphs 28-72) shows, good examinations need trained and competent personnel for the complex range of activities involved. Human resources used for these activities may be at the expense of more immediate gains for the country concerned.

109. Equally, examinations are costly in monetary terms whether they are set locally or outside the country. The internal costs of running a special system for comparatively few candidates can be very high. The unit costs per paper written are often likely to be higher than the fee paid to an outside body, even though the salary rates in the country concerned may be far less than they are in, say, the UK. However, an additional cost of using outside examinations is air mail postage or air freight, which is becoming increasingly necessary as carriage by sea becomes slower and less reliable.

110. This absolute cost has to be weighed against the use of foreign exchange for paying candidate fees to outside examining bodies. Although these may be fairly small in relation to other demands on foreign exchange, they can be sufficiently serious if foreign exchange has to be very tightly controlled. They will be particularly serious if students are able to enter outside examinations as external candidates, unless the national government is able to find a means of setting a limit on those who may enter.

Particular Problems of Small States

111. Many of these problems associated with development are ones which are likely to be solved by process of time once a more advanced stage of development has been achieved. In small states, however, the same problems are likely to remain for ever. Thus while a country at an early stage of development may only require a small number of, say, electricians, it can look forward to the time when its requirements will be able to support a reasonable series of electrical craft courses, and perhaps even viable numbers for annual examinations. A small state, however, can never look forward to having enough to form a viable class in a college; and the same applies to most other trades. Nevertheless, a small country still requires builders, plumbers, electricians, motor mechanics, typists, book-keepers, and a few librarians, and the problem of providing a technical or commercial education, and in particular examinations and qualifications for these, are considerable.

112. Cultural factors described in paragraphs 99-103 are also exacerbated by the smallness of a state. Many small countries have their own distinctive culture which they will find hard to maintain if all their technical education is borrowed from elsewhere, and yet it is not likely to be possible for any small state to run its own completely separate examinations. A small state will probably have to adopt standards from outside.

113. The problems associated with opportunities for individuals (paragraphs 104-106) are also applicable to small states and are sometimes made worse by the 'unforgiving nature' of some small communities. If everyone knows everyone else, teachers may be unwilling to act as pass/fail arbiters in qualifications. If the teacher once fails someone he may make an enemy of the whole family for the rest of his life.

114. Small states, therefore, are likely to have to look outside their borders for examinations and perhaps for qualifications, and in many cases for specialist or advanced courses. This means that unless ways can be found to meet their particular local needs, their requirements may well be swamped by those of the larger populations served by the outside examining body.

Summary

115. The analysis in this section has covered a range of factors which can affect the provision of technical and commercial examinations, and the award of qualifications, in developing countries and the type of problems they can cause. It is unlikely that all these problems will apply to all countries, or even to any one country at all times. The particular mix of problems which an individual country has to face at any stage of development will probably be unique to itself. However, within that mix the individual problems are probably being met, or will already have been met, in other Commonwealth countries. It is likely, therefore, that the basis exists for a co-operative approach to their solution.