

AN APPROACH TO SOLUTIONS

The UK Examining Bodies

224. The experience and resources of the UK examining bodies allied to their tradition of sympathy for the problems of developing countries, their independence from government control, the international currency of their awards and their willingness to consider changes in relationships, make them a Commonwealth asset which it would be sensible to use in any approach to solutions of the problems of technical and commercial qualifications and examinations.

225. The sort of new relationship which can be envisaged is one in which the UK examining body is no longer solely responsible for the examination syllabus and measurement of attainment and the award, but may retain responsibility for some of these activities, or even all of them, in association with a particular country, national examinations body or college.

Other Commonwealth Examining Bodies

226. The brief account of two regional examining councils (paragraphs 174-190) shows that facilities have been developed outside the UK which have the potential of being used on a pan-Commonwealth basis if suitable arrangements could be made. Within regional and national systems there is probably a great deal of professional experience which could be tapped in a co-operative approach to solving examination problems.

Examination Syllabuses

227. As already noted in paragraphs 203-204 there is a strong case for a systematic modularisation of syllabuses, where this does not already exist, with the object of establishing a 'module bank'. As noted in paragraph 172 there is an urgency for redevelopment in technician education. Craft technical education would be a second priority, and commercial education - to a great extent modularised - could wait for the time being.

228. Ideally, the structure and content of the modules in the bank would reflect the needs of the developing countries and depend on an input from them - and also comments on drafts as the project continued. This would require considerable administrative skill, and financial backing from outside the examining bodies. Established methods of curriculum development within the UK would have to be extended to include corresponding members. However, it would not be necessary to force through any general compromise unsatisfactory to all. Areas of major differences of approach could be accommodated by alternative modules within the bank. Alternative modules could also cater for a differential adoption of rapidly changing technology.

229. It is possible that a further breakdown of content could be made so that a bank of learning objectives could be formed, from which syllabuses could be constructed to match even the smallest local variations. TEC has already prepared a Mathematical Bank of Objectives which operates in this fashion. However, mathematics is easier than most subjects to treat in this way, and banks of learning objectives might be a second stage following the 'bank of modules'.

Measurement of Attainment

230. A standard module bank, used as a reservoir from which course material was drawn, would enable there to be several different approaches to examinations: college, national, regional or by a UK body; by the use of banked or traditional questions; by validation; or by the type of future developments described in paragraphs 214-216. Whichever way were used, means could be devised to ensure approximate equivalence of standards. A country could decide which approach it wanted to adopt.

231. Where it was decided to use a UK examining body, consideration should be given to signing a renewable contract for a fixed term of years to overcome the concern about future developments referred to in paragraphs 171-172 perhaps in conjunction with the normal candidate fee payments. In addition, attention should be paid to methods of overcoming the problems of foreign exchange.

Award of Qualifications

232. Possibly the most important conclusion to come out of this study, and one of immediate application, is that it is technically possible, easier and cheaper for a Commonwealth country to award its own qualifications on the basis of examinations set by an established examining body than it is to set up a national system of examinations. Also, if it is important that these qualifications have international currency, then it is possible for the award document itself to refer to the collaboration between the award-making body in the developing country and the UK examining body.

233. Appendix IV describes the different gradations of collaborative certificates which City and Guilds now uses, but it may be possible to negotiate others either with City and Guilds or with the other UK examining bodies.

234. The merit of this approach is that it does not depend on the adoption, or successful conclusion, of the suggestions made above on syllabus development and measurement of attainment.

Harmonisation of Existing Qualifications

235. The above proposals, if adopted, will allow for a greater degree of harmonisation of standards and course content. But it will not help those who have already obtained their qualifications. It would therefore be useful to have a Commonwealth version of the UK National Equivalence Information Centre (see Appendix V), and an agreement between Commonwealth countries, developing and developed, for the mutual recognition of qualifications. A prerequisite would be a Commonwealth focal point for technical and commercial examinations.

A Beneficial Chain Reaction

236. Pan-Commonwealth co-operation in the field of technical and commercial examinations could bring real and lasting benefits to all member countries. It is possible that a 'beneficial chain reaction' would take place, as follows:

- (a) mutual recognition of existing standards and awards

leading to

- (b) harmonisation of standards and course content

leading to

(c) systematic tackling of the problems of small numbers of candidates (particularly in the smaller states there would be an advantage in tackling these problems on a Commonwealth basis)

including

(d) assistance with the development of Distance Learning schemes (see paragraphs 211-213)

as a major aid to

(e) 'technology transfer', itself an essential ingredient in bridging the knowledge gap between the developed and the developing countries.

237. Key roles in this 'beneficial chain' could be played by the UK and other Commonwealth examining bodies, but the initiatives will come best from the Commonwealth countries themselves, working through the Commonwealth Secretariat.