

INTRODUCTION

The Background

This review of some of the references to the Commonwealth as a whole and to individual Commonwealth countries in the syllabuses and examination papers prepared by public examining Boards in Britain, is an initial response to a recommendation made by the Seventh Commonwealth Education Conference (Accra, 9-18 March 1977).

The recommendation, which appears as paragraph 143 of the report of the Conference, reads as follows:

143. The frequency and quality of the questions that appear on examination papers can have more bearing on what is taught in schools than the topics listed on the syllabus. It is therefore recommended that national and regional examining bodies be urged to ensure that meaningful questions about the Commonwealth are included in appropriate examinations. It is also recommended that the Commonwealth Secretariat should give some support to the preparation of a report on the questions set on Commonwealth topics by some of the examining boards in Britain, and that the report is circulated so that it can serve as a basis for similar studies.

If taken in its widest interpretation this task would have been a formidable one. For examinations for the General Certificate of Education there are eight Boards, for the Certificate of Secondary Education there are 14, and as questions on Commonwealth topics could occur in several subjects (such as History, Geography, Social Studies, World Affairs, General Studies or Literature) which frequently have alternative papers, the number of possible syllabuses and question papers would be too great for a complete review. Moreover, because no previous study of a similar nature was known to exist, it was necessary for the authors to devise their own methodology without knowing for certain whether it could be transferred easily and effectively to a consideration of other examinations in other parts of the Commonwealth. For these reasons it was decided to limit the present investigation to the Ordinary Level of the General Certificate of Education (O level GCE) and to the questions set in one year's papers. If, however, a more comprehensive survey is required, it would be possible to extend its scope to cover other levels of the GCE, the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE), and examination papers set in other years. At the same time any recommendations made by the workshop for modifying the methodology could be taken into account.

The Boards

The eight Boards that set O-level examinations for the GCE in England and Wales are:

The Associated Examining Board (AEB)
University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (Cambridge)
Joint Matriculation Board (JMB)
University of London School Examinations Department (London)
Oxford Delegacy of Local Examination (Oxford)

Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examination Board (Ox & Camb.)
Southern Universities Joint Board (SUJB)
Welsh Joint Education Committee (Welsh)

The papers reviewed in this report are those set by these Boards in the summer examinations in 1977.

Methodology

First the syllabuses of the Boards were consulted in order to ascertain which courses would repay investigation. There were two reasons for this. One was that if a syllabus made no mention of the topic under consideration, it could be assumed that no question on that topic would appear in the examination. The other was that it was found to be easier in practice to review the syllabuses for initial selection than to cope with the many examination papers. Examination syllabuses should therefore always be consulted as a first step in any similar investigation. It was quickly established that the only O-level papers likely to contain references to the Commonwealth were those in History and Geography. Though the AEB Social Economics syllabus and the JMB Government, Economics and Commerce syllabus were found to contain references to Britain's overseas trade and to international trade in general, these were very small items in those courses. Other potential sources of Commonwealth questions, such as the syllabuses on Literature, contained no mention of the subject. This restriction to History and Geography may not apply to Advanced Level (A level), Alternative Ordinary Level (A O Level), CSE or other examinations.

The O level syllabuses varied considerably in length, content and approach. The most useful were undoubtedly those that did more than merely catalogue subject matter and specified the aims and objectives of the course in some detail. For, by giving more than a simple reference to the factual content required, they could assist teachers wishing to do so to select courses that would enable the development of a Commonwealth perspective, even if this was not specifically mentioned in the syllabus itself. (Examples are given in the notes below.) In addition, the JMB indicated the relative weighting of marks for the various aspects of the answers given by candidates.

History and Geography in O level Examinations

As Table 1 shows, nearly 70 syllabuses are available from the eight Boards setting History and Geography examinations at O level in England and Wales.

Table 1: Number of Alternative
Syllabuses Set in O levels in 1977

	History*	Geography
AEB	6	1
Cambridge	10	2**
JMB	9	2
London	5	2
Oxford	7	2
Ox. & Camb.	7	1
SUJB	4	1
Welsh	8	1

* Including Economic and Social History and Ancient History

** Also a third for a Schools Council Project

For the purpose of this investigation, only those syllabuses that specifically referred to the Commonwealth or Commonwealth countries, or gave sufficiently clear indication that the Commonwealth should or could be included, have been considered. This indication came in many ways. Here are two examples from History syllabuses. First, Cambridge 235, "World Affairs since 1919" lists many topics including "Decolonization and the problems of the developing world". Second, Oxford O38, "History (World)" refers to "Decolonization since 1945 and its consequences". It was found that syllabuses in History paid some attention to the concept of the Commonwealth, but those in Geography did not (or could not) use this term though many did expect Commonwealth countries to be studied by the candidates.

Notes

One example of a syllabus which refers only to the factual knowledge required, and only very briefly, is Oxford O32 History (British Empire and Commonwealth). It would seem that teachers are expected to consult previous examination papers to know what to expect, as only three sentences cover everything.

One paper (2½ hours, marked out of 100) is set on the period 1492 to the present day. Candidates must answer five questions, chosen from anywhere in the paper, but are not necessarily expected to have covered the whole period. Questions may be set which refer to maps.

In contrast is the syllabus from the JMB, Paper B (The British Empire and Commonwealth from about 1750 to the Present Day).

The aim of the syllabus

The aim of the syllabus is first to enable centres to provide Ordinary level candidates who are not necessarily continuing their studies in this subject with a sound general basis of historical knowledge and understanding related to a specified period of history, and second, to enable centres to provide a suitable introduction to methods of further study.

The objectives of the examination

The objectives of the examination are to test

- (i) the candidate's knowledge of a given body of factual material
- (ii) the understanding of historical material, and
- (iii) the ability to select and organise relevant information.

The marks in the examination will be allocated as far as possible as follows.

Knowledge ((i) above) 60 per cent.

Selection, understanding and organisation of relevant information ((ii) and (iii) above) 40 per cent.

It will be noted that no specific allocation of marks has been given to powers of expression. If candidates fail to express themselves clearly they will inevitably penalise themselves.

B. The British Empire and Commonwealth, from about 1750 to the present day

The syllabus covers the development of the British Empire and Commonwealth from the middle of the eighteenth century to the present day. It is not intended that candidates will have studied every territory in detail, but they will be expected to know the principal political and economic developments in the main areas. Questions may be set on the smaller territories, and more recent events in the dismantling of the Empire, which will require a more

general approach. Some of the topics to be studied are listed below under various countries. At the end of the list are some general themes which can be studied, but these are not intended to dominate the syllabus.

America

Anglo-French rivalry, the Seven Years War and the Treaty of Paris; the events leading up to the loss of the American colonies; the War of American Independence and its effects.

Canada

1774 Quebec Act; United Empire Loyalists and 1791 Canada Act; Upper and Lower Canada and the 1837 risings; the Durham Report and the Reunion Act; developments between 1837 and 1867 leading to the British North America Act; new territories; the development of agriculture, industry and communications; Mackenzie King; Quebec libre.

Australia

Cook's voyages; Botany Bay and the transportation of convicts; exploration of the interior; Swan River, South Australia and systematic colonisation; the gold rush of the 1850s; events and reasons leading to the Australia Commonwealth Act 1900; development of agriculture, industry and communications.

South Africa

Acquisition and Anglicisation; abolition of slavery and the Great Trek; establishment of the Boer republics; relations between the British, the Boers and the Zulus; discovery of diamonds and gold; events leading to the Second Boer War; the work of Botha and Smuts; the High Commission territories; the development of National Party policies (Apartheid); secession from the Commonwealth.

New Zealand

Reasons for colonisation; Gibbon Wakefield; relations with the Maoris; Treaty of Waitangi; the work of Sir George Grey; the importance of sheep, steamships, refrigeration; progressive legislation.

India

1773 Lord North's Regulating Act; 1784 Pitt's India Act; the work of Clive, Warren Hastings, Wellesley, Cornwallis, the Marquess of Hastings, Bentinck and Dalhousie; causes, course and results of the Indian Mutiny; 1858 Government of India Act; 1877 proclamation of the Queen as Empress of India; the rise of nationalism, and the work of Congress, Tilak, Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah; Morley-Minto reforms; Simon Commission and Round Table conference; Cripps Mission; independence of India, Pakistan, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Burma.

West Indies

Effects of the abolition of slavery; 1865 Jamaican insurrection; economic recovery; federation and its failure.