

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION ON LEAD PAPER

Responsibility for staff development

1. In-service staff development schemes in polytechnics may be influenced by the centralised nature of government personnel policies. Although the degree of Ministry involvement in polytechnic staff training varies from country to country, it was felt that polytechnics should be allowed more freedom to initiate and implement in-service staff development schemes appropriate to their needs. At the same time it was recognised that polytechnics had a responsibility to follow national training policies and these should be taken into account when designing staff development schemes. A clear understanding should be sought by ministries and polytechnics on the relationship between national manpower strategies and institutional goals as a first step in the transfer of responsibility for staff development from a central position to the governing bodies and heads of polytechnics.

2. It was accepted that informal in-service staff development could sometimes operate within centrally controlled training schemes. In these circumstances there were advantages to be gained by adapting the best features of an in-formal system into well structured staff development programmes. It was important to identify points of articulation between institution staff development schemes and centrally controlled national personnel systems in order to avoid a clash of policies.

Problems of staff shortage

3. It was often difficult to release staff for training due to staff shortages but this problem could be alleviated by

- (a) the recruitment of extra staff at lower levels, to provide a reservoir of teachers who could work under the close supervision of senior staff,

- (b) designing training programmes made up of a number of short modules to avoid disruption of teaching timetables,

- (c) a critical examination of the utilisation of teaching resources, in order to reduce timetable loads. For example, the introduction of innovative methods of teaching in order to reduce the class contact time of technical teachers.

Conflicting development needs

4. Attention was drawn to possible conflicts between the career development needs of individuals and the corporate needs of the institution, particularly in research projects associated with higher degrees. The choice of subjects for in-service study programmes should reflect the needs of both the individual and his institution, and every attempt should be made to satisfy these separate needs by discussion between the scholarship applicant and his principal. Considerable benefits could be obtained if the results of higher degree research were fed back into a staff development programme. For example, research work by one member of staff on curriculum development could be shared with colleagues by means of in-house seminars.

Incentives and promotion

5. The attitudes of staff towards staff development schemes was considered to be of vital importance and such schemes should be seen by teachers as an essential part of their career progression. If staff observed clear promotion paths, both within their institution and in the education system, based on well structured staff development schemes, they would be encouraged to take an active part in their own development and assist in corporate efforts in staff development.

6. It was considered essential that all staff members should have a thorough working knowledge of their institution's staff development programme, together with a sound appreciation of national policy on personnel and training matters. In turn, Ministries of Education and other government departments involved in staff development should recognise the need to involve all polytechnic staff, when formulating and implementing national staff development schemes.

Methods of training

7. Discussion on the nature and length of pre-service training raised some doubts on the value of long pre-service and in-service courses. It was noted that the well established technical teacher training colleges in developed countries were moving away from long pre-service courses, based in a single institution, to phased modular type courses comprising a mixture of on-the-job training in the teachers own institution and area centres, followed by short courses in the specialist training colleges. Other alternatives to long pre-service training courses were examined including the possibility of well structured in-service programmes for newly appointed staff holding technical qualifications, but without professional training. In some polytechnics a system of up-grading instructors to lecturers was being operated and in these situations the in-service training approaches seemed more suitable than external courses of long duration.

8. The need to offer training to part-time staff was also recognised and one polytechnic represented at the Workshop had investigated the possibility of recruiting part-time lecturers from technical departments in government ministries. Although such personnel were technically qualified, they lacked professional training and it was highly desirable that polytechnic staff development schemes should embrace their training needs.

Expatriate staff

9. Non-national technical teachers form a substantial part of staff establishments in most polytechnics in Commonwealth African countries and although their numbers are likely to diminish as more national staff enter the system, the need to employ some expatriate expertise will remain in the foreseeable future. The cost-benefit of employing expatriate staff was considered within the context of staff development schemes and a number of salient points emerged:

- (a) Within the framework of national policies for the localisation of educational employment, the criteria for staff selection should be based on ability and it was considered essential to recruit the best staff available from all known sources.

(b) Governments and polytechnics were naturally reluctant to use scarce training resources and funds to train expatriate staff, particularly so in the case of officers serving on a single contract. However, in some instances the provision of training for expatriates could benefit the institution. For example, expatriate staff could undertake short courses in their own country prior to joining a polytechnic, if such training was related to the institution's need for special expertise on, say, new equipment.

(c) Staff development schemes in polytechnics should benefit from any special experience possessed by expatriate staff. Some examples given were,

(i) skills in modular courses using general and specific objectives,

(ii) experience of learning resources centres in polytechnics.

Assessment of training needs

10. The importance of systematic assessments of training needs of staff was stressed and methods of carrying out audits of human resources were examined. One method discussed was the use of training surveys, possibly undertaken by an external agency. Surveys carried out by external personnel offered the advantage of a detached and impartial assessment of training needs, although it was recognised that the surveyors should have a thorough understanding of the institution's needs and goals in order to co-ordinate corporate and individual development requirements.

11. Job specifications were seen as essential tools in the process of auditing the strengths and weaknesses of polytechnic staff establishments, although some reservations were felt on the possible mis-use of rigid demarcation statements by some members of staff. However, job specifications need not be static instruments and should be constantly re-examined against the changing demands of an institution's work programme. The preparation of job specifications was a matter for close consultation between the holder and institution management; an imposed specification was unlikely to work in practice and could lead to difficulties in identifying training needs.

Internal activities to foster staff development

12. In order to make the best use of internal resources to support staff development schemes, it was suggested that departments should carry out specific tasks to identify training needs. For example, one or more departments could be given the task of examining the management skills necessary to maintain curriculum development programmes. This type of exercise would draw on collective expertise within the establishment to design training programmes aimed at the specific needs of the institution. Involving staff in such work could help to foster positive attitudes towards the whole process of staff development within an institution.