

IV. COMMONWEALTH CO-OPERATION IN THE FIELD OF EXAMINATIONS

The area of public examinations offers singular opportunities for functional co-operation in the Commonwealth. From the search to resolve common problems by mutual endeavour there could emerge new approaches and techniques which would be of benefit to all. This is not to advocate in any way a principle of constraining international conformity but rather to encourage a diversity which would serve the needs of each country or region while acting as a stimulus or guide to others. The geographical spread of the Commonwealth and the many variations among member countries should not preclude useful cooperative effort both in the area of improved examination techniques and of improved examination administration.

In general terms it may be said that public examinations assume a greater importance in the educational systems of Britain and the Commonwealth countries of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean than in some other Commonwealth countries. To some extent their importance has lessened during recent years in Australia, New Zealand and the Commonwealth countries of the Pacific region.

Against this background, Commonwealth co-operation should be designed to:

- a) further the reform and development of examinations (including composite examinations) relative to curriculum, educational and social objectives;
- b) assist in the ongoing development of examinations organisations; and
- c) provide information and guidance on the changing role of examinations in an education system;
- d) consider procedures for admission and access to higher education;
- e) investigate principles on which examination certificates may be accepted internationally.

Programmes of co-operation should be developed for the short term, medium term and long term, so that early action can be taken to assist with short-term needs while planning continues for controlled change over a longer period. A number of agencies have been actively co-operating for several years, but on a bilateral and largely ad hoc empirical basis. The time is now appropriate for these arrangements to be considered overall and a rational structured programme devised in which all can join.

Means by which Commonwealth co-operation should be effected include:

- a) the assembly and distribution of relevant information, where appropriate by the Commonwealth Secretariat;
- b) meetings, seminars, workshops and conferences;

- c) the provision of training and study opportunities for professional and technical personnel;
- d) the promotion of applied research;
- e) the provision of technical assistance.

a) Information

The Commonwealth Secretariat offers one of the most appropriate points of reference for information and could act as a functional clearing-house for information with regard to all aspects of examinations. (In this connection, it must be appreciated that information can be disseminated only if it is received, so that if the programme is to be successful, those engaged in the field of examinations must be prepared to supply information both on a regular basis and in response to specific requests.)

Information exchange should be given priority in the development of Commonwealth cooperation in the field of public examinations and should include:

i) Publications

- directories of examinations boards, councils and other bodies; directories of training facilities and of resource personnel available (including those in the developing countries); directories of ongoing and recent research;
- comparative studies of examinations organisation and procedure;
- a regular journal, with original material and abstracts from other publications. (This publication might be made available under the Commonwealth Book Development Programme's proposed Exchange Voucher System.)

ii) Personal contracts, for which the Commonwealth Secretariat could act as a point of reference where individuals are not already known to each other.

iii) Direct exchanges of information between organisations and individuals. This network would grow as a result of the forementioned information activities which would increase mutual awareness of possible sources of information.

b) Meetings

The value of meetings which are organised with a specific educative or training purpose cannot be overestimated since they provide both an immediate return and the opportunity to build an ongoing informal information system and a more formalised work programme. Meetings related to public examinations in the Commonwealth context could usefully include:

- i) Commonwealth and regional working parties, specialist workshops and training centres;
- ii) A sequential series of regional seminars which might lead to
 - a) A Commonwealth Conference on Public Examinations;
 - b) A Commonwealth Standing Conference on Public Examinations

The concept of a Standing Conference merits further consideration in depth in order to define in detail its potential role and contribution. In principle, the idea of a periodic meeting on a Commonwealth basis of those involved in the development and administration of public examinations to discuss major issues of general concern has much to recommend it. In practice, for it to serve successfully the objects for which it is designed, much thought would be necessary to determine the frequency of its meetings, the composition of its members, the nature of its agenda and the precise means by which continuity would be ensured between meetings.

c) Training and Study Opportunities for Professional and Technical Personnel

While some opportunities for training exist for senior researchers and test developers, little provision has yet been made for the initial and further training of professional staff engaged in administration or for supporting staff in either category. To meet these needs, Commonwealth programmes could be established, to include:

- i) Links and exchanges
More use could be made of continuing links among examining bodies, providing opportunities for in-service training and mutual assistance.
- ii) Training for examiners and other temporary staff
The dependence of examinations bodies on large numbers of professional and supportive staff who are not full-time employees reinforces the need to ensure that they are adequately trained. This implies that a supply of well-trained teachers is available from when examinations councils may make their selection; adequate systems of teacher education, therefore are a basic requirement for good examining. The absence of criteria whereby good examiners can be identified in advance makes their training especially important. Other training needs include provision for introducing newly appointed Chief Examiners and Supervisors to their roles.

- iii) Attachments and Short Training Courses
Links, exchanges and attachments have proved of considerable value but leave the individual trainee with no formal recognition of his further education and training. Such recognition would enhance his professional standing and also allow employers to relate his achievement to established staffing and salary structures. The situation might be alleviated by an adaptation of the suggested Commonwealth Diploma in Educational Studies to the needs of examinations staff. This would provide for the accumulation of credits for approved courses and attachments leading to the eventual award of a Commonwealth Diploma in Educational Studies.
- iv) Professional Training Courses for Administrators
Courses for administrators leading to qualifications equivalent to those now available to researchers and test developers would both enhance the efficiency of the examinations authority and give recognition to the essential function of the administrator. A pilot programme should be established by an examinations council in conjunction with a university which would provide a course for examinations administrators leading to a qualification such as the M. Ed., the university being responsible for the theoretical component and the examinations council providing the field work component. As a further development of this concept similar joint courses could be devised for teacher educators and others involved in various ways with public examinations.
- v) Commonwealth Study Fellowships might be made available to support candidates for jointly organised courses (such as a joint Master of Education degree) who may follow part of their course in a Commonwealth country other than their own.

d) Applied Research in the Field of Public Examinations

While the contribution of existing research is recognised, the need still exists for the promotion of research projects designed to meet the known needs of those responsible for public examinations. In many cases, comparative studies and co-operative research on a regional or Commonwealth basis could be of particular value. Among the areas in which research might be undertaken, following a survey which would clarify and determine the precise issues, there may be included:

- i) the effects of examinations and testing on
 - the individual
 - the education system
 - the employment situation
 - the society;

- ii) improvement in the areas of
 - prediction
 - guidance
 - measurement in the affective domain
 - performance testing
- iii) the role of testing in the transition from secondary to higher education and in the professions, industry and commerce;
- iv) the use of common materials by more than one examining body;
- v) means for rationalising the number, nature and length of public examinations both inside and outside the formal educational sector;
- vi) means by which controlled change in examinations may be brought about while ensuring continuity in the education and training of each individual.

Research in many of these areas should be undertaken on a collaborative intra-Commonwealth basis. Small international (and, where appropriate, inter-disciplinary) groups in teams of five or six could be designated to work on specific projects with closely defined parameters for predetermined periods of not more than two years. The groups would meet together at the commencement and conclusion of the project, but would work for the period of the project at their home bases, maintaining contact through the project leader. Such a concept would provide the vehicle for the conduct of multi-disciplinary applied research with the opportunity for comparative studies and the consequent setting of the problem against a wider background.

e) Technical assistance

One problem facing examinations authorities in the developing countries is the lack of information regarding likely sources of technical assistance additional to those of long standing. The Commonwealth Secretariat should act as a point of reference and a clearing-house for information regarding likely sources of funds and technical assistance. In particular, efforts should be made to promote further development of the concept of mutual assistance among the member countries of the Commonwealth, using the resources of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation where appropriate.