

THE EAST AFRICAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

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Historical Background

The East African Examinations Council was established towards the end of 1967 by an Act of the East African Legislative Assembly. The Act is generally referred to as the East African Examinations Council Act, 1967. It was enacted on behalf of the East African Common Services Organisation which later became the East African Community. The Community includes the three States of East Africa, namely Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. It is responsible for running services that are common to the three States, e.g. Railways, Airways, the Posts and Telecommunications, School Examinations, etc.

Up to 1967 all the major school leaving examinations were conducted by examining bodies based in Britain. These included the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, the University of London School Examinations Council, the Associated Examinations Board, the City and Guilds of London Institute, the Royal Society of Arts and a few others which concentrated on specialised fields. The Council Act of 1967 was a climax of a move which started in the early sixties. In 1964 the Creaser Committee, which was appointed to look into University Entry Requirements, reported, among other things, that

"Over the last two years the Academic Committee of the Provisional Council of the University of East Africa and its successor, the Senate, has been concerned that entrance to degree courses within the University should relate to national needs There is strong pressure for the early establishment of an East African Examinations Council to take over from the Cambridge Syndicate the external school examining at the form 4 and the form 6 levels. Such a step can be justified on both educational and political grounds."

In 1965 the Vice-Chancellor of the University of East Africa invited the Cambridge Syndicate to send an adviser to East Africa to consult with the Governments and the University on the possibility of setting up an examinations Council. As a result of this invitation Mr. A.V. Hardy, Deputy Secretary of the Cambridge Syndicate, came to East Africa and held discussions with representatives of the Governments and the University. He then prepared a report outlining ways in which an Examinations Council could be formed. It was on the basis of this report that the Council was established by the Act referred to above.

The Act provides for the representation of the main bodies concerned with education in East Africa on the Council, namely the Governments of the partner States (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania), the East African Community, the University of East Africa and its constituent Colleges, the Heads of Schools and the Teachers. It specifies that "The objects of the Council shall be to conduct within East Africa such academic, technical and other

examinations as the Council may consider necessary or desirable in the public interest."

The Committee Structure of the Council:

The steering body of the Council is called the Finance and General Purposes Committee. This is, in effect, the Executive Body which supervises the implementation of the Council decisions. As in the case of the Council, the Finance and General Purposes Committee membership reflects the interests of the Partner States, the East African Community and the University.

In addition to this Committee, the Council is empowered to appoint, and has actually appointed, other Committees for specific purposes. There are, for instance, National Sub-Committees (one in each Partner State) whose function is to consider the work of the Council in relation to the specific requirements of their respective countries. They advise their respective Governments on the subjects that should be examined by the Council and they comment on the examinations and examination papers taken each year by candidates in their respective countries. There is a School Examinations Committee whose main function is to advise the Council on the suitability of new syllabuses, the suitability of examiners to be appointed and the regulations to be used. There are also various International and National Subject Panels covering all subjects examined. The purpose of these panels is to study existing syllabuses and improve on them as necessary, develop new syllabuses, delete unnecessary ones and then present all these to the School Examinations Committee for approval on behalf of the Council. They also make recommendations on suitable examination setters.

The Committee Structure of the Council emphasizes the need for considerable consultation and involvement by all concerned in this venture. Action can, for instance, be initiated by an individual teacher and is passed upwards through the National Subject Panels, the National Committee or the International Subject Panel to the School Examinations Committee or the Council itself. Proposals initiated at the Council level or the School Examinations Committee level have a way of reaching the teacher in the school in each of the participating countries. In this way it is hoped that the East African Examinations Council will be a people's Council and will not be looked at as a mysterious body that imposes syllabuses or examinations on countries and schools without their active participation.

Council Activities:

The scope of Council's activities, as set out in the Council Act, is fairly wide. The Council has therefore decided to be a little cautious in its approach to its task in order to ensure that the foundation is well done. Initially it was decided to concentrate on the secondary leaving examinations. As reported above there already existed a demand for participation in these examinations.

In 1968 the Council and the Cambridge Syndicate agreed on a programme whereby the Council would gradually take over the examining activities for both the O-level and the A-level secondary school leaving examinations. The Syndicate would gradually phase out. It was decided that a first step in this exercise would be the joint awarding of certificates by the two bodies. Hence the former Cambridge School Certificate/G.C.E. and the Higher School Certificate have been replaced by the East African Certificate of Education/East African School Certificate and the East African Advanced

Certificate of Education awarded jointly by the Council and Syndicate.

This joint operation, in the transitional period, is also reflected in the actual setting and marking of examination papers. For the next five years or so papers for the O-level and A-level examinations will be set and marked partly in East Africa and partly in Cambridge. The take over programme includes the training of East African examiners by Cambridge Examiners. The East African Examiners are recruited by the Council through the Ministries of Education of the three countries. They are trained in East Africa by Instructors recruited by Cambridge and those who are considered suitable are appointed as Examiners in their respective subjects.

The recruitment of suitable examiners is one of the major challenges to the Council. Obviously large numbers of examiners are required if the Council is to take over responsibility for all subjects. There are now about 35,000 candidates at the O-level and 4,000 to 5,000 candidates at the A-level. There is always the big problem of the wastage of trained examiners and this is aggravated in East Africa by the fact that a large number of teachers are still expatriates. The majority of these come to work in East Africa for short contract periods. Their assistance in this exercise can only be of a temporary nature. However, on the lighter side of the problem, there is the determination of each of the participating countries to train its own local teachers and reduce the reliance on teachers from abroad. It is thus hoped that this will not only provide the Council with the examiners required, but will also provide continuity which is essential for an examination system.

Reference has been made above to the establishment of subject panels both at the national level and the international level. The Council considers it its obligation to assist the partner States in their effort to localise syllabuses. Already some of the subject syllabuses have been tailored to suit the requirements of the member countries. Examples of these include syllabuses for History, Geography, Physics Chemistry, Biology and Literature in English. The moulding of syllabuses is initially done by the National Panels for the particular subject and the final versions are agreed upon at meetings of the International subject panels.

The revision or development of new syllabuses does, of course, bring its own new problems. First, one has to consider not only the relevancy of the matter included in the syllabus, but also its standard in comparison to existing syllabuses. Subject panels must therefore ensure that the revision or replacement of syllabuses does not result in the lowering of standards. Another problem related to that matter is the designing of new examination papers based on the new syllabuses. Problems of this nature have been experienced in connection with the development of School Science Project syllabuses. It was discovered that because of the different rates of development between Chemistry and Physics, it was impossible to set papers of the same standard for all candidates in the three countries. The solution to the problem was to set papers including alternatives of the new and old syllabuses - the so-called hybrids. This is, of course, an interim measure which will disappear when all syllabuses have been fully developed.

This paper is being written shortly after the first cycle of the examining exercise has been completed. This cycle has been an eye opener to the Council. Reference has been made to the processes of recruiting and training examiners. The exercise has revealed problems of security which, for obvious reasons, cannot be discussed in a paper of this nature. The problems of long distances in a broad region like East Africa have also come

to light. Whereas in Britain, and possibly in other countries, marking can be done in the examiners' homes, in East Africa all the marking must be residential. This certainly adds to the cost of the exercise. But it reduces the chances of losing candidates' scripts on one hand, and on the other hand it makes coordination and standardization easy. Despite all the problems that may crop up in such a venture the staff of the Council and the Council itself have been greatly encouraged by the co-operation of people within East Africa and friends outside East Africa.