

## Editorial

This issue of *Studies in Design Education* focusses on the problem of examinations in design education and considers the work required for the B.Ed. degree and for 'A' level examinations in design and in engineering science. In doing so it reveals a remarkable set of developments not only in examination practice but also in the range of design activity that it is now possible to assess by examination.

The whole issue of examining in the design subjects has a long and chequered history. When the pattern of public examinations taken in the schools began to be established in the nineteenth century it tended to be restricted to the traditional academic subjects. The design and applied science subjects were for the most part believed to be inappropriate or even of insufficient status for examination requirements. Inevitably this led to strenuous and concerted efforts to incorporate such subjects into the examination system by those who taught them in the schools and colleges in order that they might achieve the recognition and status that appeared to accrue to those who taught the examination subjects. (See, for example Hanson's article on The Association of Art Teachers in *Studies in Design Education* Vol. 3. No. 2.). The result was usually the adoption of a series of written essay type examinations modelled upon the pattern used by the academic subjects; this was usually accompanied by some test of skill of a traditional nature – 'drawing from the flat', a jointing exercise or the construction of a piece of tinplate geometry.

The results of all this were, for the most part, disastrous. The development of the design subjects in many schools was placed in a strait-jacket. And the very nature of the examination tended to confirm rather than elevate the acceptability and the status of the design subjects.

But more recently the developments of the examination system have made it more possible for the examinations to be used to assess that which teachers and students in the design and applied science subjects regard as important and representative in their curricula. Examinations are moving to a position in which they are able to respond to curricula rather than determine it.

The first step was the increased representation of teachers in subject panels in the examining boards. Further developments arose with the exploration of Mode III arrangements in which individual teachers or groups of teachers were able to set their own examination papers based upon their own curriculum (for an example of work of this nature see the contribution by Davies in *Studies in Design Education*, Vol. 3 No. 1). The gradual increase in flexibility in examination arrangements has come to involve continuous assessment, group assessment and a reduced emphasis on purely written papers that has been particularly valuable in the assessment of design education. One of the new arrangements that has been particularly valuable has been the introduction of project methods that allow a design approach to be fully incorporated in to the work being submitted for assessment.

In this issue of *Studies in Design Education* particular attention is paid to project

activities. In Campbell's article the important use of a design project as a major component in the final London B.Ed. examination is illustrated through an account of the actual project undertaken by the writer; at the time a candidate for this examination. It provides an illuminating personal account of the design process in action.

In the article by Aylward the arrangements for the new Oxford 'A' level design paper are outlined and the work of the first group of students to take this paper – itself the subject of a well reported exhibition at Loughborough recently – is considered. Tawney's contribution reviews developments that in some ways are remarkably similar in the development of engineering science in the Joint Matriculation Board 'A' level examinations. Both articles are illustrated by the 1971 examination papers (printed by permission of the respective boards). Sayer continues the discussion of project work with consideration of the advantages of 'paper' or drawing board projects as an attractive and feasible alternative in certain cases to fully developed three dimensional work.

Other developments are underway. Most Schools Council projects are now in active discussions with examining boards about ways in which the new curricula being developed may be assessed and examined without distortion. The Keele Project in Design and Craft Education is currently negotiating with a number of examining boards and initial responses are encouraging. The new publication of the Schools Council, *A Common System of Examining at 16+* (Evans/Metheun Educational) suggests new and more flexible structures to replace both 'O' level and C.S.E. examinations. The possibility of further major improvements in examination arrangements which arises is likely to be of great advantage to teachers and students in the design subjects. Yet notwithstanding these advantages it is always likely that the examination system will involve some elements of frustration for those who use it. But if we believe that it is important that the work done in the design field should feature in the assessment of school and college life then we cannot escape the duty to improve rather than to abandon the only forms of this assessment that are currently recognised and negotiable. In the long run it may be that more effective assessment systems will replace examinations as we know them or even that an alternative system of social organisation may make individual assessment less necessary. Until such times we are likely to have to make the best of examinations. And in doing so we may draw some encouragement from the realisation that it is likely to be a better best than heretofore.

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