

The Design Council's School Prize 1979

Competitions are often criticised because, it is said, the selection of a few outstanding projects creates a false impression of the general standards achieved in schools. Other observers are concerned that non-winners will be discouraged and opt out of careers in the very fields to which the competition is seeking to attract them. Competitions are, however, an important way of helping to raise standards in secondary education and subsequently in industry.

The Design Council's Schools Design Prize, now sponsored by Rolls-Royce Limited was sponsored by The General Electric Company for the first three years; during that time it has done a great deal to stimulate interest and awareness in design both in schools and among the general public. Over 600 schools have been involved in the scheme, which is an encouraging response.

The prize scheme is just one of the Council's activities in the field of secondary education. The Council believes that skills acquired by active involvement in design are ones which will serve every child well in adult life. This competition provides many boys and girls with a real incentive, and the opportunity to have their ideas judged and assessed by professional engineers and designers. For some children the challenge it poses is often more realistic and exciting than the stimulus set by examinations; and the opportunity to solve real problems results in involvement and application not previously present in a student's work. The ingenious and imaginative entries certainly prove that there is abundant creative talent available in this country.

Design education is the converse of traditional education by subjects, as it brings subjects together instead of separating them. It is a vital area of the curriculum as it teaches certain techniques and attitudes that a boy or girl will not acquire from other school subjects. At present relatively few schools are actively involved in this curriculum area, and of those that are, many have established sound courses and produce excellent work. It is not always the schools with integrated design departments and impressive facilities that win all the prizes. Projects undertaken as extra curricular activities in schools with little or no resources for this type of work often gain prizes. Success in this competition has, in some instances, led to design being incorporated into a school's curriculum.

Another important aspect of the scheme is that it gives boys and girls an insight into the challenging nature of design; it is hoped those with the right talents will be attracted and will pursue careers in this field. Some of the students who win prizes are not necessarily among the most academically outstanding. Indeed from the results of the past three years it is hard to establish any correlation between academic and design ability. This competition does help to identify creative talent and give schoolchildren confidence to enter relevant jobs. The solving of practical problems requires intellectual rigour, and this is evident in the majority of projects submitted.

The 1979 competition was certainly the most successful so far, there was a record entry and the

overall standard was higher than in previous years. The prizes were awarded to ten schools which had not previously won a national prize and for the majority of the winning schools it was the first time they had even submitted an entry. Teachers who have not previously been involved should be encouraged by last year's results and give their pupils the opportunity to enter. The scheme has been enlarged for 1980 by the addition of a group for pupils under 14 year olds. The new sponsor, Rolls-Royce, are also keen to provide practical help for schools. Design engineers employed by Rolls-Royce are willing to visit all schools that intend to enter, to give advice and assistance on the projects being undertaken. This could prove to be an important link between schools and industry.

Design education is a relative newcomer to the school syllabus and teachers can learn a great deal by exchanging ideas and discussing methods of approach. Every year the competition uncovers a new set of schools and teachers, actively involved in design education. The articles that follow demonstrate how some of those teachers have designed courses in general studies, electronics, art and design, metalwork, engineering drawing and craft, design and technology that produce outstanding examples of design work in school.