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Comment

Positive Partnership

Rarely do we find good news in the columns of the National Press. Regrettably, newspapers sell on the revelation or sensationalising of, invariably, bad news. It is therefore extremely encouraging to be able to print this issue with articles orientated towards a positive theme. Organisations of the nature of ASET are often felt to be defeatist; the announcement of a positive partnership theme for the 4th World Conference in 1985 clearly repudiates this.

Whilst 1985 remains a long way off, ASET has become involved in a number of new developments which reflect, very much, the positive side. It is a great tribute to the British system of Sandwich Education for a party to visit Spain to advise the Spanish Government on the development of a Sandwich System. A tribute to Mr. J. Ager and Mr. A. Daniels for the background work which made this possible is certainly due. It is hoped that we will see the fruition of this project in the forthcoming year.

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The Case for Sandwich Courses

The requirement of the RISE Committee (Research into Sandwich Education) that a qualitative assessment be made of sandwich courses in the UK has resulted in several studies being commissioned at Manchester Polytechnic and Brunel University. Early results from these and other independent studies were considered by the RISE Committee at its meeting in March 1984.

Whilst those involved in operating sandwich courses, either as teachers at University, Polytechnic or College or as industrialists employing graduates, have been convinced of their value as an alternative to full-time study, there are some who feel that no sound economic case has hitherto been produced. Many would argue that if the majority of employers of sandwich graduates continue to employ them in preference to those who studied full time, at least for particular occupational areas, this is reason enough for their continuance. However, government is constantly looking to reduce costs in the public sector and believe that sandwich courses are more expensive than full-time equivalents, because of the longer period of study. Early studies suggest that this is just not the case if the return of such expenditure is measured by the number of graduates entering permanent UK employment.

A statistical analysis carried out at Salford University by Dr L Davies explores the financial costs of training certain categories of sandwich students and their success in obtaining UK employment, as compared to their peers on non-sandwich courses. The results of Dr Davies' survey indicate that, over the three year period 1980-1982, graduates from seven science/engineering based courses were much more likely to enter permanent UK employment if they had completed a sandwich degree. The Graduate Employment Survey (GES) carried out by Manchester Polytechnic in

1983 provided similar results for both the Polytechnic and University graduates. On this basis Dr Davies concludes that sandwich courses are a more cost-effective method of education and training even though the sandwich courses are longer. In summarising the analysis of graduate employment from the seven departments over three years, Dr Davies illustrates that a sandwich graduate costs approximately 80% of his/her non-sandwich counterpart, and suggests that the GES ratios show a unit costing which demonstrates that the sandwich graduate in permanent UK employment costs only 65% of his/her non-sandwich counterpart.

Clearly the return on public expenditure must be measured, in part at least, by the number of our graduates who actually take up employment in the UK and as a consequence make an immediate contribution to the economy. In the House of Lords on March 14th, the Government spokesman reiterated what Governments have said for the last thirty years, namely that higher education and industry must draw closer together. Sandwich courses are obviously an excellent opportunity (although not the only one) to do just that. Comparisons based upon statistics alone can of course be misleading. However, if the merits of various programmes of study and training are to be determined then data of the kind used by Dr Davies and Manchester Polytechnic are powerful arguments for the continued funding of sandwich courses. +++

A New Challenge

At the invitation of the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science, a team lead by the British Council have recently returned from a two-day seminar in Madrid to discuss the "increasing of collaboration between industry and education" for which provision has been made in the new University Reform Law.

The Seminar was chaired by Sra Da Carmina Virgili, Secretary of State for Universities and Research, who felt that there was 'potential for the introduction of Sandwich Course Education to assist in achieving increased collaboration'. The team was led by Mr. F. J. Lassetter of the Higher Education Division, British Council, and included representatives of ASET, UCISC, the CBI, Ford Motor Company and the TUC. In his address to the Seminar, Alan Daniels expressed hope that the Spanish would feel able to join the International commitment to Co-operative Educa-

tion and thanked them for basing their plans around the British system.

Many of the problems at present being faced by the British system were mentioned to be of concern to the Spanish. It was, however, felt that none of these problems were insurmountable, given an adequate level of support from the Government. The Seminar ended having made two major recommendations:

- Representatives of the Spanish Government, employers, unions and academic institutions will undertake a visit in January/February 1984 to Britain to visit companies, universities and polytechnics to study the British system, as well as visiting the TUC and CBI.

- A pilot scheme should be established at a Spanish University as soon as possible in a relevant industry/discipline, for instance, Naval Architecture or Computing. +++

