



## Newsletter of The Association of Sandwich Education & Training

Volume Three Number One June 1986

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### Comment

One of the most significant events in recent months affecting sandwich-type education has been the publication in June 1985 by the DES of the report by a committee on research into sandwich education (RISE) entitled 'An Assessment of the Costs and Benefits of Sandwich Education'. Elsewhere in this newsletter Peter Vallance, Chairman of the Universities Committee on Integrated Sandwich Courses gives his personal appraisal of the report. But whatever our personal reactions it is clear that the RISE report signals an urgent need for some, if not all, providers of Sandwich courses to set their houses in order and to redouble their efforts to ensure that all sandwich courses do, in fact, provide the benefits claimed for them, and that the collaboration between college and employer, the academic supervision of the work experience considered to be an essential feature of all true sandwich education, is indeed taking place. Employers and educational institutions are thus being stimulated to look hard and seriously at both the quality of the work experience provided and that the means of assessing the response of the students to that experience. ASET is cooperating in organising a number of seminars in various parts of the country designed to focus attentions on these and related problems in order to improve still further sandwich education and to justify the claims made for it.

To use a well-worn media-phrase, we apologise for the 'break in transmission' of this newsletter and hope with this issue to revert to biannual publications, in May and November. Readers are invited to contribute items of interest and news of coming events within the field of sandwich education and training. Please send your contributions to the editor at the address given above. You will, thereby, earn his undying gratitude.

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# The RISE Investigation - A Personal View

By Peter J. Vallance - University of Reading

"A report by a committee on research into sandwich education". This is how the assessment of the costs and benefits of sandwich education is entitled. Many of those actively involved with sandwich courses, and who became enthusiastic adherents of the scheme, rather expected that a resounding vote of confidence at the end was a foregone conclusion. However, as the investigation continued, it was obvious that those who expected this would be disappointed. There are several reasons for this. One could criticise the hurried research, the ambiguous questionnaires, the reluctance to consider non-UK evidence, and the way the report focused too much on the financial aspect of sandwich education, and too little on its capacity to develop people in ways traditional education has been accused of neglecting.

However the report rightly drew parallels with traditional disciplines such as medicine and dentistry, where the "sandwich principle has always been accepted". (Most of those who have been on the working end of a dentist's drill are happy to endorse this arrangement.) The report concludes that "at its best" it provides for "an integration of work and course study that is very much to the advantage of the student". The caveat is expressed in "at its best". Thus the report laid stress on the need to ensure that the system is working properly if additional costs are to be justified.

Whatever we feel about the report itself, the implications of this cannot be ignored by any of the parties involved in the running of sandwich courses. The implication of the report is that not all sandwich courses in the United Kingdom have received a clean bill of health and all of us involved in running sandwich courses, and this of course includes the members of ASET, must ensure that they are all properly run. It should be our job to ensure that the sandwich component is just as rigorously controlled as the academic component. We are unlikely to get more financial resources for this because in the view of the DES at least, there are already sufficient financial resources available to institutions to carry out this job, and I am sure that the UGC's view would be not too dissimilar.

So, what should sandwich-course institutions be doing? I would like to think that all institutions are considering their response to the implied criticism of the RISE report, and even more, that they are already beginning to implement some of the decisions. The first and overwhelming implication of the report is that academic institutions must take **responsibility** for the industrial training component in the courses that they operate, and that this responsibility starts at the top. It is important that heads of institutions, heads of departments, course supervisors as well as the people organising industrial training, all equally concerned about the quality of the training provided.

In the experience of those concerned with the detailed operation of sandwich courses, the system has proved to be a very good processing method. In the world conference in Edinburgh, in September 1985, there was some evidence that the raw material (as measured by 'A' Level scores) came out as a better product (as measured by class of degree) when processed by the sandwich method. If therefore we accept this analogy, then as in any other processing system, we should set parameters at all stages of the operation, raw material, work in progress and finished product. We should ensure that all staff involved in the processing system are properly prepared and trained, and make sure that there is a good quality control system in operation to ensure that the process is working properly. It may not be possible to stretch this analogy too far, but it does mean that we should face up to the need to prepare both students' tutors and placement officers for their roles, and that we should also be prepared to face up to the problems of assessment.

This not only means doing the assessment ourselves, but to be prepared to let someone else have a look at our assessment to see whether it is fair. As a practitioner myself, I appreciate that there are lots of problems with any form of assessment, but the fact that it is difficult, does not mean that it should not be done. If we set the objectives that are to be achieved we should be able to judge the performance against those objectives, and to give additional credit for those who enlarge and even exceed the objectives.

Perhaps therefore the hidden benefits of the RISE report are that it gives us the stimulus, the excuse, or possibly the threat, which will persuade our institutions, and ourselves, to have another look at how we do things at present, how others do it, and to see whether it can be done better.

We should not be afraid to drop courses which fail consistently to achieve their objectives, nor to discuss with our industrial partners how we can improve the training placement; even to agree together reluctantly perhaps, that collaboration is no longer possible. I would also like to throw out a challenge to the Manpower Services Commission. It is rightly concerned that the limited amount of funds available should go to support courses that fill a real need, and courses that justify a sandwich title. However, the mechanism for the dispersment of grants through the remaining Industrial Training Boards and the non-statutory training organisations does not have a place for the educational institutions. Educational institutions have a part to play in assessing the quality of training provided by organisations that provide grants, if only to ensure that the limited funds available finds their way into the right hands.

Thus having come to the end of a long period of expansion, perhaps we can now embark upon a period of consolidation.

(cont. on Page 3, foot of column 1)

