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Comment

In any human activity it is useful from time to time to remind oneself of what it is that one is trying to accomplish. In the case of the Association for Sandwich Education and Training, its principal aim is clear. ASET is for sandwich-type education, and exists to promote and develop by all means in its power the operation of soundly conceived and efficiently run sandwich courses. And what is Sandwich Education? The World Council and Assembly on Cooperative Education have formulated a definition of cooperative education which cannot be bettered as a statement of that which ASET is seeking to encourage. "Cooperative Education," they say, "is a strategy of applied learning which is a structured programme developed and supervised by an educational institution in collaboration with one or more employing organisations, in which relevant productive work is an integral part of a student's regular academic programme and is an essential component of the final assessment. Such programmes should normally commence and terminate with an academic period and the work experience component should involve productive work and should comprise a reasonable proportion of the total programme. Whilst Cooperative Education has in the past been most commonly associated with the post-secondary level, the World Council believes that it can equally be developed at any level..... The overriding requirement is the maintenance of excellence at whatever level the programme is offered." And that is what ASET stands for.

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THE CRAC/ASET CONFERENCE: HELD IN CAMBRIDGE, MARCH 1987

**Theme: Higher Education -
Rising to the challenge**

This, the latest in the annual series of conferences on the theme of Higher Education, and jointly sponsored by ASET and CRAC was held at Robinson College, Cambridge, on the 30/31 March 1987. Some 120 people participated. An encouraging feature was the increase in the attendance of non-academics to almost 30%. The main speakers were drawn from the higher reaches of industry, education, and the major political parties. All gave their own diagnoses of higher education's current problems, relating them to national and industrial needs and put forward their own routes to the resolution of these problems. The 'challenge' of the title is that of effective collaboration between educational institutions and industry to meet national needs.

The Challenge for the Future.



Sir Norman Lindop

In the opening session, Sir Norman Lindop, currently Principal of the British School of Osteopathy and formerly Director of Hatfield Polytechnic, set out his personal views of the various themes of the conference. He reviewed the recent history of higher education, its present condition and its medium term prospects. The imminence of the White Paper on Higher Education, the report of the Council for Industry and Higher Education and the NAB report coupled with the recent Croham report, made this a particularly appropriate time for such a conference. For the last five or six years, higher education had suffered a particularly concentrated attack. With its resources cut, achievements questioned, suffering from the demographic trough for 18 year-olds and beset by economic uncertainties, higher education could no longer impose, or be taken on, its own terms. The Robbins Report had been University-orientated but Messrs Crossland and Boyle in promoting the binary scheme had tried to bring equality on the grounds that 'successive decapitations of the system cannot lead to a raising of the head'. More recently, the 'modified Robbins' principle of access for all those able to benefit, allied to an emphasis on continuing education as an aid to adjustment to technological, economic and social changes had posed a further

challenge. The APR (age participation range) of 18 year olds was now 14%. This participation rate was far lower than that of our competitors. Proposed changes in the school's examination systems, encouraging broader curricula, coupled with an increased readiness to admit students with 'non-standard' qualifications were welcome. Recent work in the public sector showed that such entrants showed as much motivation and success as those with traditional 'A' levels. Widening of access to higher education was essential and could help satisfy the demand for graduates (and equivalents) and would also improve their quality. Financial disincentives to part-time students should be reversed - the engine was currently driving in the wrong direction. Sir Norman felt it difficult to criticise the Jarratt principle of Quality Control/ Assurance; cost should always be under examination. However, the (over) emphasis on research as a performance indicator was suspect; teaching took the larger share of available time. Policy on tuition fees seemed erratic, if it in fact existed. Sir Keith Joseph, for example, had arbitrarily cut fees as a disincentive for colleges to recruit students; the UGC had penalised universities who exceeded intake targets. Unit costs across the binary line showed them to be unfairly skewed against the public sector. He was appalled by the unemployment problem facing young people, coupled with the severe problems of innumeracy and illiteracy. MSC initiatives were having a beneficial effect on schools' curricula. How soon before these are extended to higher education - possibly coupled to a customer/client relationship? Relations between higher education and industry also posed a dilemma. Those who advocated a market-force approach must accept that the last twenty five years had been demand-led by students but had not produced the right balance of graduates since the perceived rewards were inadequate in many areas of national need. However, manpower planning was discredited, even in closed systems such as medicine. Could it be that a 'third way' should be tried? Should higher education concentrate on producing 'generalists', leaving industry to 'top-up' specialisms? This could reduce the long lead times required to change academic courses. Could industry respond sufficiently quickly to new specialist needs? Our efforts to solve these problems - the issues at the heart of this conference - will determine the future of the U.K. as an industrial nation.

Future Links with Industry



Sir James Cleminson

Sir James Cleminson, Chairman of the Overseas Trade Board, stated that the

