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The Newsletter of the Association
for Sandwich Education & Training

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Comment

This issue of our Newsletter marks a significant point in the development of our Association. Through the eighties ASET has been dependent on the involvement and commitment of members doing great things but with little or no financial assistance for funding major activities or functions; the only income coming from subscription funds. Things have been ticking over. Now as we enter the new decade the Association, through the successful Employing Agent Scheme, has sufficient funds to set up a small secretariat (see article on page 2) and more importantly has made budgets available to Working Groups so that the long list of activities discussed over previous years can be put into action. The following working groups have been set up, and indeed many have already met several times; Membership, Exhibitions, Conferences & Seminars, Publications & Research, Development and Evaluation. As a result the Association will be undertaking many new initiatives over the coming months and as a consequence this Newsletter will appear more regularly keeping members informed of ASET's activities.

The working parties set up do not have to take their membership exclusively from the Executive Committee and if you feel you would like to help on one of them, now is the time to put your name forward. It can be very rewarding working with people committed to sandwich education and training for a common purpose. Any suggestions, comments or concerns should be directed to Malcolm Brewer the Association's Secretary. We need your involvement to keep the Association active and alive and over the next decade we hope to achieve great things.

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Students, Money - and Sandwich Courses

The student loans scheme, which became law recently, together with a loss of housing benefit means that students will have to borrow to pay rising rents as well as find the money to repay government loans intended to top up student grants which will be frozen this year. The impact of this will radically change the way students attempt to keep body and soul together and in future money will almost certainly be the main determinant of student choice.

Academics' attitude to loans

There is evidence that academics are becoming concerned about the loans issue. It is clear that they are becoming worried about the problem of attracting students. In one case, academics at University College London put on a seminar for employers to persuade them to cooperate in attracting more students to UCL courses by offering special bursaries to make it unnecessary for students to take out loans. This may be a special problem, unique to London, where costs are high and students may be deterred from applying by the financial pressures of studying there.

In another case a member of the enterprise unit at Brunel, where they are developing an EHE programme, is worried about the impact of loans on student choice. They felt that four year courses would extend the period when students would need loans, and delay the time when they could pay off the debts. They felt that this would apply even though students spend six months in each of the first three years of the course away from Brunel on sandwich placements during which the student would be paid salary. They fear that under these pressures students may prefer full time to sandwich courses.

Poll tax and sandwich students

There are other problems. Everybody is going to be liable to poll tax. For most of us it will be a question of whether we are liable for more or less than we currently pay in rates. But students will have to pay tax for the first time. Malcolm Brewer, Secretary of ASET has produced the following notes on the effect on students of the poll tax:

Working students fall into one of four categories:

- 1 Sandwich course students on placement
- 2 Students working on voluntary intercalated years
- 3 Pre university/polytechnic students
- 4 Students working in their vacation

Their Community Charge (poll tax) situation is as follows:

- 1 All students who are registered with their academic institution are "exempt" (ie they only pay 20% of poll tax). This applies to sandwich course students on placement. Thus all sandwich course students on placement who are registered with their academic institution only pay 20% of poll tax. "Registered" implies that either they pay a fee or someone pays a fee for them to

their academic institution.

Appropriate "certificates of exemption" will be made available to students in this category by the Community Charge Certification Officer at their college.

- 2 Students on intercalated years or on so called sandwich courses, and who are not "registered" with their academic institution whilst on placement, will be eligible to pay 100% of the poll tax. They may, along with their academic institution, make a claim to be "exempt" and this will be determined by the local Community Charge Officer. This claim *may* be determined by the amount of academic institutional involvement and control over the student during the work period.
- 3 Pre university/polytechnic gap-year students will be required to pay 100% of the poll tax. Again claims can be made by students.
- 4 Students on vacation are "exempt" from poll tax. Their designation as "students" is deemed to apply from registration with their academic institution (early October) to the end of September in the following year.

What is interesting are the liabilities under 2 and 3 above. What line will the community charge officers take? What effect will this have on students' preparedness to undertake gap-year employment or to opt to take voluntary intercalated years out in employment as happens at certain universities eg Aberystwyth and Hull?

LEAs and student fees

There appears to be yet another threat to sandwich courses. At present local authorities (which pay students' tuition fees) are charged full fees for each year of a sandwich course - £1600 a year. The DES has now decided that from 1990-91, where students take off a full year as part of their course, only half the fee should be paid to the institution - £838 - and that the grant paid by the UFC and PCFC for the salaries of academic staff who supervise such students will be reduced. (The new regulations apply only to a full year out - the payment for shorter periods of training will be unchanged.)

Effect on employers

How does all this affect employers? The sandwich course concept is likely to become more important in future because employers see it as a way of making early contact with students they can train and (they hope) eventually recruit as graduates. Many employers who prefer the thick sandwich route will be affected if course structures are altered because of the financial juggling of the politicians. All sponsoring employers will be affected if students turn away from sandwich courses for the reasons discussed in this article.

JOBS'90 Exhibition

ASET is taking a stand at Jobs'90, a major exhibition and convention being held at the NEC Birmingham, from 3-7 October 1990. The exhibition is aimed at young people, 16-19 year olds, prior to starting HE courses and deciding on future careers. Schools from all over the UK are attending and major employers from key sectors of British industry and commerce will participate.

The ASET Exhibitions Working Party is seeking help from members in a variety of ways;

material- photographs of sandwich students on placement and other display material is urgently needed; sponsorship from employers- £25 will buy sufficient space on the stand to advertise the company logo; and manpower- companies who can send one of their employees, preferably a recent sandwich course graduate, to help man the stand or talk to groups of students for a day or half a day. Members who may be able to help should contact Rob Prescott, at Bath University, on (0225) 826303.

