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RETURNEES: ADMISSION TO UNIVERSITIES AND TECHNICON

It can be expected that a fairly small number (300-600) of returnees may want to embark on studies at a University or Technicon during 1992-93. The vast majority of them will have University of London controlled O-Levels. In order for these students to study, they will have to obtain Joint Matriculation Board approval. Another group of students are those who have studied at one or more foreign universities and they will need to have their certificates evaluated by the Human Sciences Research Council in Pretoria. During telephonic discussions with officials at the JMB and the HSRC the following came to light;

1. Officials at both institutions are unaware of potential problems and see no reason why existing regulations required adjustment. The senior person at JMB (Mr Otto) said it was absurd to compare "these people" with soldiers returning from the 1945 war and therefore saw no reason to even contemplate changes to existing regulations. He seems extremely bureaucratic and will only be of assistance if instructed by higher "authority". In contrast, the head of the HSRC centre (Mr Muller) sounded much more sympathetic and expressed a willingness to process large numbers of applications at short notice.

Status of O-Levels. To obtain full matric exemption a candidate requires 5 different subjects, 2 of which are at A-levels. A candidate who is already 23 years old, or who will be 23 during the first year of study at university can qualify for conditional exemption with 4 subjects at O-level, all passed at C-grade or higher and 1 must be English Language. A grade of less than C is regarded as a fail. The comparison between O-levels and Senior Certificate was made by the HSRC centre, who decreed that O-levels were equivalent to a South African standard 9. Exactly how this equivalence was established nobody could explain, except to say that it was based on a comparison with the content of the different matric authorities. Equivalence of standard was assumed between different matrices - numerous research studies at a number of universities have demonstrated this assumption to be fallacious. The comparison also does not include difficulty level.

Evaluation of Foreign Certificates. The HSRC Centre for the Evaluation of Education Qualifications is the official body for evaluating all foreign certificates. This institution processes about 8000 certificates a year. According to Mr Muller, they have good relationships with similar bodies in Germany and the USA, which he says enables them to make detailed comparisons on very short notice. They also have adequate information about Eastern Europe and Africa. Mr Muller confirmed their assessment that O-levels are equivalent to a South African standard 9, but agreed that the standard of a BET exam was really problematic. He was much more amenable to the idea of making a special arrangement specifically applicable to returnees.

RESPONSES TO RETURNING SERVICEMEN IN 1945

It is difficult to determine exactly what rule changes the government of the day made for demobilised servicemen - mainly because the only response from officials at JMB is that they had not been there during that time. Selective amnesia does not seem to be confined to the director of national intelligence. What is certain is that mature age was introduced as one concession. In the University of Witwatersrand Academic Plan it is very ambiguously stated that the then principal Raikes recruited "those qualified for admission" (p17). In a previous interview (1987) with JMB an official informed us that "military exemptions" were granted for a certain period of time to ex-servicemen who did not have an exemption. He was not certain that matric was a prerequisite, adding that he was prepared to say that preference were given to those who had obtained a standard 10 before enlisting. According to a previous principal, D. J. du Plessis, Wits "stood on its head" for returning servicemen. Raikes personally recruited ex-servicemen and informed staff that it was the duty of those who had not served in the war to assist the returning servicemen. Student numbers increased at Wits from 3148 in 1945 to 5240 in 1946, a staggering 66%, the biggest in the history of the university. During 1946 and 1947 alone, a total of 4082 ex-servicemen enrolled. Separate statistics were kept for these students because they were allowed to register at different times during the year, and by attending lectures during the holidays did not follow the normal academic semesters.

Wood and galvanised iron huts were erected on the main campus and at Cottesloe. While the former served as classrooms, the latter provided accommodation. The last of these temporary structures were removed in 1976, the year that the new educational crisis started manifesting itself. The large first-year classes were duplicated and triplicated and conducted throughout the day and evening. First-year medicine was taught in the Great Hall in 1946 with the aid of a loudspeaker system. Additional temporary staff were appointed and extra classes (academic support) were conducted to refresh the rusty minds of the servicemen. Some of those who had left at midyear received credit.

It seems clear that a joint effort between government and higher education institutions is required. Certain universities will make concessions and respond constructively - even if not quite as heroically as Wits did in 1945. However, neither the Universities nor the Technicons can take students unless they are JMB approved. This means that a major effort will have to be directed to JMB, and the HSRC Centre for the Evaluation of Foreign Qualifications.

PROPOSALS

The only suggestion offered by the JMB is that prospective university students should either do matric or enroll for two A-levels at an institution such as Intech (previously known as International Correspondence College). Experience at Khanya College with students with O-levels have been very positive. During 1991 the second best student at the college is one who had been admitted with O-levels. Those returnees who have visited the Counselling and Careers Unit at Wits seemed to have a much better command of English than the vast majority of second language speakers presently at the university.

Considering the number of years that these students have sacrificed and the fact that there is no objective evidence that certain of the South African matric authorities is of a higher standard, we propose that under certain conditions students with O-levels be admitted to study at university.

University Study.

1. Candidates with 4 or more subjects at O-levels (at grade C or above) be given conditional exemption for a period of 3 years.

Admission should be a joint venture between JMB and the universities. Candidates with conditional exemption should be submitted to university selection procedures. A student should be given full exemption upon completing 3 or more courses during 3 academic years. The universities could administer this in a manner similar to the mature age exemption.

2. Those returnees who will be 23 in 1992, or who are older and who have 4 subjects at O-levels (including English Language) should apply through the NCCR who will have to negotiate with specific institutions for admission. Applications for mature age closed in many universities as early as August. However, the JMB could be pressurised to process these on short notice. It is important to note that at this stage such applications should only be submitted through the NCCR.

3. Universities, and Technicons who admit returnees must establish support groups to assist these students with re-orientation problems.

Technicons

A suggestion from the HSRC evaluation centre is that students with 4 O-levels should do 2 matric subjects and that this could count for a school leaving certificate, which would give entry to a Technicon. We propose a similar model as that for the universities. A conditional exemption based on 3 subjects at O-levels and gassing the first year within 2 years of study.

Colleges of Education

From discussions with Soweto College of Education it seems that the colleges have already allocated all their spaces for next year. Also the principal is very rigid about JMB requirements, which in the case of the colleges is a senior certificate. He did indicate that he would only be prepared to consider cases approved by JMB.

The above suggestions were developed by an ad hoc group of Udusa at Wits, with some consultations with Khanya college. It is certainly not a Udusa national position.

Nico Cloete

General Secretary

RETURNING EXILES : LANGUAGE PROBLEMS IN THEIR EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

1.The United Nations High Commissibner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that of ca 30 000 returnees some 7 000 are likely to be of school-going age; in addition some others will clearly wish to enter tertiary education.

2.Many of these children and young people will not enter our schools with the language knowledge they would have acquired if they had grown up in South Africa, but this is not unique, as we have had large numbers of children in our schools in the past who have come from various parts of the world with language capacities that did not match those of local children at the time the immigrants entered our schools.

3.There are certain concessions that are made in our education regulations to allow "immigrant children" to acquire the language competencies of South African children. These should be applied to the present group of children and young people entering the country. NB The argument that these are South African children, not "foreigners" entering the country, should not be used against them, as they are in fact entering the country after schooling - and in many cases having been born - abroad.

4.A factor to be borne in mind is that most of the principals and teachers w.o will be asked to admit and to teach these pupils have little experience of accepting and helping pupils in this situation: they need to be informed about the nature and normality of such problems.

5.At Junior primary level newly enrolled pupils will soon adapt to the language medium of the school, even if it is new to them, particularly if it is widely spoken in their neighbourhood and in the playground, and possibly in their homes. At this level, lack of knowledge of the language of instruction should therefore NOT be used to deny returnee children access to the school, nor should they, save in exceptional cases, have to be "put back a year because of the language problem. Especially at the beginning of the school year they will have time to adapt to the local situation during the school year.

6.Schools should, however, make arrangements to help returnee children

7.It is likely that quite a number of returning children

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by arranging additional tuition to help them adapt more rapidly to the school's language situation. Possibly methods of handling such tuition could be discussed at regional level among inspectors, principals and teachers once the nature of the problems is better known.

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may in fact be more competent in English than some of the local pupils. Since English is of increasing importance in education as pupils advance up the educational ladder, such improved competence, where it exists, will benefit the pupil in his/her school progress.

.A is the case with other "immigrant" children, concessions need to be laid down concerning the postponement of any requirement that Afrikaans must be a passing subject before the pupil can be promoted to the next higher standard. It is suggested that any such requirement, where it is applicable, be postponed for returning exiles. (They must study the subject should not prevent them from promotion to the next level

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11. In Stds 3-5 in African schools there will be no problem with the medium of instruction where the children who are coming home have had previous instruction through the medium of English, though they will have to adapt to the African, language being taught in the school and of course also to Afrikaans.

12. Similar remarks apply to Stds 6-8 in high schools: concessions need to be made about pass requirements in languages other than English during the first 2-3 years. These would need to be agreed at national level, and communicated to all school systems affected.

13. At Std 9 and 10 level there are existing concessions that apply to immigrant children, concerning Afrikaans. Yet at this level there would seem to be an additional problem; pupils must pass 2 languages at Std 10 level in order to qualify for entrance to tertiary institutions. Apart from English, they would thus have to study, and pass; either an African language or a language they have previously studied - an example applicable to some returnees is Portuguese. Once pupils have actually been enrolled at this level, one might study the extent and nature of the problems that do exist, and study whether special rules or tuition may need to be provided for a limited period.

14. It is recommended that such concessions as are made to returnee children be granted for the period 1992-1995 only, i.e. for 4 years.

15. Problems concerning admission to universities are dealt with in a separate submission.

16. We expect most people to have been repatriated by the end of April 1992. It is therefore important that these matters be dealt with to enable such measures as may be agreed on to apply from the opening of the 1992 academic year.

17. In conclusion it should be emphasised that adaptation to new social and educational circumstances is of itself a fairly traumatic process. It is therefore important that schooling should ease that process by welcoming these pupils and helping them. We should avoid adding educational and bureaucratic hurdles in their path.