RECENT INTEGRATIVE TRENDS IN FURTHER EDUCATION IN ENGLAND AND WALES

JAMES LYNCH

This paper gives a survey of the development and current trends in the area of further education in England and Wales. It describes the wide range of functions further education has in the entire post-compulsory education sector. On the basis of statistical data, special emphasis is given to its tasks concerning some crucial areas, such as further education of juvenile unemployed and of the handicapped, education of adult immigrants and community education. The role of further education as a critical corrective for traditional university education is also stressed. In the internal system of further education, its integrative aspects are demonstrated by the examples of commercial training in trade and industry. The changes and extensions of the competent management bodies of the various parts of this sector are clearly discussed.


Since the major national Education Act of 1944 gave local authorities in England and Wales the specific task of providing adequate facilities for further education in their areas, this sector of educational provision has developed a mammoth, multi-million pound commitment. Taken at its broadest, further education can include any educational provision, formal and informal, ordinary and special, following the end of compulsory education at the age of 16. It thus comprises technical, commercial, vocational, recreational, professional and academic training, education and inquiry of all kinds and at all levels. In this technical education dimension, for example, it includes the provision of courses in preparation for craft, technician, higher grade technician and technologist levels of expertise. Similar gradations of expertise in other fields such as business and social studies may also be involved.

By 1975 there was a total enrolment of almost four million students in this sector of education, half of these being at evening institutes. But not only is the commitment of further education massive in total numbers, it is also rapidly growing. For example, between 1974 and 1975 there was an increase of 6.4% in student enrolments or over 236,000 in absolute numbers. In the same period the increase in the number of students on advanced courses was roughly 9%, or over 12% if the increase due to the inclusion of merged Colleges of Education is added. This represents an increase of almost double that of the previous years. By the end of 1975 there were almost 8,000 establishments involved in the further education sector of the educational system, with over 63,000 members of staff of whom almost 40,000 were untrained. The total bill in 1974/75 for central and local governments was something in excess of six hundred million pounds.¹

But if the mind boggles at the dimensions of the figures quoted, the qualitative diversity within that provision, ranging from recreational keep-fit to sophisticated research and development, are no less important. Almost from its inception the further education system, possibly because of this diversity, has been bombarded by government legislation, administrative memoranda and national reports. From the Percy Report of 1944, recommending the establishment of regional advisory councils which were to coordinate the provision of further education within the regions of England and Wales, through major government reports such as the Crowther, Robbins, Russell, Hazelgrave and more recently James reports, the system has repeatedly been asked to meet new demands as quickly as possible and these demands accelerate in particular over the last decade. A large part of the task of responding to growing youth un-