THE HALE REPORT

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The Hale Report\(^1\) came out nearly a year after the Report of the Committee on Higher Education (Robbins Report). Its scope and aims were very much narrower; it was commissioned as a comparative study of present Undergraduate Teaching Methods in British Universities, excluding Medicine, and the Committee’s terms of reference did not include the power to make recommendations, nor to study other University systems. The core of its work was fact-finding; to that end it shared for certain purposes facilities put at the disposal of Lord Robbins’ committee as well as drawing on its own sources of information. In consequence, given its limitations, it is far more detailed than any previous work in the subject. Fact-finding is, of course, an intricate and arduous operation in a field of this kind. The material to be handled is the contrary of homogeneous. The facts become out of date rapidly in a phase of rapid growth. The mere act of enquiry can produce or hasten significant changes in the object of investigation. Most of the fairly massive body of facts established by the Hale Committee relate to the year 1962; already in 1965 some of the detail may be presumed to be no longer up to date, and in due course the report will become a document of largely historical interest. In the meanwhile, however, a substantial amount of its material is still practically relevant to problems of Universities in Britain, and no doubt of interest elsewhere.

An immediate and obvious question is “what are the aims of the Report?” As it embodies no recommendations, its contents are not conspicuously designed to illustrate any one line of argument, and the chapter headings indicate a fairly wide range of concerns: Structure of degree courses, Organisation problems, Introduction to student life, Students’ use of time, Student opinion, Lectures and discussion periods, Practical classes, Examinations, Equipment, University teaching as a matter for training and study. A large number of tables are included in the text.

As the terms of reference precluded discussion in a direct manner of the content of University studies, with all that that implies, there is no attempt to develop in depth an enquiry into, say, engineering departments, in the light of current trends in industry or development in technology. Furthermore particular studies of methods in any one

discipline are omitted – partly, it may be inferred, because another, comparable, national Committee is studying some of these. Most educationalists would tend to the view that methods are dictated by ends, and specific methods by specific ends, and that this applies to teaching. Also that teaching can only be discussed systematically as a function of learning, whether learning by pupils or learning by teachers. These considerations are bound to make the Hale Report look in some respects one-sided; on the other hand, if the terms of reference had been so framed as to include questions of content, discipline by discipline, the Report might well have taken ten years to prepare, instead of three; and it might in the end have been a fragmented encyclopaedia rather than a relatively coherent set of statements on central topics, on which it is reasonable to think that attention should be concentrated.

To the question "whom is the Report addressed to?" the obvious answer is, "anyone interested". But since its signatories are predominantly drawn from Universities, together with one secondary school Headmistress and the Chairman (a former Secretary of the University Grants Committee), it seems reasonable to judge that interest in its findings will be shown by the Universities themselves, and that this interest is unlikely to be complacent, but rather a starting-point for further investigations. Indeed, the Report makes the point that such investigations have very seldom been attempted in Britain, or at any rate very seldom reported. Without such work, it becomes difficult to see how Universities can confidently face problems of growth, or increasing involvement in matters that concern public policy, and generally carry out their work in a changing society.

There are two important general grounds for believing that follow-on operations from the Hale Report are urgent. Both have been discussed fairly frequently. First, there is widespread belief that the technology of education is backward, and that as productivity rises in the rest of the economy education tends to become relatively more expensive. Whether or not the belief is true, the mere fact that it is entertained, places an obligation on Universities to take some notice of it. Secondly, education is one of the largest users of skilled manpower in the economy, and since skilled manpower is likely to remain scarce in Britain, it follows that the education system is likely to remain short of teachers. This applies to university teachers in the immediate future in Britain. It is unfortunately the case that the output by skilled teaching manpower in Universities does not lend itself to such close estimation as in, say, a machine-tool

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