By 1971 a situation had arisen in Swaziland's educational development in which expansion of primary school places was taking place at a very rapid rate with two effects: sub-qualified teachers have to be retained, and unqualified teachers have to be engaged; and teachers trained for work at one level have to be employed at a higher level.

The only acceptable solution is to train more teachers. But any increase in teacher-training potential is a slow process, because of difficulties of finding teacher-educators, of erecting buildings, and, of course, of finance. A possible partial solution is the introduction of in-service training, combined with correspondence courses. A scheme had already been tried in Botswana: based on this, and with the benefit of their experience, a project was proposed for Swaziland.

The intention of the government was originally to upgrade 'sub-qualified teachers, of whom there are over 600'. (Ministry of Education Report for 1971.) Subsequently, however, it was found that, with continued expansion of the primary school system, some 200 completely unqualified teachers were being taken on every year. Some of these entered the original project. In 1976, the project was extended to provide training for a second batch of 600 teachers, making a total of 1,200. Meanwhile, the government was arranging to provide a second large training college to meet the envisaged future requirement for teachers.

The original intention of the government was implemented by a project for the in-service training of primary school teachers. The objectives were: to improve the teaching strength of the country by training some 600 primary teachers (now 1,200); to inculcate modern methods, not only for use by the trainees, but also as a medium for change in others; and to organize the training in such a way that it caused a minimum of disruption to the staffing of schools at any time.

The project was perhaps unique in the number of its participants, in that those co-operating with the Government of Swaziland numbered three United Nations Agencies, namely the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Each of the four participants contributed a share to the cost, and the government and Unesco provided the expertise. In addition, five of the tutors provided by government were aided by ODM (the British Ministry of Overseas Development), thus adding a fifth party to the project.

The actual training originally comprised: three residence courses, each of six weeks; eight correspondence assignments in each of five subjects (English, education, mathematics, science, and social studies), in each of three years; tutorial supervision of the trainees at their schools; a programme of radio broadcasts.

The radio programmes have, regretfully, been dropped. The reason is that most of the in-service teachers were unable to receive them, either through lack of a radio, or because reception in much of mountainous Swaziland is not good. Some of what would have been radio
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talks have been printed and distributed to the trainees; and recordings of precious talks are used during the in-college courses.

The number of students in the courses is limited by accommodation at the college. The maximum is 100 at any one time. In fact, two courses of fifty are held at the same time, six times a year. Each course is divided into two classes, so that there are four classes at any one time. Each course lasts six weeks. The first in-college course began in July 1973. Students come back to the college after about one year, for their second course, and again after about another year, for their third course. The interval between courses depends to a large extent on the individual, as those who lag behind in their correspondence work are likely to be asked back to the college after those who complete them quickly.

What kind of persons are these students? The greater part of the primary teaching force in Swaziland consists of women, and about four-fifths of the in-service trainees are women. The original students who came to the first courses in 1973 were mature women who delighted in the opportunity to go back (or to go for the first time) to college and to be given the opportunity to win a professional qualification. The older applicants were taken first. After them the average age gradually dropped, but the keenness and interest remained. Many of the students are married, with children. (Children may not be brought to the college.) One of the most noticeable characteristics is the desire to learn; the course, besides being a training for a specific purpose, is a form of lifelong education. The following extracts from a letter, written in July 1976 by a trainee, are revealing:

I wish to thank the tutors who were teaching us at In-Service Teacher Training. Before I went to the course, two tutors came to advise us to go and learn there. I told them that I could not imagine myself going to learn. But they told me that some aged from 55-60 are learning. They said that I should go and try for once, and if I failed only then should I leave it out. I then agreed to go and try for once, but I told them that I would be happy if I could be in the first group. In fact there is a lot of things which I learned at William Pitcher College while learning. I did not know that even clouds had their names. I did not know also that even the earth was divided into many parts. Even though I cannot remember everything I learned, I would be able to recognize some, whenever I’d come across them. I wished that this education had come early while I was still young.

To many of the trainees the project has offered the opportunity to rise above the normal circumstances of their lives, which are often spent in poor physical conditions, and in which they are frequently deprived of occasion for intellectual activity. To them the in-college courses, and the need to study correspondence assignments, have given a new lease of life and a new excitement. Letters of the kind quoted above are not infrequent; invariably they indicate satisfaction that the writers have been able to achieve something which they had never thought possible. Moreover, the desire to progress is awakened in many, and a relatively considerable number of trainees have begun correspondence studies at the Swaziland International Education Centre with a view to obtaining a Junior Certificate (Form III).

On their side, the staff of the project obtain satisfaction not only from the advancement of the student’s knowledge and professional abilities, but also from the awakening of their intellectual curiosity and of their desire to go forward.

Drop-out has been remarkably low, about thirty, of whom death and illness or other unavoidable cause accounted for most.

The trainees attend, as noted above, three in-college courses, at intervals of about a year. The courses last six weeks, and within the capacity of the students are intensive. The weekly allocation of time varies slightly between first, second and third courses, but is approximately forty-five periods, broken down as follows (the figures refer to the number of periods