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UNIVERSITIES AND THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS

PART 3 of the Report on University Developments, which was adopted by the Council of the Association of University Teachers on May 25-26, 1945, and has now been published*, deals with two main topics: the universities and the education of teachers; and the international functions of a university. In regard to the former, the Association of University Teachers comes out emphatically in favour of placing the responsibility for the education and training of teachers in England on the universities. It will be recalled that while the McNair Committee recommended unanimously a similar course for Wales, that Committee was equally divided on the point in regard to England. Half the members, including the chairman, recommended a transformation or further development of the existing joint boards; the rest of the Committee recommended that each university should establish one or more schools of education, consisting of an organic federation of approved training institutions working in co-operation with other approved educational institutions, and responsible for the training and the assessment of the work of all students seeking recognition by the Ministry of Education as qualified teachers.

This principle is accepted by the Association of University Teachers, with the understanding that the scheme should be adapted to the needs of each particular region. Acceptance of this task is recommended for five reasons. The universities owe a duty to the society of which they are essential parts, and the education of teachers has long been one of their main functions. This work is vital to a civilized people, and by it the universities can make a contribution to the increase and diffusion of knowledge by raising the standards of teaching, and so aiding the maintenance of intellectual standards among the whole population. The universities are the highest stage in the series of educational institutions and should do all they can to strengthen the whole system. By accepting a greater responsibility for the education of teachers, they would make an effective contribution over the whole field of education. The universities have the prestige and ability to enable them to establish and maintain high standards, combined with freedom of development, in the education of teachers, without danger of the rigidity and uniformity which might characterize a single centralized body. Finally, the vitality of an educational system at all levels depends mainly on the teachers. It is much to be desired that all teachers should be members of a unified profession. The development of that unity among teachers in Great Britain has been hindered by the separation of those teachers who are preparing to teach young children from those who hope to teach in secondary schools and higher institutions. While it is not likely that the proportions of graduates teaching in secondary and primary schools will change, it is probable that

* Association of University Teachers. Report on University Developments. Part 3: Comprising the Education of Teachers: the International Functions of a University. Pp. 8. (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, Ltd., 1945.) 1s.

bringing all the education and training of teachers under the ægis of the universities would do much to unite and raise the status of the whole of the teaching profession, and make possible a wider variety of training.

The Association of University Teachers does not discuss the counter-arguments put forward in the McNair Report, and the basic statement that "the fundamental studies and disciplines of all teachers, primary and secondary alike, are, at their apex, the concern of the universities", to quote a fine passage from the assenting group in the McNair Report, would have been stronger had this group, like Bruce Truscot in "Redbrick and these Vital Days", stayed to consider more fully the serious difficulty which the preponderance of students preparing themselves for one profession is bound to offer, especially in the arts faculties. The quantitative aspects are dismissed rather too lightly by the Association in the present report, and there is little real attempt to think out the implications and to see exactly where a principle, admittedly sound and desirable theoretically, will lead us. It is not sufficient to brush over the difficulty by the assertion that "the universities will not thereby be swamped by an excess of students of a single type", or that "Those who aim to become teachers are not for most of their university work, distinct from other students in many departments of the Faculties of Arts and Sciences", and "will thus contribute to the increase in the total number of university students which is to be expected".

The provision for this increase may be made either by increasing the size of some of the smaller university institutions or by establishing more universities, and the Association's report is right in urging that the chief obstacle to a large and rapid increase in student numbers is the difficulty of finding sufficient men and women to staff the universities on a proper standard. But this is largely beside the point. The danger of saturating a university with prospective teachers, with the risk that it may tend to deteriorate into a teacher-training establishment, will be far more acute than when it first aroused the concern of Flexner nearly two decades ago. Even when all allowance has been made for the expansion of the universities to provide the increased numbers of scientific workers and others required in industry and in the Government service for research and development, the annual influx of 10,000-15,000 recruits estimated as necessary to maintain the numbers of teachers who will be required to implement the proposals of the Education Act is far too large, in proportion to the most optimistic estimates for university expansion, to be dismissed without serious concern. Although it is apparently not the purpose of the Association of University Teachers at this stage to go into any details as to the ways by which this task may be accomplished, one might have expected some concrete evidence that a real attempt was being made to formulate constructive proposals for dealing with these dangers. Even more disturbing is the absence of any indication of the importance of the schools of education in regard to educational research, in spite of Sir Fred Clark's observation in

this connexion in a speech on the university and the teaching profession at the Second Education Conference of the Association of University Professors and Lecturers of the Allied Countries in Great Britain in April 1944.

The risk may, of course, have to be run, and may be worth taking; but every effort should be made to keep the danger to a minimum. The Association in its report again pays very little attention to the suggestion for 'university schools of education', though such a development may make an important contribution. So, too, might any considerable increase in the intake of university graduates into business and commercial careers, and there are hints in the recent report of the Cambridge University Appointments Board which deserve further attention in this connexion also.

For the rest, the report urges that it is essential that the university should be responsible for the arrangement of curricula and the final assessment of university students. It endorses the recommendation of the McNair Report that the pledge committing students to teaching in consideration of receiving grants should be abolished, and that maintenance grants for students should be provided in such numbers as to ensure an adequate supply of recruits for the professions. The universities, moreover, could not accept the responsibility for the training of teachers without guarantee of the necessary financial resources, and these can only be supplied by the State. Again, graduate students in training should not relinquish contact with their academic studies, and the university should arrange for such students to continue academic work, both during their training-year and after entry into the profession.

Although the Association of University Teachers does not go quite so far as might be desired in the way of formal proposals, it nevertheless recognizes the undesirability of insisting on uniformity in organisation. It suggests indeed that each university, in its own area, should accept a similar responsibility to that of the present University of London Delegacy of Training Colleges, and receive the necessary powers for its execution; but a suitable scheme would have to be worked out for each region in agreement with other institutions concerned. Further, a university should be prepared to give advice to any student at any stage on the choice of his future profession. The location of training colleges and the delimitation of the area to be associated with each university institution is a matter for planning on a national scale in consultation with the universities. The alternative proposal of university schools of education is perhaps brushed rather too hastily aside, but we may nevertheless take the report as evidence that, so far as the teaching staff is concerned, the universities are more alive to their opportunities and more disposed to accept responsibilities which hitherto most of them have not desired. If the responsibility for training teachers be accepted by the universities, its adequate discharge must in itself place them in a far stronger position to make that contribution to regional life which Prof. Dobrée outlined in his Earl Grey Memorial Lecture nearly three years ago.