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**A PILOT SURVEY OF THE OPINIONS
OF STUDY FELLOWS FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES
ON THEIR COURSES IN BRITAIN**

BY

ANNA J. SIMONS (ODA)

**(THIS REPORT IS BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF
382 QUESTIONNAIRES BY MR A HENDERSON)**

OCTOBER 1979

EVALUATION UNIT

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PREFACE

Each year the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) commissions a number of ex-post evaluation studies with two aims in mind; firstly, to assess the effectiveness of its aid activities and secondly, to learn lessons for improving the effectiveness of future aid activities.

This evaluation is one such study.

Evaluation studies are undertaken by individuals or by teams especially recruited for their particular knowledge with regard to the subject under study. Sometimes these teams will include personnel from ODA (increasingly teams are a mix of ODA and external personnel).

In all cases the reports and conclusions are attributable to the authors, who are finally responsible for their contents, and not to ODA.

Evaluation Unit
Manpower and Evaluation Department

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main findings of this study, which by means of a survey looked at a sample of ODA financed study fellows who had followed courses in the UK, fall broadly into two sections. Firstly there are the findings relating to the lessons gained from conducting a survey of this kind and secondly there are the more specific findings relating to the contents of the survey questionnaires.

SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION

- i. Considerable difficulties arose over administering the survey, both in arranging for the despatch of the questionnaires and in recording their distribution.
- ii. For a variety of reasons (see paragraph 2.3) many problems were encountered in ensuring that questionnaires actually reached the study fellows.
- iii. Some sections of the information sheets and the questionnaires were poorly completed and it was found that insufficient attention had been paid to the coding necessary for the subsequent computer analysis.
- iv. A further factor hindering the analysis was the discovery of discrepancies and inconsistencies both between and within the data acquired from information sheets and questionnaires.
- v. For the questionnaires sent out the response rate was quite reasonable at 64%.

SURVEY FINDINGS

- i. By far the majority of study fellows were following courses or attachments for which no qualifications were awarded. Very few students were placed on courses of first degree level (paragraph 3.5).
- ii. Female study fellows, although spanning most subject groups, accounted for less than 15% of the total sample. The majority of study fellows were over the age of 30. (paras 4.1 - 4.3)
- iii. Study fellows tended to receive additional English Language tuition depending on the length of their course in the UK rather than on the need of the student. Nearly half the study fellows were not satisfied that they had received sufficient English tuition before commencing their course. (paras 3.6 - 3.8, 4.12 - 4.14)
- iv. Most study fellows felt that the courses had been of benefit both to themselves personally and to their countries. In only a few cases did study fellows feel that their courses had been of limited benefit. (paras 4.5 - 4.6, 4.10)
- v. Study fellows following training in "Teaching English as a Foreign Language" generally seemed the most disappointed with their courses. (para 4.7)
- vi. Although just under half the study fellows felt they had not had enough opportunity to specify the kind of training they needed, nearly three quarters were satisfied that they had been placed on the right course. (para 4.17)
- vii. Whilst only 25% of the married study fellows were accompanied by their spouse, study fellows generally felt that the presence of their spouse in the UK would have benefited their studies. (paras 4.18 - 4.19)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE SURVEYS

- i. It is essential, for a survey of this size to be successful, that one person must take responsibility for the monitoring of each and every stage of the exercise.
- ii. The response rate could be improved by ensuring that the print-out of study fellows is up to date and that sufficient time is allowed between despatching the questionnaires and the study fellows' departure from the UK.
- iii. More persuasion should be used to encourage the study fellows to complete and return the questionnaire; one possibility is to enclose the questionnaire with the letter advising the student of details of his forthcoming air ticket.
- iv. Information sheets could be simplified and would be better completed if Programme Officers were supplied with a set of guidelines to aid this task.
- v. The questionnaire itself could be improved in a number of ways; details of these improvements are set out in paragraph 5.5.
- vi. The computer analysis would be greatly facilitated if more attention were given to the coding of the questionnaire, particularly in the case of open ended questions.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

1.1 The Technical Co-operation Training Department (TCTD) of the British Council administers a training programme under which some 5000 people from developing countries receive awards each year. The award winners, known as study fellows, attend courses and/or practical attachments, whose length varies from three months to (exceptionally) seven years. The direct cost of the programme of £20m per year (excluding administration costs) is met by the Overseas Development Administration (ODA).

1.2 In 1976, the British Council and ODA asked the Social Survey Division of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) to devise a questionnaire to be sent to a selection of study fellows (SF's) shortly before they returned to their home countries. Various drafts of the questionnaire were discussed by the OPCS, TCTD, MPU and the Statistics Division of the ODA. A pilot questionnaire was tested on about fifty study fellows and was then revised in the light of the problems that had arisen. OPCS also helped to design an information sheet; this was to provide background information on each study fellow and would be completed by TCTD and attached to the relevant questionnaire. Blank copies of both the questionnaire and the information sheet are attached.

1.3 It was decided that from the total of 5000 ODA financed study fellows in the UK, approximately a quarter would be selected for survey during the first year. This selection was made by different subject groups (in this case eight subject groups or subgroups were chosen) with the intention of covering all the subject groups over a four year period. In the event however, for reasons described in the following chapter, only 600 questionnaires were sent out, from which 382 completed questionnaires were received. Distribution of the questionnaires commenced in March 1977 for study fellows whose awards would end during the period April 1977 - March 1978. Returned questionnaires, together with the information sheets, were checked and prepared for processing by the Statistics Division and the data were then analysed by computer.

1.4 In 1978, Mr Alistair Henderson was recruited as a temporary Senior Economic Assistant by the ODA to undertake an evaluation of the training of the study fellows based primarily on the information contained in the returned questionnaires. In his study, he was asked specifically to cover:

- a. the contents of the questionnaires returned by the study fellows during the first year;
- b. an analysis of the problems that had been encountered with the enquiry and suggestions for improvement;
- c. the role of this questionnaire system as a means of giving ODA and the British Council "early warning" of factors making for success or failure in training programmes.

This report is a summary of the main findings arising from Mr Henderson's study of the questionnaires.

CHAPTER 2: PROBLEMS IN THE SURVEY METHODOLOGY

2.1 Before the results can be assessed it is necessary to first consider the extent to which the survey was satisfactorily carried out. Unfortunately as a result of various methodological and administrative difficulties only 600 of the 1000 or so questionnaires covering the selected courses were eventually despatched. Few statistically reliable conclusions can be drawn from the data collected, and the following analysis should be seen in the light of these difficulties. Nevertheless the survey does pinpoint many of the problems that a project of this kind can run into so that these problems can be resolved and the survey improved in the future.

2.2 Considerable administrative difficulties arose over exactly how the questionnaires were to be sent out and over keeping records of their distribution. Out of a total distribution of approximately 600 questionnaires, however, the division between subject groups was broadly as follows:-

<u>Subject Group</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
Broadcasting and films	2
English Language Teaching and Linguistics	26
Medicine	11
Social Studies	7
Electrical Engineering	9
Biological Sciences	6
Agriculture	18
General and Public Administration	<u>21</u>
	<u>100</u>

Problems were also encountered in the assigning of "subject of study" code numbers on the information sheet and this may account for many of the discrepancies of data which were later discovered.

2.3 The main point to note however when considering the following chapters is that although the number of returned questionnaires as a percentage of those sent out was reasonable (64%), because so many of the questionnaires were not sent out in time, the percentage of questionnaires completed to the population of the courses covered was only 38%. Thus the results must be interpreted with caution. The reasons for the response rate of 64% are many. Print-outs of study fellows included a lot of students who had already returned home or had been granted extensions since the "award end" date was set on the computer. Some SF's were not contacted quickly enough owing to the tight time schedule of the survey and to other work pressures and the staff changes in TCTD which had caused delays in despatch.

2.4 Whilst it is difficult therefore to calculate the response rate among the various subject groups, given the uncertainty over how many questionnaires were distributed and how many actually reached the study fellows, it is evident that the rates varied considerably between groups.

2.5 Analysis of the results was further complicated by gaps both in the information sheets and in the questionnaires. On the whole it was found that information sheets were not filled in well, in the sense of completeness and appropriateness of replies, and a major difficulty was in ensuring consistency both between and within information sheets. Two possible explanations of these errors and omissions in the data are that (a) the sheets were completed too early when much of the requested information would not have been available and that (b) there seems to have been no guidance or explanatory leaflet for TCTD staff on how to fill in the sheet. Such guidelines may have prevented many of the errors and omissions that subsequently resulted.

2.6 Apart from the poor data base, discrepancies and inconsistencies in the data continued to print-out stage. Part of the problem was that there was no one person seeing the project through from beginning to end, checking up on each and every stage. The sort of mistake that remained undetected until too late is that when a print-out of scores of the English Language Test was made, the vacation student dealing with the computer analysis, unaware that the critical dividing line was 34, lumped the 30-40 range together. This sort of error can in no way be blamed on the individual concerned but the resulting print-out was in this case meaningless. The other major difficulty encountered at the print-out stage was as a result of poor coding eg when an item was missing it had often been entered as a 0 so that again the print-out would be of no use.

2.7 As for the questionnaires themselves, it was disappointing that even some of the basic questions, eg 5 and 6 which covered course of study, were either ignored or incorrectly filled in by the SF's. In some cases however the Programme Officers at TCTD had filled in these gaps when the questionnaire had been returned and sometimes it was possible to deduce the course of study from other information in the questionnaire.

2.8 The comments in the SF questionnaire ranged from cases where students had barely filled in the basic details of the course to others where students had commented in considerable detail on their courses and on their life in Britain, and on the problems they expect when they return home. Even with the comments that were received, there has since been some confusion over what purpose these comments were intended to serve. These comments could be seen merely as a means of focusing the SF's mind before filling in the 1-10 and "satisfied/dissatisfied" scales, or they could be used more positively as references when the various indicator scales indicated that something was wrong with the training. The idea of summarising the comments into a list of 30 categories was abandoned and Mr Henderson devised his own method of analysing the students' comments.

CHAPTER 3: BASIC DATA FROM THE INFORMATION SHEET

3.1 As earlier mentioned, various problems were encountered in the completion of the information sheet, with the result that errors and omissions have led to a number of discrepancies on the computer print-out. A reorganisation scheme at the British Council, at about the time these forms were being filled in, certainly did not help to ensure that the operation ran smoothly. Nevertheless, from the 382 information sheets attached to the completed questionnaires, some information can be gleaned and this is discussed below.

3.2 About 89% of the SF's had returned to their home country, and just over 6% had not returned home, three months after their award had ended. For the remaining 5% of SF's this particular question had been left blank. However, it is likely that this information is based on whether or not the SF had used his return air ticket which may not be the most reliable guide as to whether the SF intended to return eventually to his home country. Some study fellows, particularly in the medical field, seem to have had paid jobs in Britain. Out of the 43 medical personnel, 8 had not returned home; this may have been to gain further practical experience or possibly to re-sit exams.

3.3 The mean length of award for the 382 SF's was just over 13 months, although the modal group was the time period 9-12 months which accounted for 40% of the SF's. Just under a fifth of the study fellows applied for extension, and of these applications about 70% were agreed. The majority of extensions were for medicine or agricultural studies, and again although the average extension period was approximately 6 months, 40% of the extension awards were for periods of between 1 to 3 months.

3.4 Training programmes for one half of the SF's consisted of courses alone, a further third attended both courses and practical attachments and about a tenth of the SF's only had practical attachments. Table 1 gives the distribution of study fellows by course and type of training institution.

TABLE 1 STUDY FELLOWS AND THEIR TYPE OF TRAINING INSTITUTION

TYPE OF INSTITUTIONS ATTENDED	SUBJECT OF STUDY								TOTAL
	BBC	TEFL*	MEDIC	ELEC	BIOL	AGRIC	SOCIAL	ADMIN	
Universities	-	52	21	6	14	37	23	37	190
Technical Colleges	-	1	1	3	1	12	1	-	19
Colleges of Education	-	23	-	-	-	-	-	-	23
Hospitals, nursing	-	-	7	-	-	-	-	-	7
Hospitals, other	-	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	5
Government, nationalised industries, public authorities	6	-	-	10	-	10	-	44	70
Private Colleges, Research Establishments	-	24	-	-	-	2	-	-	26
Not Known	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Practical attachments	2	-	9	16	6	8	-	-	41
TOTAL	8	100	43	35	22	69	24	81	382

* Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Not surprisingly, the majority of students followed courses at universities although nearly 20% attended institutions working in the field of government, nationalised industries, or public authorities. The average length of the students' main course was 12 months (as opposed to the mean length of award of 13 months referred to in paragraph 3.3), nine months being the most frequent length of course.

3.5 The level of course for the 382 study fellows is set out in Table 2 below. Whilst the numbers of students following postgraduate studies or HNC/HND level courses represented roughly similar proportions (approximately 15%) a mere 2% of the students were placed on courses of first degree level; three fifths of the SF's were on courses or attachments for which no qualifications were awarded.

TABLE 2 STUDY FELLOWS BY LEVEL OF COURSE

<u>Level of Course</u>	<u>No of Study Fellows</u>
a. PhD	10
b. MSc/MA/MPhil	54
c. BSc/BA/Ced/Other qualifications of first degree level	5
d. Non graduate teaching qualifications	2
e. HNC/HND; University diplomas and certificates; qualifications from polytechnics or professional institutions below degree but about GCE 'A' level	57
f. Any other recognised qualifications	81
g. No qualifications available	149
Blank	<u>24</u>
TOTAL	<u>382</u>

Analysis of the information sheets reveals that of the SF's who followed "exam type" courses, passes represented 75% of the total, and failures 6%; information was not available for the remaining 19%.

3.6 Only about a quarter of the SF's underwent the "Subjective Assessment of English Ability" test since

- a. there is an alternative test (the Davies Test which is discussed later) and
- b. many of the Commonwealth study fellows are exempt from English Language Testing.

The test scores range from A ("approaches native speaker") to E ("little or no ability"). The percentage of students scoring A in the "Understand spoken" and "Understand written" categories was quite high, 75% and 67% respectively, but for the "Ability to speak" and "Ability to write" categories the most frequent score was B. Scores of C were particularly noticeable in the "Ability to write" group (23%) and C scores in the other three groups averaged around 10%. In isolated cases even D scores were noted. Additional English tuition is normally recommended for students with low scores on the subjective test (below 4 C's standard) and generally the length of this tuition is related to the length of the training course for which the award is granted.

3.7 Scores for the Davies Test range up to 56, a score of below 34 indicating that English is insufficient to follow a course (recommended tuition: 6 months full time) and scores 34-39.9 indicating a need for some preliminary intensive tuition, say 4 to 12 weeks. Students who score over 40 should have sufficient English to be able to follow a course in Britain.

3.8 85 students had taken the Davies Test, 17 of whom had scored below 34 and 48 had scored in the range of 34-39.9. The average length of English tuition however varied only slightly between the low scoring group (less than 34) and the middle scoring group (34-39.9), just over 2 months for the former and just under 2 months for the latter. Even more surprising is that students who scored over 40 and should therefore be sufficiently able to cope with a course in England, did in fact receive English tuition of an average of one month. This again tends to reflect the TCTD procedure of allocating English tuition according to the length of course rather than the need of the student.

3.9 For 70% of the SF's the level of course required had been specific on the A2 form ("Application for a British Government Technical Co-operation Training Award"). Of these SF's, the majority were placed on a course at the level requested but a small group, 9% of the total, were placed on courses at a lower level than that requested. In only a few cases did the SF end up on a higher level course.

3.10 The vast majority of SF's were placed on their main course at the first application and in only 29 cases (about 7% of the total) was more than one attempt at placement necessary. In 38 cases however, difficulties were encountered in placing the SF on the training course required. The three most commonly recurring types of difficulties were:

1. SF lacked required qualifications;
2. English below required standard;
3. Application was received too late.

In only 2 cases was there said to be insufficient information about the kind of training required.

CHAPTER 4: BASIC DATA FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRES

4.1 Before considering the analysis of the completed questionnaire it should be remembered that the 382 questionnaires received (of which 52 were filled in by female study fellows) represent less than a twelfth of the total number of study fellows in the UK and that not all countries and subject groups were covered in the survey.

4.2 Only 6% of the SF's were under 25 years of age at the end of their course in the UK, and in fact more than 60% were over the age of 30.

4.3 Table 3 gives a breakdown of questionnaires according to country and study groups. Whilst female study fellows account for less than 15% of the total, they more or less span all the subject and country groups, the exception being the Arab and Middle Eastern category where all the female SF's were confined to "Teaching English as a Foreign Language" (TEFL) courses. Similarly for "Africa south of the Arab States (not ex British)" the vast majority of the SF's were on English Language teaching courses.

4.4 It is difficult to work out the exact number of different courses of the 382 SF's since in some questionnaires there is little or no information. A provisional figure however of 131 different courses has been estimated. This refers to the main course for which the SF was enrolled and thus does not include any of the preliminary courses the student may have attended. 34 different types of practical attachments were also recorded, and these varied in length from a few days to over 4 years.

4.5 SF's were asked to indicate on a "1-10" scale the success of training in meeting their country's requirements. When the OPCS did their testing of the questionnaire the distribution of scores on these scales was found to be highly skewed towards the upper end so that it was recommended that a score of 7 or below should be regarded as relatively low. In this case, 44% of the returned questionnaires recorded scores of 7 and below, and thus according to OPCS guidelines, would therefore feel that their training could have been improved in some way. In less than 5% of the questionnaires however were scores of below 5 and it is reassuring that it is only in these few cases that the benefits of training are likely to be very limited indeed.

TABLE 3 STUDY FELLOWS ACCORDING TO REGION OF ORIGIN AND SUBJECT OF STUDY

REGION	(NO OF FEMALE STUDY FELLOWS IN BRACKETS)								TOTAL
	BBC	TEFL	MEDIC	ELEC	BIOL	AGRIC	SOCIAL	ADMIN	
ex British Caribbean	2(1)		1			1		5(1)	9(2)
Latin America		10(7)	11(3)	1	2(1)	6		1	31(11)
European Atlantic						2		6(1)	8(1)
Arab Middle East		24(13)	1	8	4			1	43(13)
Africa South of the Arab States, ex British	5	2	13	6	5	18(1)	13(3)	23(1)	85(5)
Africa South of the Arab States, not ex British		63(3)				4			67(3)
Indian subcontinent ex British and Nepal			7(1)	14	2(1)	18	3	14	58(2)
South East Asia, ex British			8(2)	1	3(1)	2	1	4	19(3)
South East Asia not ex British and East Asia		1(1)	1(1)	2(1)	5(2)	13(1)	6(1)	24(3)	52(10)
Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean	1(1)		1	3	1		1(1)	3	10(2)
TOTAL	8(2)	100(24)	43(7)	35(1)	22(5)	69(2)	24(5)	81(6)	382(52)

4.6 As can be seen from the blank questionnaire, two further scales were included and these were intended to measure:

- a. satisfaction with training as a whole and
- b. satisfaction with amount of practical experience.

For each question there are four alternative replies:- very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied and very dissatisfied. For a. it is clear that the bulk of students were satisfied with the training (20% were "very satisfied") and less than 10% indicated signs of dissatisfaction. On the question of amount of practical experience however nearly a quarter of the students were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (although there was obviously a fair amount of confusion as to what exactly constituted practical training).

4.7 English teachers seem to exhibit slightly more dissatisfaction with their training (20%) and it should be noted that English teachers also tended to give lower scores on the "1-10" scale for success of training. Again English teachers together with Social Studies students, showed more dissatisfaction over the amount of practical training than average. By contrast, medical personnel, electrical engineers, biologists and agriculturists seem the most satisfied with their practical training.

4.8 Question 11, relating to the type of work the SF would return to, was not on the whole well filled in. Despite errors and misunderstandings in the interpretation of this question, it is evident that nearly two thirds of the SF's expected to return to the same post, whereas 13% expected to change jobs and 10% did not know what type of work they would take up on return (of the remaining SF's, a tenth had not managed to complete this section and the remaining few were students before taking up the British Council award).

4.9 Those who were returning to the same post did have an advantage in filling in the next question which dealt with usefulness of training for the work the SF expected to do in his home country. In the same way as for the other "scale type" questions, the "cut-off" point was 7. Just over half the students gave scores of 8 and above indicating that on average the UK training was reasonably appropriate for the SF's expected work on return. Nevertheless scores of 5, 6 and 7 were recorded for nearly a third which suggests that there may be difficulties in choosing a course in the UK that will adequately cover the specific problems of LDC's.

4.10 There are strong similarities between question 8, which asks SF's how valuable was the training to their country, and question 13 which asks how valuable it was to them personally. Not surprisingly the results were broadly the same for the two questions although rather more (85%) of the students felt that the training had benefited them personally. The majority of students also preferred training in the UK as opposed to in another developing country although this varied quite noticeably between subject categories: students of Social Science and Broadcasting showed slightly more preference for training in other developing countries whereas for those following courses in Electrical Engineering or Biological Sciences (where cultural factors are unimportant) the reverse was true.

4.11 If a developing country had to be chosen as an alternative, nearly a fifth would have preferred their own country. In total however 64 different countries were suggested (these unfortunately included some developed countries despite the perfectly clear wording of the question), the most frequently mentioned being Nigeria, India, Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania, Zambia and Malaysia. In fact about a third of the suggestions were for African countries reflecting the tendency for students to choose countries from their own region/continent.

4.12 Of the 111 study fellows who received English tuition, nearly half felt that they had not received enough. It did not seem to follow that the more English tuition they received, the more satisfied they were. Another 36 students, who may or may not have received any extra tuition, also felt that they had not had enough tuition before commencing their UK training. In total then, about a fifth of all SF's in the survey were not satisfied that adequate English tuition had been provided.

4.13 Difficulties with the English language were noted on a scale ranging from difficult, fairly difficult, to fairly easy and easy. Reading in English did not appear to be a problem for many students but approximately 15% of the SF's faced difficulties in either writing in English or understanding spoken English; figures however for difficulties in speaking in English were slightly higher at almost 20%.

It is interesting to note that students at the TEFL courses seem to be more troubled about their standard of English and this may be because:

- a. fewer were from English speaking countries;
- b. they may have been more aware of the problem;
- c. competence in English would be a much more vital part of their course.

4.14 English Language assessment scores on the information sheet revealed that, for those students that had experienced difficulties with English, scores ranged from B to D. The assessment of SF's proficiency in English from examiners, and SF's themselves, thus appeared somewhat out of phase.

4.15 Concerning information about courses supplied to the student before the training begun, half the students felt that they had not received enough, a quarter were satisfied with the information received and the remaining quarter had not received any information. This is a problem which could probably be fairly easily rectified through administrative changes in the UK end of the operation.

4.16 The majority of students applied for Technical Co-operation training because it was recommended by their employer, supervisor etc, for but a minority (less than a third) it was the SF's own idea to apply for training. However the distinction between the SF or his department initiating the request may not always have been clear since training is often agreed on and discussed jointly.

4.17 Only slightly more than half the students felt that they had had enough opportunity to specify the kind of training they needed. In fact in the case of English Language Teaching, almost twice as many students felt that they had not had sufficient opportunity as compared with those that had. This is a problem which would have to be dealt with in the home country as the question of type of training arises before the application is made. Nevertheless about 70% felt that they had been placed on the right course as compared to the 30% that voiced dissatisfaction with their placement. Dissatisfaction seemed rather more prominent for the Administration students, and once again, the English Language teachers.

4.18 Of the 270 married students (70%) on Technical Co-operation training courses, only 25% had brought their spouse to the UK. Most of these joined the SF at a later stage of their course and some had been in the UK during part of their spouse's course and had then returned home. The group that was more likely to bring their spouse to the UK was those studying Medicine, probably because in general their courses were quite long, two or more years. In general, length of stay did seem to be a major factor as to whether married students would bring their spouse to the UK, especially if the course was longer than one year. Only 13% of students on courses of less than one year brought their spouse as compared to 65% of students

who were in the UK for longer than one year. As for country groups far more Latin American students were accompanied by their spouse than any other group.

4.19 Very few of the students who had been accompanied by their spouse thought that their presence made it more difficult to study, and of those whose spouse did not come to the UK the verdict was more than 3 to 1 that their presence would make it easier to study. Although 247 SP's had families, only 42 brought some or all of their children with them. From the data collected however from all the married students with children no conclusions could be drawn as to whether the presence of children would make it easier or more difficult to study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 This chapter will try to draw together some of the main points arising from the preceding chapters in order to highlight the areas for improvement in future surveys of this kind. It will not attempt to propose possible explanations of the factors which may have led to the success or failure of particular courses but will more broadly consider the problems that this type of enquiry can run into and its usefulness in providing the British Council and the ODA with an "early warning" both of the strengths and weaknesses of the training programme.

5.2 This particular survey was disappointing on two counts: firstly the proportion of questionnaires returned out of the total should have been higher and secondly the quality of the data from the questionnaires should have been better. Whilst an attempt will be made to explain the factors behind these disappointing results, it must be stressed that this is by no means intended to point the finger of blame but merely to serve as an opportunity to learn from past difficulties and rectify them for the future. The problems of the survey will therefore be considered from two angles:

- a. Why the response rate was less than expected.
- b. Why some of the questionnaires were badly filled in.

5.3 Two of the major reasons for the poor response rate were that many of the students had already returned home or had applied for an extension to their award. Thus an important lesson of the survey is the need to ensure that the print-out of SP's is up-to-date and that an appropriate length of time is allowed between despatching the questionnaires and the end of the SP award. Assuming that steps can be taken to ensure that more questionnaires actually reach their destination before the SF's departure, some way should then be found to put some gentle pressure on the student to take the trouble not only to complete the questionnaire but to do so conscientiously. One suggestion is to enclose the questionnaire with the letter advising the student of details of his forthcoming return air ticket. It may also be a good idea to inform SF's before they first take up their awards that they may be asked to fill in a questionnaire for their views on the training they have received. The importance of the questionnaires must be stressed to the student; after all it is prospective study fellows who stand to gain from improvements in the training programme, more than the British Council or the ODA.

5.4 The information sheet seems to have been beset with three major difficulties:

- a. it was impossible for Programme Officers to ensure any degree of consistency since they were not provided with a set of guidelines on how to fill in the forms. Certain questions were either ambiguous or confusing; such questions should be revised but if this is difficult a clear set of guidelines should be prepared. This would seem to be a vital component of any future survey.
- b. The timing of completion of the information sheets is critical. If this takes place too soon the Programme Officer may not have all the necessary information eg total cost of award (item 3) to be able to fill in the sheet fully. The British Council would be best placed to advise on the most appropriate time for Programme Officers to do this work.
- c. Programme Officers normally have two parallel areas of responsibility, a set of countries and a particular study area (eg Statistics, Medicine etc). This may have led to confusion over who should fill in the sheets. A factor which perhaps aggravated this situation still further is that some questions may have had to be filled in by other departments eg cost of award.

5.5 Although a great deal of OPCS expertise went into devising the questionnaire and despite the fact that most of the study fellows are of at least post 'A' level standard, the questionnaire was obviously not easy to complete accurately. Possible amendments are:

i. Question 5 ought to specify that the details requested of the first course refer to the course in the UK financed by the British Council, not the first course which the SF's may have taken in their home country.

ii. There seemed to be some confusion over who should answer Question 6 - this will have to be made clearer still.

iii. Many study fellows did not answer parts (a) and (b) of Questions 8 and 9. Perhaps if the scale were put before the invitation for comments there may at least be a higher response for the (b) part.

iv. Question 11 was in many cases badly answered. Additional information on the correct sequence of answering may be a help. Question 11 (b) should be rephrased to read "When you go home will you be returning to the same post as you had before you came to this country or will you be taking up a different post?" In addition it may be better if Question 11 (c) stood separately.

v. Question 7 on practical attachments, does not ask where practical attachments took place; this may have been useful. Careful revision of the questionnaire should go some way to obtaining a better rate of response from the SF's in certain questions.

5.6 As for the computer analysis, the whole process could be speeded up by including coding numbers at the right hand of each question on the questionnaire as had been done for the information sheet.

Greater care in any future exercise would have to go into coding of questionnaires as this is a particularly important aspect of any computer analysis. It would also have been of great help for the computer analysis if the purpose of the comment type question had been thought out before the distribution of the questionnaires. If the survey really is to act as an "early warning" to the British Council and the ODA of factors making for success or failure in the training schemes, the individual comments from SF's would be of immense value. The British Council however cannot be expected to examine every questionnaire in detail so it would be desirable if the kind of comments most frequently encountered could be included on the questionnaires and pre-coded.

5.7 The final recommendation is probably the most general and yet the most crucial. It is evident that despite a great deal of effort that was involved in this survey by all concerned, particularly the study fellows themselves and Programme Officers, a survey of this size is unlikely to be a great success unless each stage of the exercise is carefully monitored by one person who is clearly seen to be responsible. Mistakes are to some extent inevitable, and while hopefully the improvements in the survey suggested above will help to minimize these, the person in charge of a particular stage will be able to detect any deficiencies as soon as they appear so that they can be rectified immediately rather than waiting until the survey has been completed and it is too late.