

Primary Education

The work of the revision of the syllabus of instruction was continued during the year, and reports from committees, on which teachers and officers of the Education Department were represented, have been submitted in the subjects of handcraft, handwriting, and homecraft, for the consideration of teachers. As soon as the views of teachers have been received, the whole of the syllabus, completely revised, will be issued to the schools.

The preparation of text-books proceeded during the year, and some of the series of infant readers purchased by the Education Department for use in the schools will become available for distribution in 1950.

Emergency measures were taken during the year to meet the shortage of teachers, which was felt most in the North Island. The early certification of probationary assistants, the employment of superannuitants and of married women in relieving positions, the discouragement of long periods of leave, and part-time employment of married women teachers on a half-day basis, were measures adopted to keep vacant positions at a minimum.

In order to meet future staffing requirements, the five training colleges were taxed to the limit of their capacities, and 1,225 students were admitted. Even with record numbers undergoing training, the supply of teachers would not be sufficient to meet the rapidly increasing school population in the years immediately ahead. The decision was made to institute a special one-year training course and invite applications from people over twenty-one years of age. The response was greater than our most optimistic hopes, and national selection committees chose 300 from nearly 1,000 applicants. In the work of preparing the course, the syllabus of studies and the experience gained in England with similar courses was found to be most helpful.

Post-primary Education

There have been no new developments during the year in the school curriculum. The schools have had a task of some magnitude in recent years in absorbing an increasing percentage of primary-school leavers, and in adjusting their work to the needs of these new pupils.

The schools continue to prepare large numbers of pupils for the School Certificate Examination in a wide range of subjects. This examination is being more widely accepted; but a large number of pupils remain for one or more years in the sixth forms to qualify for entrance to the University or for the higher certificates of the Education Department. The number of students reaching the top classes of secondary schools is increasing; and there is a pleasing unanimity of opinion among the Inspectors that their work is of a high standard. This improvement is all to the good; for not only does it mean a higher standard amongst those who enter the University (and the changes in the Entrance Examination have helped), but it should be even more widely felt in the community. I do not wish to imply, however, that we should be satisfied: it is evident enough that all do not reach the high standard of the best. At the same time, it must ever be our duty to see that the best are not kept back by those who are not so able. Our standard must not be set by mediocrity.

The University has, on occasions, complained of the lack of general education among its undergraduates rather than of any shortcomings in special subjects; and it has discussed the advisability of introducing cultural subjects into degree courses that are highly technical. The University has therefore required, as from 1950, a pass in four subjects instead of three at University Entrance standard, and has made English a compulsory subject. This, and the five-subject Entrance Scholarship which will follow in two years' time, should help to ensure a broader basic education for all proceeding to the University.