

The introduction of a system of partial accrediting for University entrance is no nearer realization than it was a year ago. Enthusiasm for this reform appears to have waned considerably among secondary-school teachers, whilst the opposition that exists in certain quarters to any form of accrediting whatsoever is by no means quiescent. The position, so far as the Department is concerned, is that it has done all that it was required to do in connection with the initiation of the scheme. In May an additional Secondary Inspector was temporarily appointed in anticipation of the increased work that would devolve upon the Secondary Inspectorate and plans for the application of the scheme were worked out. A few weeks later, however, the Executive Committee of the University Senate, having discovered that certain Universities in England would not accept the Matriculation status of students from the University of Melbourne because this status was based on accrediting, decided that the scheme should not be introduced in 1930; it further decided to ascertain from its agent in England whether the English universities would accept the New Zealand Matriculation if awarded by accrediting. The agent's reply was that as a result of his inquiries he considered that Matriculation by accrediting was not favoured by the English universities. It would appear, therefore, that the introduction of our proposed accrediting system must be postponed until such time as certain English universities come to realize that the safeguards attached to the system proposed in New Zealand differentiate it entirely from the systems in vogue in the United States and in Victoria. It is well to emphasize the point that in New Zealand only the best of the candidates for University entrance will be passed by accrediting; others, about whose fitness either the Principals of the schools or the accrediting officers have any doubt at all, will be required to sit the public examination as heretofore. In other words, the accredited pass candidates will constitute a superior class of student, and not an inferior. For an outside university to refuse admittance to such a student, whilst admitting poorer students who have had to resort to examination to obtain their University Entrance pass, betokens an imperfect knowledge of the situation. In the meantime no definite progress may confidently be looked for.

In anticipation of the introduction of accrediting the Department has for two years in succession enlisted the co-operation of the Principals of all secondary schools and of several other large post-primary schools in investigating the degree of correlation existing between their own estimate of the candidates' chances of success in the Entrance Examination and the actual successes obtained. Principals were asked to place their candidates in four groups: I. Undoubtedly fit to pass and who would be accredited if a system were in operation. II. Having a reasonable chance of passing. III. Having only a poor chance of passing. IV. Almost certain to fail. Estimates were obtained in 1930 from seventy-one Principals, who reported upon 3,289 candidates; of these 22.4 per cent. were placed in Group I (23.0 per cent. in 1929), 33.8 per cent. in Group II (35.0), 31.1 per cent. in Group III (27.6) and 12.7 per cent. in Group IV (14.4). Of the Group I candidates 12.8 per cent. failed, as against 9.9 per cent. in the preceding year. Of the forty-four departmental schools ten failed to pass 80 per cent. of their Group I or "accredited" candidates (five mixed, three girls' and two boys' schools); in one girls' school only 58.3 per cent. of them passed. In 1929 only three schools were in a like position. One boys' school had the unenviable distinction of appearing in this group two years in succession. On the other hand, the external examination was passed by 100 per cent. of the Group I candidates from twenty-three of the secondary schools in 1929 and from twenty-two in the following year. Twelve schools (four girls', four boys', and four mixed) appeared in the list both years.

Two facts are apparent from a study of the detailed analysis of the results: one is that in any system of partial accrediting it would be unsafe to accredit on the average more than about 22½ per cent. of the total number of candidates, and the other is that either the judgment of several Principals is still unreliable or the examination as at present devised and conducted does not select accurately the best candidates. It is admitted that the lack of the "examination temperament" or the effect of temporary disabilities may produce unexpected failures in the examination-room, but there should undoubtedly be a greater measure of correlation between the examination results and the Principals' estimates than has been revealed by the figures quoted above.

Four years ago I drew attention to the unsuitability of the academic preparation of many of our younger secondary-school teachers, and pointed out that too many entrants into the service were obtaining honours in such comparatively unsuitable subjects as philosophy, economics, and education, and that there was a marked superabundance of teachers with honours in history. The position in district high schools is equally, perhaps even more, disconcerting; instances are by no means rare where a teacher is attempting to teach all the usual secondary-school subjects after completing a degree course in philosophy, education, economics, history (pass and advanced), and one other subject. One feels that the English, science and mathematics, and the French or Latin of district high schools cannot be very efficiently taught by teachers equipped with such degrees. In the secondary schools the disadvantage to the pupil is not as a rule so pronounced, owing to the presence of a sprinkling of teachers who are specialists in various subjects; but even here the position is far from satisfactory. In this connection a letter written by a Principal of a secondary school in April, 1930, is worth quoting; his remarks undoubtedly compel attention: "I have been analysing the qualifications of the twenty-three applicants for a D position here. From the point of view of classroom equipment the results are ominous. Only three have taken science in any form for their pass degree, only five have taken mathematics, and only eleven have taken English. The other pass subjects are Latin (9), French (12), history (15), economics (10), education (18), philosophy (7), Greek art and literature (5), &c. For honours, out of fourteen no fewer than ten have taken history, one Latin, one education, and two English and French. I do not know where we shall be in a few years if this trend away from science and mathematics continues. Moreover, English should be a compulsory subject for every graduate."