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SESSIONAL WORKING GROUP (OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS) ON THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 21st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 21 April 1982, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. BURWIN (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

CONTENTS

Consideration of reports submitted in accordance with Council resolution 1988 (LX)
by States Parties to the Covenant, concerning rights covered by articles 13 to 15
(continued)

Review of the composition, organization and administrative arrangements of the
Sessional Working Group (continued)

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consolidated in a single corrigendum to be issued shortly after the end of the
session.

The meeting was called to order at 11.15 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1988 (LX)
BY STATES PARTIES TO THE COVENANT, CONCERNING RIGHTS COVERED BY ARTICLE 13 TO 15
(continued)

Report of the United Kingdom (continued) (E/1982/3/Add.16)

1. Mr. GRIFFITHS (United Kingdom) said that at the close of the preceding meeting he had started to reply to questions posed by the representatives of France, Bulgaria and Mexico regarding the system of grants to students in the United Kingdom. Such grants were made by the local education authorities, which were reimbursed 90 per cent of the amount by the central Government, and were intended to cover both tuition and maintenance costs. There were two kinds of grants: the mandatory grants, which were provided to students on advanced courses, and the discretionary grants, for all other courses. For the forthcoming academic year, students living away from home would receive £1,900 per annum in London and £1,595 elsewhere; students living at home would receive £1,225. Parents were required to contribute towards the grant according to their income, with the exception of those whose annual income was less than £6,500.

2. As to fee levels, £1,413 was charged for full-time advanced courses at the post-graduate level and £480 for full-time advanced courses at the undergraduate level. The fee for full-time non-advanced courses was £276. There was a proportional fee scale for part-time students based on the amount of time in study. Fees for overseas students were fixed by the authorities and institutions concerned, subject to minimum levels. At universities, fees varied according to the discipline: £2,700 in the arts, £3,600 in the sciences, and £6,600 in medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine. Students from EEC countries and refugees recognized as such were charged the home rate. Acceptance for a course at the advanced level was all that was needed for a student to be eligible for a mandatory grant. Other grants were at the discretion of the local authorities. The award of a grant was not essential for acceptance on a course. Some 90 per cent of students were in receipt of national awards for studies.

3. The Open University, to which the representatives of France and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya had referred, had been started in 1971. Its current enrolment was approximately 70,000 of which 60,000 were taking degree courses. Approximately 5,000 students graduated each year and some 44,000 had received degrees since its inception. There were no formal entry qualifications for admission. The University had five main faculties: Arts, Sciences, Mathematics, Technology and Social Sciences. Degrees were built on a system of unit credits, with six credits required for an ordinary degree and eight for an honours degree. All students were required to take one multidisciplinary foundation course to initiate them into the method of study. The representative of France had referred to scepticism on the part of employers as to the value of the qualifications obtained from a school with open admissions. Obviously, it took time for a new venture such as the Open University to take root. There were encouraging signs that employers in the United Kingdom took the qualifications seriously, and the high rate of applicants - far exceeding the number which could be accepted - was proof that people felt the education dispensed was worth while. People from all levels of society attended courses, including many women.

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4. A number of questions had been asked concerning State support for the capital costs of voluntary aided schools (E/1982/3/Add.16, para. 30). Such schools, many of which were run by religious groups, fell within the "maintained system", and any voluntary aided school that had been accepted was eligible for a grant. Independent schools, on the other hand, were not eligible for State support. They were subject to inspection and had to register with the Department of Education. If they failed to meet the basic standards, such schools could be closed down, although they had a right to appeal to an independent tribunal. There were approximately 3,200 independent schools in the country.

5. There seemed to be confusion in the minds of some concerning the distinction between independent and public schools. The concept of the independent school encompassed the whole of the private sector, the main component of which was the "public school". The latter accepted pupils at 12 years of age on the basis of a fairly demanding examination. There were approximately 460 public schools, most of them single-sex schools and at least partly boarding. However, there were some co-educational public schools and some all-boys schools admitted girls directly to the top forms. Public school status was acquired through affiliation with various governing bodies, such as the Headmasters' Conference. Public school fees varied significantly, but had averaged £2,100 per annum in 1979. The fee might be remitted in part for children who had won competitive scholarships, and local education authorities in England and Wales could also provide assistance. There were a number of preparatory schools which prepared children for entry to the public schools. The trend with respect to public schools was that they were more than holding their own relative to the maintained sector. In 1974 public schools accounted for 8 per cent of all schools in the country and 4.6 per cent of total school enrolment. Those figures had risen slightly to 8.5 per cent and 4.8 per cent in 1979. Under the Assisted Places Scheme the central Government provided support for 5,000, or 1.2 per cent of all pupils. The local education authorities also supported pupils with scholarships.

6. Turning to the question of the education of children of migrant workers, which had been raised by the representative of Mexico, he said that, unlike in other Western European countries, most of the immigrant population had come to the United Kingdom with the intention of remaining permanently and that, as a result, the educational problems of immigrant children had a somewhat different emphasis. The United Kingdom was bound by the provisions of the EEC Council Directive of 1977 on the Education of Migrant Workers' Children, and the Government had issued a memorandum of guidance to the local educational authorities, which recognized the affinity of the problem with ethnic education generally and the fact that distinctions based on passport nationality were often not relevant or practicable. Consideration was given to providing supplementary English-language teaching and mother-tongue teaching appropriate to the needs of such children, and the Government was currently sponsoring research on the provision and implications of mother-tongue teaching. A Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups had been established in 1979 for the purpose of reviewing the educational needs and attainments of such children, having regard to factors outside the educational system that were relevant to performance. The first report of the Committee had dealt with West Indian children and was currently being considered by the Government jointly with the local education authorities. The Committee planned to study the needs of children of other ethnic groups and report the following year.

7. The representative of Byelorussian SSR had asked how a dialogue with local education authorities on the question of ethnic education would help to ensure equality. In the United Kingdom, such dialogue was both important and inevitable because practical decisions on education were taken at the local level and it was not possible to circumvent the local decision-making process.

8. Statistics on the ethnic origin of students were not collected in the United Kingdom. That was regarded as a sensitive point, which the Committee of Inquiry into Education of Children of Ethnic Minority Groups was considering. However, the system of student awards provided students from all strata of society with access to higher education. Current enrolment in higher education was 516,000, including 49,000 overseas students; more than 60 per cent of the latter came from developing countries.

9. The 1980 Education Act was applicable to England and Wales. The Scottish equivalent, the Education (Scotland) Act 1981, governed education in that part of the United Kingdom. Its broad aims were the same as the 1980 Act although it reflected certain differences in school organization that existed in Scotland.

10. The representative of the Byelorussian SSR had also sought clarification regarding paragraph 9. While the entire paragraph referred to both further and higher education, the last sentence referred only to part-time employment-related training, which was available only in the further education sector. The employer's agreement was, of course, necessary and the individual was not entitled to demand such training. Government policy on adult education required recipients to contribute towards the costs, with the exception of certain underprivileged groups, which received subsidies.

11. By virtue of its size, the comprehensive school sector was a major component of the education system. The current administration had repealed legislation that had required local education authorities to prepare schemes for the establishment of comprehensive schools and the phasing out of the selective system. Future developments would depend on decisions to be taken at the local level and it was difficult to predict what would happen. It was a matter of judgement as to whether the comprehensive schools had lived up to expectations. In developing the comprehensive school system, emphasis had initially been placed on their structure and organizational requirements; greater attention was now being paid to problems of curriculum, teaching methods and the examination system.

12. The representative of the Federal Republic of Germany had inquired about nursery education, expressing the concern that rural areas were being neglected in favour of deprived urban areas. Although the report might give that impression, it was certainly not the case; the concentration of some 70 per cent of nursery schools in urban areas simply reflected the general distribution of the population.

13. The representative of the Federal Republic of Germany had also expressed the fear that the looseness of the arrangements described in paragraph 27 might lead to regional imbalances in levels of pay and working conditions for teachers. Teachers' pay, allowances and pensions were agreed upon nationally through a committee composed of representatives of unions, the Government and local educational authorities. Basic salary rates were the same throughout the country, but additional allowances were paid to teachers serving in the London area and in schools for the handicapped or other designated social-priority areas.

14. There had been significant changes in the national attitude to regional accents over the past 20 to 30 years. Previously, there had been a definite emphasis on imposing the standard of speech known generally as the Oxford accent. The early days of radio had given an impetus to that trend but regionalism was now asserting itself. Regional accents were increasingly heard on television and radio, and schools made no effort to suppress regional accents but rather emphasized grammatical correctness and fluency. Although accents continued to have social relevance, that too was slowly changing.

15. The representative of Norway had inquired whether the activities of the European Economic Community in the educational and cultural field had given rise to much regulation or legislation in the United Kingdom. While there were recent signs of a wish within the Community to play greater role in cultural matters, in the past its action had been in the broader field of social affairs, with a view to assisting deprived regions or social groups.

16. Enrolment in adult education in England and Wales had been 1,849,000 in 1979-1980. The courses provided were closely aligned to local demand and admission was generally open, although in some cases there were restrictions relating to employment need or the standard of expertise attained. On the subject of conditions of service of teachers, the representative of Norway had expressed concern that local control might lead to destructive competition to attract staff. Since teachers' salaries were nationally agreed, there was no scope for such competition to emerge. Teachers were free to change employers as they wished and teacher vacancies were openly advertised. However, teachers could be moved between schools run by the same local education authority.

17. The representative of Norway had also expressed concern that business financing for the arts might assume a dominant role. Such financing was small in comparison with the resources made available by the Government for the arts, which in 1981-1982 totalled £80 million.

18. Replying to the question of the representative of Venezuela concerning paragraph 4, he said that students from any part of the United Kingdom or the dependent territories could attend further education institutions anywhere in the country, subject to acceptance by the school concerned, and they were not confined to the region in which they lived. Different institutions had particular fields of excellence.

19. Turning to the questions asked by the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, he said that private grants were often tied but not invariably. Ninety per cent of all students were in receipt of Government grants, which were not tied. Anyone resident in the United Kingdom, irrespective of nationality, whose parents' income was judged insufficient to meet school fees could be considered for the Assisted Places Scheme. Voluntary aided schools were part of the publicly maintained sector and could be established wherever local demand was sufficient to make them viable. They were required to observe minimum national standards with respect to, inter alia, accommodation. All countries placed certain restrictions on scientists doing research in security-related fields, and such restrictions were not in contradiction with what was stated in the report concerning international scientific co-operation.

20. Mr. CHATTERJIE (United Kingdom), replying to a question from the representative of Bulgaria, said that there were 4,668 pupils at primary schools and 4,190 pupils at secondary schools in Guernsey. Replying to a question from the representative of the Soviet Union, he said that, for 1980-81, there had been a total of 51,500 foreign students in the United Kingdom; 10,000 of them had come under technical co-operation agreements between his Government and developing countries. However, that figure did not include students studying below degree level. Replying to another question from the representative of the Soviet Union, he indicated that, for 1979/80, 68 per cent of students from independent schools and 4.6 per cent of students from State schools went on to university. However, that discrepancy could be explained by the fact that independent schools focused on academic subjects with a view to preparing students for universities, while State schools had a wider range of subjects and their pupils frequently continued their education elsewhere than in universities. Referring to the question of tuition fees at such universities as Oxford and Cambridge, he stressed that admission depended on academic ability, and the fees of those who were unable to pay were defrayed by the State. The tuition fees at Cambridge were £900 for home students and £2,500 for overseas students, while the college fees at Cambridge were £146 for undergraduates and £800 for post-graduate students.

21. Replying to the question concerning the reduction in cultural and scientific ties between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union which, according to the Soviet representative, was contrary to the spirit of article 15 of the Covenant, he observed that the United Kingdom considered article 15 to be important and that the British Council was actively involved in developing scientific and cultural activities. The budget for such activities for 1981-1982 was £118 million. The Anglo-Soviet Cultural Agreement signed in Moscow in 1981 for the 1981-1983 period was still in effect. However, progress in the implementation of the Covenant depended on the prevailing circumstances; in 1981, some of the events planned in the context of that Agreement had indeed been cancelled as a result of the Soviet armed intervention in Afghanistan, which had contravened article 1 of the Covenant as well as the Charter of the United Nations.

22. Mr. ALLAFI (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), referring to paragraph 30 of the report, requested further clarifications concerning the reasons why the State funded 85 per cent of the capital costs of, for example, Jewish schools, while the schools of other religious faiths were required to meet qualifying criteria for such assistance.

23. Mr. CHATTERJIE (United Kingdom) explained that the requirements for establishing any voluntary aided school were the same; no special privileges were granted in any case. Approximately two thirds of the religious schools were run by the Church of England and one third by the Roman Catholic Church; Jewish schools had been operating in the United Kingdom for many years. For that reason, those three religions had been mentioned in the report. However, there was no reason why applications to establish Moslem schools, for example, would not be accepted.

24. Mr. SOFINSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) explained that, in fact, his question had concerned the percentage of the students leaving independent schools and other types of schools who went on to higher education of any type, not merely university education.

25. He drew attention to the fact that, several years previously, the United Kingdom had opposed the polarization of cultural ties and that that position had been especially useful in periods of international tension. Therefore, he was disappointed about the change in the position of the United Kingdom and about the arbitrary reduction of its cultural ties with the Soviet Union.

26. Mr. CHATTERJIE (United Kingdom) said that the statistics requested by the representative of the Soviet Union would be provided at a later date.

27. The CHAIRMAN observed that the Working Group had concluded its consideration of the report of the United Kingdom contained in document E/1982/3/Add.16.

28. Mr. GRIFFITHS and Mr. CHATTERJIE (United Kingdom) withdrew.

29. The CHAIRMAN said that the Working Group had thus concluded its work relating to the consideration of reports submitted in connexion with rights covered by articles 6 to 9, 10 to 12 and 13 to 15 of the Covenant.

REVIEW OF THE COMPOSITION, ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS OF THE SESSIONAL WORKING GROUP

30. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the two conference room papers before the Working Group (1982/1 and 1982/2); one contained a proposal by the Soviet Union and the other listed the issues arising from the consideration of reports of States parties to the Covenant.

31. Mr. SOFINSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), referring to item 6 of conference room paper 1982/2, read out the decision taken by the Working Group in 1981 concerning the role and participation of the specialized agencies (E/1981/WG.1/L.2/Add.1, para. 10), and stressed that the specialized agencies must confine their statements to questions related to their spheres of competence and could not comment on the reports of States parties. It had also been decided in 1981 that the representatives of States parties could reply to the general statements made by the specialized agencies, if they so desired. Therefore, he could not support item 6 of the conference room paper. With regard to item 10, he said that the previous year the Working Group had reviewed 31 reports and had still had enough time to deal with other matters. Therefore, unless the number of reports submitted increased significantly, the Working Group should merely make better use of the time available to it. However, he did not have any objections to the other items contained in the second conference room paper 1982/2.

32. In conclusion, he drew attention to the fact that two States had not appointed any representative to the Working Group, while some representatives had been appointed late and others had been withdrawn early.

33. Mr. AGBASI (Secretary of the Committee) pointed out that the Working Group could perhaps make the most progress in the little time available to it by meeting informally on the review of its composition, organization and administrative arrangements.

34. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Working Group should devote the remaining part of its current meeting as well as its subsequent meeting to informal discussions.

35. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.

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