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Teachers study latest techniques

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Teachers and would-be teachers from all parts of the Commonwealth can have their skills improved or be taught the basics of their profession at a centre run by the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in north-east England.

The most up-to-date methods and sophisticated aids are used to improve students' teaching standards and prepare the future teachers to cope.

The university's Centre for Development in Education Overseas aims to familiarise its students with modern methods and ideas which may be adapted to local conditions overseas; and to encourage them to plan their work in terms of their future pupils' needs and interests. Teaching by involving children in planned activities is stressed throughout the training.

There are various courses leading to diplomas for teachers in nursery, primary or secondary education; a diploma course for teachers of handicapped children; and diploma courses for trainers of primary teachers for teachers of English as a foreign language for those in educational management and administration and for those wishing to obtain a diploma in drama in education.

Candidates who have completed successfully any of the one-year courses leading to a diploma in educational studies may take a further one-year course culminating in the diploma in advanced educational studies BPhil Part I. Successful students can then proceed to study a further year for either the BPhil Part II or the MEd degree.

Guy Branthwaite the centre's director spent six years in Tanzania and four in Uganda training teachers before he returned to England to start the centre in 1962. He has no doubt at all about the value of the courses offered.

Beginning with just ten students Mr Branthwaite has developed a centre with a world reputation for teaching excellence which now accepts up to 70 students a year. Past students include K.P. Morake Botswana's Minister for Education and R.W. Chirwa minister for the northern region of Malawi.

The 1983 intake includes students from Brunei, Zambia, Nigeria, Hong Kong, the Cayman Islands, Kenya, St Vincent, Swaziland, the Turks and Caicos Islands, Botswana, Malawi, Ghana, Lesotho, the Seychelles and Mauritius. Among them are primary and secondary school teachers, school inspectors and those responsible for school planning. Some of them are sponsored by the British Council and Britain's Overseas Development Administration (ODA).

On arrival the students go through a two-week general course to get used to life at Newcastle and to have their aptitude for coping with the English language assessed. "Our aim" says Mr Branthwaite "is never to try and impose the British system on a teacher. We encourage teachers to adapt

aims of their own countries and to adapt our ideas to suit themselves.

"There are obviously wide differences between schools here and in developing countries. Sometimes the teachers find it hard to realise how much technological equipment is available to schools in Britain. But really teaching is all about relationships between teachers and pupils and there is much in common between a teacher in Britain and one in another country."

This is borne out by a 28-year-old physical education teacher from Brunei Abu Hassan bin Ibrahim who works in his country's main town Bandar Seri Begawan. He comments: "Seeing how other teachers work is very interesting. I have picked up a lot of useful tips."

This sentiment is echoed by Shing Tak Leung an official from the Hong Kong education department which is responsible for 2500 schools and about 1.5 million pupils. Mr Shing who is studying for his Diploma in Educational Studies (Management and Administration) remarked: "It is very interesting to compare how the British school system works with our own in Hong Kong. Our education system is very advanced but I believe we can still learn from Britain."

The centre works closely with Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic and with various departments of the university so that the specialised needs of any of its teacher-students can be met. A field of education for which Newcastle is particularly well known in the United Kingdom is its work with handicapped children and those with learning difficulties. Among the centre's 1983 students are seven who are taking a special course under tutor Mrs Annette Barnard at the Pendower School, one of the leading schools for handicapped children in northern England. The seven trainees come from as far apart as Hong Kong, Nigeria, Brunei and Zambia.

Mr Ziyu Siatwiinda, the 37-year-old deputy headmaster at the Dagama Special School for the Physically Handicapped near Luanshya, Zambia is one of the seven. As a physical education teacher, he is interested in the many outdoor pursuits at Pendower, which include horse-riding, skiing, swimming, rock climbing, gliding and canoeing. "These are all good for muscle building," he says, "and for getting the children out into the open air."

But normal school studies are not forgotten at Pendower, whose children, suffering from spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis and other disabilities, are expected to follow a normal school curriculum up to O level General Certificate of Education standard. This too impresses Mr Siatwiinda who, like others attending Newcastle's Centre for Development in Education Overseas, picin

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