

Chapter 4: Nothing Stands Still (1990-93)

(a) Developments affecting the Scottish Examination Board

Tribute was paid in *The Higher Tradition* (page 229) to Dr John Walker, who retired on 31 March 1990 after 25 years with the Board, and to Dr Farquhar Macintosh, who left the Board on 31 August 1990 after 21 years' service, the last 13 of them as Chairman. These two had steered the Board safely through a turbulent period of industrial action by teachers and constant curricular change.

Dr Hamish Long became the new Director on 1 April 1990, and the new Chairman was Ian L. Fraser, Depute Director of Education in Lothian Region, who had already served eight years on the Board. They did not have to cope with teacher opposition, but change was still the name of the game on several fronts; and there was the strong possibility that much of the on-going work could come to nothing if the Howie Committee took a very radical line.

Although the annual total number of candidates dropped in line with the fall in the size of age cohorts, the number of presentations at Higher and CSYS held fairly steady, and those in Standard Grade increased as the Development Programme worked its way towards full implementation. In 1992, 98.6% of the pupils in S4 were presented in at least one subject at Standard Grade, thus getting very, very close to the *Assessment for All* target which the Dunning Report had set in 1977. At the same time, the number of "O" Grade presentations dropped dramatically, and 1993 saw the last open presentations in these examinations. Resits were permitted in six subjects in 1994 but, in the event, resits took place in only three of these subjects, involving 75 presentations in all, 64 of which were in Technical Drawing.

The proliferation of different types of examinations (Standard Grade, "O" Grade, Traditional Highers and CSYS, Revised Highers and Revised CSYS, and short courses) reached a peak in 1992, when 600 different papers were set and 6,400 markers were employed — more than double the number employed five years previously.

The Standard Grade Programme was completed in 1993. However, since a decision had been taken to withdraw, as from 1992, linguistic support for pupils with learning difficulties in examinations which required candidates to demonstrate communication skills, it became clear that special examinations would have to be devised for this category of candidate. Two new courses in "English: Alternative Communication" and "English: Spoken" were offered for the first time in 1994. To ensure that this change did not disadvantage any child who was already in secondary school when the decision was taken, it was agreed that the period of overlap between the withdrawal of linguistic support and the introduction of the alternative courses should be extended to include the 1995 and 1996 examinations.

The preparation of courses and examinations, however, was not the only work on Standard Grade carried out by the Board at this time. In response to requests from teachers for guidance on assessment standards, the Board published copies of the annotated marking instructions which had been used for external examinations, together with worked solutions to specimen questions in some cases; and, in 1991 and 1992, to help teachers with the assessment of practical skills, investigations and other work that had to be assessed internally, it also issued to presenting centres detailed notes and graded exemplars, in a wide range of subjects. In 1992, a set of 36

colour transparencies, which illustrated candidates' work in Standard Grade and Revised Higher Grade examinations in Art and Design, was issued free of charge to centres, along with descriptive notes and an indication of the grades attained. A further set of 140 transparencies was available for purchase.

Up to the 1991 Standard Grade examinations, appeals were dealt with after the publication of the results. In 1992, the Board introduced the Derived Grade procedure — a pre-results review of awards based on the estimates submitted by centres in the hope that this would considerably reduce the number of appeals made after the issue of the results. The number of appeals dropped by 6.78%, and henceforth appeals from centres had to be supported by powerful evidence to have any hope of overturning results which had already been reviewed.

By early 1993, the programme for the revision of Higher and Post-Higher was virtually complete, and the Steering Committee had been discharged. The last of the Revised Highers would be included in the 1994 diet of examinations, and the last Revised CSYS in 1995, although a new CSYS examination in Management and Information Studies was to be offered for the first time in 1996. One of Michael Forsyth's last decisions before leaving his post as Scottish Education Minister in 1990 was to insist that there should be the usual one-year overlap between the Traditional and the Revised CSYS examinations, even though neither the SEB subject panels nor the Inspectorate thought this necessary because the changes were minimal. There were some complaints from subject departments about certain features of the revisions and a few teachers had teething difficulties in, for example, the assessment of project work; but, by and large, the revisions went off well.

During this period, there were two incidents which caused considerable embarrassment. In 1990, a school complained that seven of its pupils had been awarded Grade 7 in Standard Grade Art, even though none of them had been assessed lower than Grade 4 by the school for the "critical activity" part of the examination, and two had been assessed as Grade 1. SEB regulations said that the two pieces of "critical activity" had to comprise two entirely separate units — the one expressive and the other on design. The pupils had chosen an architectural topic as their expressive activity and the Art examiners maintained that this fell within the design field. The school and parents maintained that this was not the fault of the pupils and that the regulations should be expressed more clearly. A number of other schools had made the same mistake. Since it was never the policy of the Board to penalise candidates for what was a misunderstanding of the published arrangements by their teachers, the work of these candidates was re-assessed and upgraded. The Board also issued further guidance and clarification of the requirements.

The other incident occurred in 1991, when only around 50 candidates passed out of the 580 who were entered for the Revised Higher in Home Economics, which was intended to replace the separate Highers in "Fabrics and Fashion" and the very popular "Food and Nutrition." Some people maintained that the course had become too demanding. The Board admitted to some drafting errors in the examination papers and to timetabling difficulties in the independent study element but maintained that the real problem lay in the quality of the candidates. The course was intended to be more intellectually rigorous than the two Traditional examinations had been and to be of a standard acceptable for university entrance, but it was still tending to attract candidates from the lower ability range, who did not possess the skills of analysis and evaluation which were essential in problem-solving. After Appeals, the number of passes was increased to 114, but this was still less than a 20% pass rate. The subject panel undertook an immediate review of

the syllabus and examination arrangements and also promised to issue more detailed guidance to teachers regarding the demands of the Revised Higher. Confidence had been undermined, however, and the number of candidates for the next three years dropped to the low 400s. Even in 1996 and 1997, the pass rate was only in the mid-50s, whereas the average pass rate across all subjects was 70%.

The Self-Governing Schools etc (Scotland) Act 1989, which amended section 129 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, had given the Board a new function, viz. to prepare, distribute and monitor tests which would assess the work of pupils in primary schools. The Primary Assessment Unit, later called the Five to Fourteen Assessment Unit (FFAU), was established in temporary premises in Newbattle College in 1990. Costs in the first year amounted to only ,240,995 but they rose to ,855,990 in 1991 (mainly due to the cost of producing the catalogues of item banks) before dropping to ,275,000 in 1992. In 1993, because of the expansion of testing, the annual cost rose considerably to ,713,000, before dropping back slightly to £658,000 in 1994. The sums involved in 1995 and 1996 were £750,000 and £789,000 respectively. This expenditure was not a drain on the Board's finances since, throughout its existence, the Unit was totally funded by the Scottish Office Education Department. However, the considerable opposition which its existence stirred up among teachers and local authorities did make demands on the time of at least one very senior officer who had other responsibilities within the SEB. The complicated history of National Testing is told in more detail in Appendix 1.

Tribute to the quality of the work of the FFAU was paid indirectly by the Northern Ireland Schools Examination and Assessment Council which in 1992 placed a contract (worth ,150,000) with the Unit to produce tests for its Key Stages 2 and 3 in English and Mathematics.

By the early 1990s, consultancy work was becoming an increasingly important source of income for the SEB which, like all public bodies at that time, was required to find savings within its budget. In the four years from 1990 to 1993, the income generated by providing consultancy services was £15,079, £5,754, £34,817 and £123,161 respectively. In addition to the Northern Ireland contract, Board staff worked with the Egyptian Ministry of Education on the establishment of a national examination body in Cairo, undertook a feasibility study on the establishment of an examination board in Zimbabwe, completed a Review of the New South Wales Higher School Certificate Syllabuses and Examinations, and undertook a commission from the Schools Examinations and Assessment Council in London regarding *Setting Effective Question Papers in the GCSE*. In 1990, the Board ran a seminar on the practicalities of operating Grade Related Criteria, which attracted interest from examining bodies in the rest of the UK and from many overseas countries. The pioneering work of the Board was also regularly recognised at international conferences which invited senior staff to deliver key lectures.

One commission which deserves special mention was an international research project undertaken for UNESCO on the impact of examination systems on curriculum development. The Board's execution of this project was highly regarded, so much so that the UNESCO officer who handled it said that this was the only project he had ever commissioned where he was happy to accept the first draft submitted to him. An interesting fact that emerged from this UNESCO project, which covered three developing countries and four countries in which there were fully developed education systems, was that Scotland was the only country in which teachers had freedom to choose their own textbooks.

In addition to the above consultancy work, the Board on a very limited budget carried out several important pieces of research dealing with its own work. One of these, which compared the assessment of course-work by the candidates' own teachers with external marking, suggested that the external marks based solely on the end product were slightly more lenient than teachers' marks which took all information into account. Another investigation, which monitored the relative success of candidates as they moved from Standard Grade to the Revised Higher, supported the view that a Credit Level award in S4 was a good predictor of success at Higher Grade in the following year. The results of an investigation, which was mounted to deal with an allegation that markers could be influenced by such things as the gender, ethnic origin or quality of handwriting of a candidate, or by the name of the school attended, suggested that marking was relatively bias-free. Standard Grade examination papers were scrutinised to check the linguistic demands of questions, and the findings were passed to subject panels. A more extended project involving trials over a three-year period in English and Science seemed to confirm the findings of earlier trials in Computing Studies and Modern Studies that it was feasible, both procedurally and financially, to base Standard Grade assessment entirely on internal assessment, provided that banks of Standard Assessment Tasks were available and consensus moderation was used for the more open-ended areas of the curriculum. However, while those who took part in these trials were very enthusiastic about consensus moderation, they were not so keen on the prospect of a fully internally-assessed Standard Grade. A survey of users' perceptions of Standard Grade certification showed that, while candidates and presenting centres found the element profile useful, colleges and employers were more interested in the overall awards. In fact, colleges and employers were still not particularly knowledgeable about Standard Grade despite earnest efforts by the Scottish Office and the SEB since the inception of Standard Grade to keep them well informed (**Note 8**). This prompted the Board to issue in 1993 an informative booklet *The Work of the Board* written in layman's language, together with a companion video.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, local authorities were under considerable financial pressure and COSLA, which by statute controlled the Board's budget, in turn put pressure on the Board to make savings, so much so that concern was expressed in the Board about the effect that continual cuts could have on the quality of the service offered. For example, the Board's initial draft budget for 1991 was £10,902,000. This would have maintained existing services. By curtailing the checking and moderation procedures, the Board reduced the sum which it formally submitted to COSLA to £10,088,000; but the figure which was finally agreed with COSLA was further reduced to £9,446,000. In view of the increase in the number of Standard Grade examinations and the overlap of provision of unrevised and revised examinations, the Board had sought to increase charges for each subject presentation from £14.56 to £18.90, but COSLA insisted that the new charge be restricted to £17.49. Relations between the Board and COSLA were quite strained at times, particularly over the fact that long-term planning was impossible since COSLA's approval of the budget had to be sought annually and was dealt with at a very late stage in planning for the following year. In 1992, COSLA even sought to lay down the specific areas in which savings should be made; but this was successfully resisted by the Board, since it was outwith the authority of COSLA, and it was re-affirmed that the Board should continue to determine its own budget allocation within an approved total. The strained and somewhat uneasy relationship between the Board and its paymaster and the failure of COSLA representatives to attend Board and Committee meetings were two of the points highlighted in the *Policy Review and Financial Management Survey* of the SEB described in Chapter 3.

Prior to the publication of this Policy Review, the Board had already taken steps to streamline its

procedures and management structure. In October 1991, at the instigation of COSLA, an in-house team had begun a staffing review of the Board's 131 clerical, administrative, computing and managerial posts. The findings of this review were implemented early in 1993 and resulted in a 10% reduction in these posts. As from 1 January 1993, the Directorate was also restructured following a review by an outside consultant. Dr Long, the Director, was re-designated the Board's Chief Executive, which recognised the increasing complexity of the Board's work and the need for action to be taken on occasion without reference to the full Board; and, when Melville Hendry retired on 12 April of that year after eighteen years as Depute Director, his successor Peter Kimber was designated Depute Chief Executive as well as being a Director in charge of Development. As such, he was responsible for the Examination Officers and Subject Panels, 5-14 Assessment, and External Relations. At the same time, three Assistant Directors became Directors. The Services Director was responsible for finance, personnel and central services; the Operations Director looked after data-processing and all the logistical operations involved in the running of the examinations; the Assessments and Awards Director took charge of the preparation of question papers, assessment moderation, research and the new computer systems. The number of staffing levels below the Directorate was reduced from seven to four. This simplified management structure resulted in a reduction in real terms of the comparative costs of running the Board's examinations.

Another restructuring affected research findings. The Committee on Research and Development of Examination Techniques (CORDET) had been one of the standing committees which reported directly to the Board. This was proving to be a cumbersome arrangement in the new climate of constant change. Any research findings had to wait for a Board meeting and, if the Board decided to implement any of CORDET's recommendations, these were then passed to the Examinations Committee for action. Since that Committee met only twice per annum, this inevitably led to delay. To speed things up, CORDET was disbanded and replaced by a Research Sub-Committee of the Examinations Committee. It held its first meeting on 14 December 1993.

Although Standard Grade was proving very successful, there was growing concern in the SOED and among local authorities about its cost. One very expensive feature was the fact that virtually all candidates were taking papers at two Levels. Originally, this provision had been intended only for those who were genuinely on the borderline of Foundation/General or General/Credit and needed the second paper as a safety-net; but trial examinations raised concerns about pupils being locked into a particular level once they had embarked on it, so that there was neither a safety net for them if they failed to maintain that standard nor the opportunity to rise above that level, no matter how well they progressed. It was therefore agreed early in the discussions that the best way to obviate these difficulties was to permit all candidates to sit papers at two adjacent levels, i.e. Foundation + General, or General + Credit. On 24 September 1991, the SOED wrote to the Board expressing concern about the number of Standard Grade papers which some candidates were sitting, a concern which was shared by the Headteachers' Association of Scotland. In the hope that centres might be given a clear incentive to present candidates at one level only, the Examinations Committee of the Board looked at the possibility of extending downward the grades that could be awarded for Credit and General Level papers, so that these would cover respectively Grades 1-3 and 3-5, instead of only 1-2 and 3-4. There were serious reservations, however, regarding the equivalence of overlapping grades achieved on different papers and also as regards the relation of grades and awards to the Extended Grade Related Criteria, i.e. the aggregation of the different elements within a subject (**Note 9**). Interested bodies were consulted on the issue, but there was insufficient support for the proposal and the

Examinations Committee dropped the idea at its meeting on 13 February 1992. Some savings were achieved, however, by the decision taken in October 1991 to discontinue syllabus moderation because teachers were now considered to be sufficiently experienced in Standard Grade procedures to make this unnecessary.

One of the distinctive characteristics of the Board's work had always been the willingness of education authorities to release teachers without charge and the willingness of teachers to undertake committee and subject panel duties unpaid, while their school colleagues were prepared to cover classes during their absence on this work. The authorities and teachers both believed that the educational experience, which was gained through working for the Board, brought sufficient benefit to schools to justify providing what was effectively a consultancy service free of charge. Early in the 1990s, however, it was noted that increasingly nominees were not being granted release by their employers, and more teachers were beginning to decline invitations by the Board to act as examiners. This latter phenomenon was attributed partly to the low level of fees offered (**Note 10**), but also to the fact that the later start to the main diet of examinations, which was introduced in 1991, meant that post-examination procedures in some subjects now intruded well into the summer vacation.

Towards the end of 1992 the refusal to release teachers took a new twist following alterations to teachers' contracts under which authorities automatically had to provide supply teachers to cover such absences. Strathclyde Regional Council gave notice that, as from 1 April 1993, they intended to charge the Board for the release of teaching staff in the same way as colleges of education had done since 1991. It was estimated that to reimburse employers for the release of teaching staff for the full range of Board duties would cost £1.7 million per annum. The only way in which the Board could raise that amount of money was by increasing presentation charges, this at a time when the management of school budgets was beginning to be devolved to schools (DSM). Not only would headteachers then be responsible for paying supply teachers to fill in for those undertaking SEB duties but they would also have to pay the increased presentation fees; and there were fears that these extra financial burdens might make them reluctant to put forward those candidates whose success in the examinations was in doubt.

The Board pointed out that it had already cut down on the moderation of Standard Grade and the Revised Highers in order to make fewer demands on teachers during the school week, but it insisted that the involvement of teachers in the whole examination process was essential if its integrity was to be protected. After protracted negotiations, Strathclyde and the other local authorities agreed towards the end of 1993 to delay the implementation of payment for releasing teachers until 1 April 1996, when the whole of local government in Scotland was to be reformed (**Note 11**). Notwithstanding this agreement, the Board agreed to pay for the release of further education lecturers from October 1993 (**Note 12**).

The problem faced by the Board in securing the release of teachers was further exacerbated when the SOED intimated, also towards the end of 1992, that in future HM Inspectors would attend subject panels as assessors rather than as full members and would no longer be available to assist in the moderation of question papers.

On the one hand, therefore, considerable financial constraints were being placed on the public examination system. On the other, the total number of presentations of one kind or another continued to increase. As predicted, schools during this period began to make greater use of

short courses to provide attainable targets for the increasing numbers of less academic pupils who were staying on into S5 and even S6. But it was in S3 and S4 that they proved particularly useful in satisfying the requirements of the curricular mode structure that was introduced following the Munn Report and in broadening the educational experience of pupils within a timetable that was already overstretched. For example, many schools turned to short courses to satisfy the Religious and Moral Education mode and entries in these accounted for around half of all short course entries. By 1993, 64 SEB short courses were on offer, attracting over 44,000 candidates annually (**Note 13**).

(b) Developments affecting SCOTVEC

There was an even bigger explosion in the number of school pupils presented for National Certificate modules since the vocational nature of these proved attractive to many less able pupils who were now staying on at school in increasing numbers beyond the statutory leaving age. Also, since the modules did not have to satisfy the constraints of a national examination timetable, the flexibility that they afforded proved useful to both S5 Christmas leavers and other senior pupils who had gaps in their programme of academic studies.

One very important factor in this expansion was the extensive use of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) by education authorities in order to attract additional funding. Although this was at a much lower level per head than had been available in the pilot stages, it was nevertheless estimated by the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) that, by 1993, some £7 million per annum was being spent on TVEI in Scottish secondary schools — a welcome injection of badly needed income. To begin with, schools had accounted for less than 20% of candidate registrations for National Certificate modules (not counting SVQs) and only about 5% of module enrolments; but, with the use of modules becoming commonplace in S3-S4, as well as S5-6, largely through the influence of TVEI, in 1991, for the first time, schools enrolled more candidates (47%) than further education colleges (45%), although it has to be remembered that, on average, school candidates took only 2-3 modules, whereas FE candidates took seven. In all, in 1991, SCOTVEC dealt with 275,000 module presentations, of which 100,000 were for school candidates. In 1993, 50% of pupils in S3-S4, 80% of Fifth Year pupils and 60% of Sixth Year pupils had enrolled for at least one module.

Two major breakthroughs were achieved by SCOTVEC in 1991-92. Firstly, the SEB agreed in principle to accept certain groups of National Certificate modules as qualifying for entry to a CSYS course in lieu of a Higher Grade pass in the subject concerned; and, secondly, in pursuance of its support for the Scottish Wider Access Programme (**Note 14**), the Scottish Universities Council on Entrance (SUCE) agreed to accept modules as satisfying all or part of entry requirements. By 1992, it had already recognised groupings in English, Mathematics and Modern Languages, and SCOTVEC and SUCE had begun to look at similar arrangements for Biology, Chemistry and Physics.

One of the criticisms which the Howie Report levelled at the use of modules in schools was the haphazard way in which these were selected by pupils, so that there was very little structure in their programmes of study. Indirectly, a decision that Ian Lang had made when he was Education Minister led to a possible solution of this problem. In October 1989, he had announced that, as part of the Government's strategy for expanding vocational training,

SCOTVEC's remit was to be extended to include the concept of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs). These were qualifications specifically designed to testify that candidates had reached certain standards of occupational competence as defined by employers. They were therefore quite different in character from qualifications such as the National Certificate, the Higher National Certificate and the Higher National Diploma, which were designed to prepare people for moving into employment, rather to assess their competence in employment. SVQs like the NVQs, their counterparts in the rest of the UK, were seen by the Government as a way of raising the skill levels of employees, thus making the UK more internationally competitive. SVQs were group awards made up of units designed to be assessed in workplace conditions. Each SVQ was assigned to one of five occupational levels, ranging from level 1 (qualifications for operatives) through to level 5 (qualifications for senior managers and professionals).

In the two years following the Government's decision to introduce SVQs, the development of these became a top priority for SCOTVEC. A Group Awards Development Unit (later to be called the Accreditation Unit) was established to ensure a co-ordinated approach across all occupational areas. This Unit worked closely with Industry Lead Bodies to set the occupational standards on which SVQs were based. Close contact was also kept with the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and, following negotiations with that body, SVQs and NVQs began to be mutually recognised from October 1990 onwards. By July 1991, 120 SVQs had been accredited with over 3,000 candidates enrolled for them. By 1992, SCOTVEC had achieved its target of developing some 600 SVQs to cover almost every significant sector of employment and parallel the NVQs in England and Wales.

The SVQ concept was further enhanced by the fact that SCOTVEC had introduced in 1989 a computer-based Record of Education and Training (RET) on which candidates could have awards of modules and units recorded whenever and wherever they were gained. They could be listed separately or in a cumulative way to achieve group awards — a significant step in the promotion of life-long education and training, which was ultimately of considerable importance to schools.

In 1991, when the Government launched the National Record of Achievement (NRA) which would apply to the whole of the UK, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) was given responsibility for developing it, and it contracted the NVCQ to carry out the work. Not for the first time, the DfEE forgot that the Scottish system was different from that south of the border, and the first stage of the NRA did not suit the situation in Scotland in a number of ways: for example, it assumed that holders would have to copy out all their qualification successes and name the awarding body, instead of simply slotting in SCE passes and SCOTVEC's RET; it also forgot that Scotland's definition of core skills was different from that adopted elsewhere in the UK; and even some of the vocabulary (such as the use of "sessions" instead of "openings") was inappropriate. Following discussions with the SOED, the SEB and SCOTVEC, the DfEE agreed to modify the wording on some pages of the NRA so that the Scottish system could be incorporated within a single UK-wide format. In 1992, the Scottish Office asked SCOTVEC to assume responsibility for the production, development and distribution of the NRA in Scotland, while at the same time continuing to liaise with the NCVO. The NRA was issued free of charge to every S4 pupil and to all young people on Government training schemes. Initial reports of its reception were disappointing, however; and, following the publication of a research paper entitled *TVEI School for Skills* which revealed that FE colleges and higher education institutions

were making very little use of it as a source of information about applicants, the SOED decided on 24 November to fund the appointment of a development officer to promote awareness of the NRA.

The NRA on its own did not solve England's problems either. There was at that time no suitable qualification in England designed to meet the needs of the growing number of less academic pupils who were staying on at school beyond the statutory leaving age and for whom "A" levels were inappropriate. Nor were the NVQs suitable for use in schools, so the idea was mooted of introducing a "*Vocational A Level*" from which emerged the General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). However, these had to be developed from scratch. There was no such problem in Scotland since the National Certificate was already, to some extent, meeting the needs of this new type of S5/S6 pupil. Scottish Ministers were won over to the view that, since developments in Scotland were so far ahead of those elsewhere in the UK, Scotland should build on the success of the National Certificate by producing its own General Scottish Vocational Qualifications (GSVQs), which could still be compatible with GNVQs.

Following the white paper *Access and Opportunity* (May 1991), which emphasised the Government's commitment to a coherent Scottish system of vocational qualifications, it was announced during the committee stage of the Further and Higher Education Bill in December 1991 that an extra ,1 million would be made available to SCOTVEC from 1992 to continue the development of SVQs. More significantly for education in schools, roughly ,100,000 of this sum would go immediately into the development of general SVQs (GSVQs) whose main target was schools (Note 15). GSVQs aimed at providing a broadly-based preparation for employment or progression to HNC/HND. They would not be about full occupational competence, like SVQs; but, by providing vocational sampling for those who had not yet decided which career they wished to follow, they would prepare young people for a range of occupations and allow them to keep open several further education options. Like the more specific SVQs, the GSVQs would be built up from existing National Certificate modules and would use a core plus options framework. The aims of these GSVQs and the fact that they included the mandatory core skills of communication, information technology, numeracy, problem solving and interpersonal skills would turn out to be in line with what the Howie Report would later suggest for SCOTCERT.

As they worked on the preparation of the GSVQs, SCOTVEC kept in close touch with the NCVQ which was preparing GNVQs for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Although broad compatibility was achieved between the two qualifications, there were significant differences in their approach to assessment, grading, core skills and Level 1 awards because SCOTVEC was particularly concerned with the need to link GSVQs to the general educational provision in Scotland.

The first batch of GSVQs (comprising Business Administration, Care, Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism, and Technology) was offered to centres from August 1992; the second batch (consisting of Arts and Social Sciences, Design, Information Technology, Land-based Industries and Science) became available in August 1993. The expectation was that GSVQs could provide either a one-year (Level II) or a two-year (Level III) post-Standard Grade vocational programme. A compulsory assignment or project was built in as an additional assessment at Levels II and III to determine whether the award was given a pass or merit grade. Certain groupings of three or four modules at Level III were recognised as alternatives to Higher Grade passes.

During the GSVQ consultations, SCOTVEC had received complaints that there was nothing on offer for students with special educational needs. In 1991-2, therefore, SCOTVEC began to develop awards for these students. The target group for Skillstart 1 was slow learners with moderate learning difficulties and low achievers, including those with social and behavioural problems. Skillstart 2 was designed "*for those who lacked formal qualifications and/or confidence to take on a more demanding programme.*" Both courses were to be built around starter-stage core skill modules and activity-approach modules, and SCOTVEC readily found centres keen to take part in piloting them. The aim was to "*offer a new beginning to many individuals who previously could not gain formal qualifications for their achievements.*" They would be particularly useful to certain categories of adult learners and long-term unemployed people. Both Skillstart 1 and Skillstart 2 were designed to provide entry to SVQs or GSVQs. By the end of 1992, over 100 centres were piloting GSVQs, and 50 were piloting Skillstart awards.

Speaking at a conference in Paisley in March 1993, Tom McCool, the Chief Executive of SCOTVEC, admitted that there was a regrettable divide between SVQs and GSVQs. The former, which had derived from the NVQs promoted by the Department of Employment in England, were concentrated in workplaces and it was difficult for employers in small and medium-sized businesses to deliver SVQs to national standards. GSVQs, on the other hand, were almost entirely the preserve of schools and colleges which were better equipped to meet the standards.

Although only eleven schools joined the 1992-3 piloting of GSVQs, a 1993 report from the TVEI National Task Group, commenting on how schools had built up GSVQs from modules which they had already been teaching, stated that some six dozen secondary schools had signed up for at least one GSVQ in 1993-94, and another 32 were expected to join in 1994-95. However, this was a lower uptake than the SOED had expected and was put down to uncertainty over the outcome of the Howie recommendations. Those schools which had become involved had done so for the same reason as had prompted schools to turn to the England-based CSE in the late 1970s and early 1980s before the introduction of Standard Grade. They were "*tired of waiting for Howie*" to replace the incoherent mass of modules which were meaningless in terms of progression. At the same time, the report admitted that, despite the considerable potential of the GSVQs, they would be difficult to sell to parents and pupils, who would rather sit Highers and fail. As the report said, "*The stigma of not sitting one or two Highers seems to be greater than the stigma of failing the course.*" Even a seminar for parents held in Stirling University in June 1992 and widespread publicity failed to change this attitude.

Some criticised the GSVQs for not being general enough. Schools, in particular, felt that they were designed to suit FE colleges and employers rather than for use in schools, which had no desire to direct pupils prematurely along one vocational line. Schools also felt that 12 modules of 40 hours demanded too large a part of a pupil's timetable, especially if pupils were capable of studying full subjects.

In 1992-93, therefore, the piloting of a SCOTVEC Schools Group Award, intended to be more school-friendly, began at the behest of Strathclyde, Lothian, Grampian and Shetland Education Authorities in 30 of their secondary schools. Level 1 of this Award was designed to provide a more appropriate progression for S5 pupils who had gained Foundation awards at Standard Grade, Level 2 for those who had achieved General Level at Standard Grade. To achieve an

award, a pupil had to obtain a credit in each of Communication, Mathematics, Personal and Social Development, and either credit in a foreign language or Information Technology. A further six credits had to be a coherent grouping drawn from Business Administration, Home Economics, Technology, Expressive Arts, or Leisure and Tourism. Early feedback suggested that a named award had more currency with pupils and employers than a clutch of apparently unrelated modules. The Schools Group Award was expensive in manpower, however, and proved difficult to administer, as it was difficult to co-ordinate combined assignments set by different departments within a school and possibly involving also an FE college. The inability of some pupils to achieve all the elements of the award also proved a drawback in that they finished with no group award, although completed modules were certificated through the Record of Education and Training.

Yet another initiative was the concept of National Certificate Clusters, planned jointly by SCOTVEC and the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (SCCC) and backed up with specially designed resource materials, supported by ,120,000 of Government funding. To meet specific pupil needs, schools could group together into coherent 120-hour packages three National Certificate modules drawn from key areas. It was thought that such an arrangement would be easier to accommodate within school timetables than the more extensive GSVQs. The first three clusters dealt with European Studies, Information Technology and Home Economics, each available at three levels ranging from beginners to advanced students, and roughly equivalent to General and Credit Levels of Standard Grade and Higher Grade. In Home Economics and Information Technology, however, difficulties were encountered in identifying modules which were suitable for the classroom, since most of them were too much occupationally based. Progress in European Studies was even slower. In general, these clusters were perceived as less difficult to market than GSVQs, but there was concern over whether they would be compatible with a group award system covering the whole curriculum.

On 13 May 1993, the Government began a two-year campaign to make employers and the public more aware of NVQs and SVQs. Also in 1993, SCOTVEC launched a major initiative to encourage good practice in the use of National Certificate modules in schools, and this led to the development of a guide which was distributed to every school teacher who used modules. A booklet *Towards a Flexible Curriculum*, which highlighted examples of good practice in the use of modules by schools, was also published.

(c) Summing up

From what I have written above, it should be clear why I have called this chapter "Nothing Stands Still." There was an unending stream of major initiatives, all very worthy in themselves, but cumulatively they put enormous pressure on every level of the educational system. Even parents and employers expressed concern about the system becoming destabilised because too much was being attempted at the same time. Parents and employers also admitted that they were bamboozled by all the changes. They had thought that they understood what "O" Grades and Highers stood for, but they had not yet come to grips with Standard Grade and National Certificate modules.

Not surprisingly, complaints also came from the teaching profession about the ever-increasing workload, and particularly about procedures which gave them less time for actual teaching. The EIS began a campaign of non-cooperation which threatened the viability of certain of the

initiatives.

Relations with the Government were not helped by the introduction of teacher appraisal coupled with repeated threats to sack incompetent teachers and by the publication of what were popularly known as "league tables" of examination results. Ever since the early 1980's, schools had been required to publish their own SCE results in their Handbook for Parents. By the late 1980s, Michael Forsyth was pressing to have the SCE results of all secondary schools published nationally without any social weighting to show parents, so he claimed, how well or how badly individual schools were performing. He was strongly advised against this by the Inspectorate and held back at this stage.

At the same time, the Inspectorate was working with the SEB on ways of helping schools to make a better evaluation of their results. In August 1991, the Management of Educational Resources Unit of the Inspectorate (MERU), which was established as a result of the Parents' Charter, issued to every secondary school a document entitled *Using Examination Results in School Self-Evaluation*. This big package, whose purpose was "to develop educational indicators and focus attention and to encourage a more informed debate on the performance of the educational system at national, regional and school levels," contained detailed guidance on how to interpret the various data. The package combined the raw scores of national presentations and passes in each subject and the "relative ratings", which showed how the same group of pupils had performed in other subjects. It was hoped that each school would use these indicators to analyse the relative performance of each of its subject departments. A second, more sophisticated version *Using Performance Indicators in Secondary School Self-Assessment* was published in March 1992.

In March 1992, the Labour Party Scottish spokesman on education had put a Parliamentary Question to the Government about the examination performance of schools in Paisley, where there was a dispute over school closures. Michael Forsyth used this as an excuse to publish the 1989-90 results of all Scottish secondary schools. This caused immediate outrage. Since they had been put together hurriedly, the tables contained serious inaccuracies. Further, they took no account of Higher Grade passes gained by pupils in S6, and no mention was made of SCOTVEC module awards. Teachers claimed that league tables of raw results did not give the whole picture of schools and were particularly unfair to schools in deprived areas. By definition, half the schools in Scotland were below average, and there was a risk of complacency in schools higher up the "league" and demoralisation of staff and pupils in those near the bottom. The Government countered by stating that they had not produced league tables. Inevitably, however, the national newspapers did just that and pilloried the schools with the poorest results.

From that point on, there developed a veritable industry in the production of examination statistics of various kinds. In November 1992, the Audit Unit of the Inspectorate published *Examination Results in Secondary Schools 1990-92*, the first of what has become an annual report, whose intended aim was to share information about quality and standards in assessing performance in schools. Educationists met it with the same criticisms as the previous statistical data. Each subsequent report sought to provide more information and to remove anomalies. For example, the second report, published in November 1993, included Highers gained in S6, SCOTVEC awards and staying-on rates, but passes gained after appeal were not included. The SEB continually argued that these should be included, but the SOED maintained that the timing of the publication did not permit this. Related to these reports was another produced by the

Inspectorate in January 1993 - *Standards and Quality in Secondary Schools*, which was based on a sample of schools inspected during session 1991-92.

To counter the claims that league tables distorted the true performance of schools, the Audit Unit of HM Inspectorate, in collaboration with the statistical section of the SEB, began working on ways of producing a value-added analysis of examination results. The aim was to introduce a weighting which took account of the social background of the pupils in each school.. This proved extremely difficult, however, and years later no convincing method had been found. Establishing base lines was inevitably subjective: there was no accurate measure, for example, of the attainment of pupils when they moved from primary to secondary; and using Standard Grade results as the baseline from which to measure success at Higher Grade dealt with too short a period within the secondary career of pupils and took no account of whether pupils had excelled themselves in the first four years or under-performed. Similarly, the use of postal codes and unemployment rates proved too vague for classifying the social background of schools, and ascertaining the educational attainment of parents was regarded as too intrusive. The number of free school meals is accepted to be an accurate statistic, but it is not regarded as a true reflection of the social make-up of a school.

The Education Minister had won a political point by publishing examination statistics. However, it had been won at the expense of making teachers feel threatened and undervalued so that they were much less receptive to the initiatives which could be recognised as having genuine educational value; and it remained to be seen whether other Government initiatives could succeed without the willing cooperation of teachers.

Whatever one's personal views, there could be no doubt that education was moved to the top of the political agenda during this period. Symptomatic of the growing awareness of the importance attached to educational qualifications and the stresses which accompanied this, was the creation of a telephone helpline in Careers Offices to give advice to candidates who had failed to achieve the qualifications they required for entry into higher education. It opened on 7 August 1993, immediately after the issue of the SCE results, and ran for a week. Radio Scotland FM broadcast "Highers Survival" all week to remind listeners of the helpline. In 1993, over 1,000 calls were received. Two years later, the number of calls had risen to over 6,700 calls, possibly due to the fact that the SEB began to send out along with each candidate's results a flyer advertising the helpline service.

Note 8: See *The Higher Tradition*, pages 201-2

Note 9: In Standard Grade, elements are the key aspects of a subject (normally three in number) from which the overall grading is derived and which are reported separately in the Profile section of the certificate.

Note 10: The SEB had always considered that the level of fees paid to examiners and markers was inadequate but it was forced several times to withdraw proposed increases because of financial constraints.

Note 11: In the first year of implementation (1996), the actual sum spent on teacher release was £1.25 million. This money was targeted specifically at those schools which had

actually released staff instead of being spread evenly over all authorities.

Note 12: FE colleges had ceased to be under the control of local authorities in April 1993.

Note 13: Care has to be taken when examining the statistics in the SEB Annual Reports since they were inflated by the fact that awards gained in S3 were also included in the figures for S4. True figures can be found in Chapter 9.

Note 14: The Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) was a Government-funded initiative designed to open up higher education to mature students and to young people from areas which traditionally produced few university students by bringing their qualifications up to admissions standard.

Note 15: From the beginning, SCOTVEC abbreviated “general SVQs” to “GSVQs”, but other earlier publications referred to them as “gSVQs”. Prior to the publication of *Higher Still*, there was a debate in the Scottish Office over whether they should be called gSVQs or GSVQs. The purists, who preferred the former, won the argument and that is how they appear in *Higher Still*. However, latterly, almost everyone used the more natural looking abbreviation GSVQ. I have chosen to refer to them thus throughout my account.