

Chapter 14:

West African Examinations Council

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The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) was created in 1952 to serve the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana), Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia. Liberia became the fifth member in 1974. This chapter presents aspects of the history and operation of WAEC, particularly from the perspective of its smallest member, The Gambia. The chapter illustrates the benefits and costs for a small state in a regional partnership which also embraces much larger states.

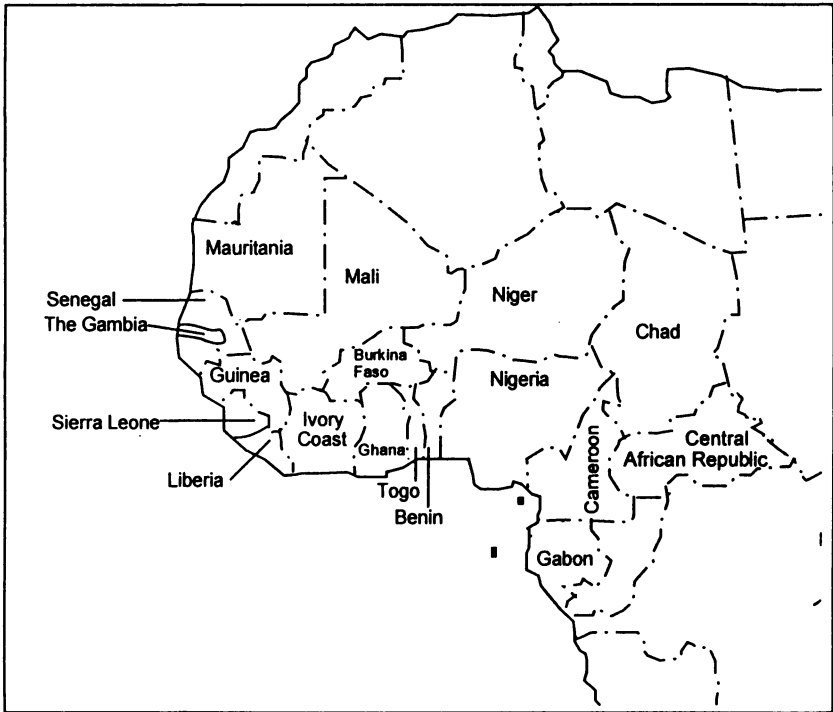
Four of the five WAEC member countries are former British colonies which inherited education systems influenced by models in the United Kingdom. Ghana attained independence in 1957, Nigeria in 1960, Sierra Leone in 1961, and The Gambia in 1965. Liberia's history is rather different, but it has in common with the other four a strong role for English in its education system. Liberia was founded in 1847 as an independent republic by liberated slaves from the southern United States, and its education system has been heavily influenced by American traditions.

Table 14.1: Populations of Member States of the West African Examinations Council

Country	Population
Nigeria	105,300,000
Ghana	16,400,000
Sierra Leone	4,300,000
Liberia	2,800,000
The Gambia	1,000,000

Note: Figures refer to the year 1993.

Source: United Nations Development Programme (1996), p.179.



The five member states of WAEC are widely divergent in population size (Table 14.1). By far the largest is Nigeria, with an estimated population exceeding 105 million. Ghana comes next, with approximately 16 million people. It is followed in order of population size by Sierra Leone, Liberia and The Gambia.

This chapter begins with the history of WAEC. It then indicates the types of examinations that the Council conducts, and the structure of WAEC administration. Turning specifically to The Gambia, the chapter then outlines changes in the Gambian system of education, and the ways that WAEC examinations fit in. Subsequent sections address issues of staffing and costs, and the final section summarises and concludes.

The History of WAEC

The origins of WAEC go back to 1948. In that year, the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) and what was then called the University of London School Examinations Matriculation Council (ULSEMC), which were the main external agencies responsible for school examinations in the British West African colonies, discussed with officials of Departments of Education in those colonies the future of examination policies. Following this discussion, G.B. Jeffery, Director of the University of London Institute of Education, was invited by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to advise on a proposal that there should be instituted a West African School Examinations Council. This initiative was part of a broader effort to foster regional collaboration in several social and economic sectors. After a three-month visit to The Gambia, the Gold Coast, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, Jeffery submitted a report which strongly supported establishment of an examinations council and which made detailed recommendations on its composition and duties.

The Jeffery report was adopted without reservation by the four West African governments, and an ordinance establishing the West African Examinations Council was drafted by the West African Inter-Territorial Secretariat. The ordinance was passed by the Legislative Assembly of the Gold Coast in 1951, and later made effective by similar enactments by the other three governments. The ordinances charged the Council to determine the examinations required in the public interest in West Africa, and empowered it both to conduct such examinations and to award certificates.

The Council headquarters were established in a specifically-designated building in Accra, capital of the Gold Coast. The Nigerian government also made available a block of offices in Lagos, which became the seat of the Deputy Registrar. In Sierra Leone and The Gambia, the Council initially worked through the respective government Departments of Education,

though was allocated separate offices in Freetown in 1958 and in Banjul in 1973. A WAEC office was established in Monrovia, capital of Liberia, in 1976.

The first WAEC meeting was held in Accra. It was attended by 13 nominees of the participating governments, and by 10 observers. It was also attended by three nominees of the Secretary of State, namely the Chairman of the Council, A.N. Galsworthy (who was also Chief Secretary of the West African Inter-Territorial Secretariat); J.L. Brereton, secretary of UCLES and representing the University of Cambridge; and G.B. Jeffery, representing the University of London.

The formal participation of representatives from the Universities of Cambridge and London was of considerable significance since it was a mechanism to promote linkage between WAEC and the UK examination boards. At its inception, WAEC had been instructed to ensure that its certificates would not represent a lower standard of attainment than equivalent certificates of examining authorities in the United Kingdom. The participation of senior representatives from the Universities of Cambridge and London helped to achieve that goal. The UK examination boards gave WAEC important technical assistance in its early years, and the linkage also gave credibility to the new organisation. For the first 30 years of WAEC's life, both UCLES and ULSEMC had seats on the Council. By the 1980s, however, WAEC was considered able to stand on its own feet, and the continued formal linkage with these UK examining bodies was no longer felt necessary or appropriate.

Examinations Administered by WAEC

WAEC administers four types of examinations, namely:

- national examinations,
- regional (international) examinations,
- examinations conducted in collaboration with other examining bodies, and
- examinations conducted on behalf of other examining bodies.

The national examinations are prepared for the specific member countries which they serve, and reflect the policies, needs and aspirations of those countries. The regional examinations are developed centrally for candidates in several or all member countries. Examinations conducted in collaboration with other bodies may be tailored for the specific circumstances of the recipient countries, whereas examinations conducted on behalf of other bodies are mostly designed by those bodies as standard examinations for

candidates anywhere in the world.

Table 14.2 presents statistics on the Council's own examinations in 1994. It shows that some examinations were for primary and middle schools, while others were for secondary schools, and one was for graduates

Table 14.2: Examinations Operated by the West African Examinations Council, 1994

	Candidates
<i>National Examinations for Primary and Middle Schools</i>	
The Gambia: Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination	11,939
Ghana: Basic Education Certificate Examination	198,812
Liberia: Junior High School Certificate Examination	7,845
Sierra Leone: National Primary School Examination	23,145
<i>Regional Examinations for Secondary Schools</i>	
Joint School Certificate & GCE 'O' Level: May/June for sch. candidates	
The Gambia	1,580
Sierra Leone	9,836
Joint School Certificate & GCE 'O' Level: Nov./Dec. for pvt. candidates	
The Gambia	193
Ghana	55,253
Sierra Leone	895
GCE 'A' Level: May/June examinations for school candidates	
The Gambia	233
Ghana	11,309
Sierra Leone	701
GCE 'A' Level: Nov./Dec. examinations for private candidates	
The Gambia	16
Ghana	16,871
Sierra Leone	29
<i>National Examination for Secondary Schools</i>	
Ghana: Senior Secondary Certificate Examination	78,875
Nigeria: Senior School Certificate Examination (school candidates)	573,078
Nigeria: Senior School Certificate Qualifying Examination (sch. cand.)	1,263
Nigeria: Senior School Certificate Examination (private candidates)	523,509
Nigeria: Senior School Certificate Qualifying Examination (pvt. cand.)	490
Liberia National Certificate Examination	1,217
Liberia Senior High School Certificate Examination	3,655
<i>Other Examinations</i>	
Ghana: Teachers' Final Certificate 'A' Examination	2,847

Source: West African Examinations Council (1995), pp.73-78.

of teachers' colleges. The WAEC examinations for candidates in primary schools were provided only for The Gambia and Sierra Leone. In the other countries, the equivalent examinations were set under the auspices of internal bodies. At the secondary level, WAEC examinations were set for School Certificate/General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary ('O') level at the end of secondary Form 5 for candidates in The Gambia and Sierra Leone. Candidates in those countries who had proceeded to two further years of study in secondary schools sat the GCE Advanced ('A') level examination. Ghana and Nigeria had moved to a different school system, having restructured from 6+5+2+3 (i.e. six years of primary, five years of junior secondary, five years of senior secondary, and three years of university) to 6+3+3+4. In Ghana the 'O' level examination had been phased out for school candidates, and 'A' levels were due to be phased out; while in Nigeria both examinations had been discontinued. In their place, new national qualifications had been introduced for each country.

Another feature of Table 14.2 which deserves attention is the balance between regional and national examinations. In the year to which Table 14.2 refers, the proportion of candidates taking regional examinations was small. This was chiefly because Nigerian candidates no longer sat the regional 'O' and 'A' level examinations. Nigeria's Senior School Certificate Examination had first been offered in 1988, and had progressively replaced the regional examination. Thus in 1991/92 the proportion of candidates taking the regional examinations was just 8.8 per cent, but the previous year it had been 39.8 per cent, and in 1987/88 it had been 71.5 per cent (Table 14.3).

In the short term, educational restructuring in Ghana contributed to the small proportion of candidates taking regional examinations. Like Nigeria, Ghana moved to a 6+3+3+4 model; but the Ghanaian authorities decided that they wanted a Senior Secondary Certificate Examination which focused closely on Ghanaian syllabuses and which had a core and electives which differed from those in Nigeria. Ghana's examination was first offered in November/December 1993. Table 14.3 shows that in absolute terms the number of Ghanaian candidate taking regional examinations rose continuously over the eight-year period from 1987/88. However, in the latter part of the period numbers were not as great as they would have been in the absence of the new national examination. As the number of Ghanaian school candidatures for the 'O' and 'A' levels was phased out, eventually the examinations were taken only by private candidates in Ghana and by school and private candidates in Sierra Leone and The Gambia.

However, the proportion of candidates taking regional examinations was planned to increase again towards the end of the decade. Following the

Table 14.3: Percentage of WAEC Candidates taking Regional Examinations, 1987/88 - 1994/95

	1987/88	1988/89	1989/90	1990/91	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95
Gambia	1,121	1,203	1,242	1,165	1,227	1,271	1,604	2,060
Ghana	58,102	59,932	65,578	68,416	77,562	105,365	129,374	152,702
Liberia	4	4	3	-	-	-	-	-
Nigeria	763,096	522,563	685,857	506,697	-	-	-	-
Sierra Leone	14,274	13,770	13,767	13,102	10,457	10,615	11,413	11,457
Total regional	836,597	597,472	766,447	589,380	89,246	117,251	142,391	166,219
Total candidates	1,170,477	1,262,690	1,526,461	1,479,793	1,011,133	1,329,619	1,572,010	1,709,965
Regional as % of total	71.5	47.3	50.2	39.8	8.8	8.8	9.1	9.7

Source: West African Examinations Council (1992), pp.23-4; West African Examinations Council (1995), pp.21-2.

leads of Nigeria and Ghana, in 1988 authorities in The Gambia also decided to restructure their education system. At that time The Gambia, had no university, so the structure was 6+3+3+2 rather than 6+3+3+4, with the final two-year segment still leading to 'A' level. With at least three countries firmly moving to the 6+3+3 system, and the possibility that Sierra Leone would follow suit, WAEC decided to develop a regional examination for senior secondary students. In 1996, WAEC announced that the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) would be available, and that the first cohort would take the examination in 1998. The expectation was that this regional examination would replace the national senior school certificate examinations taken in Nigeria and Ghana, and would also be taken by candidates in The Gambia and Sierra Leone.

Liberia was to some extent a special case deserving further explanation. During the first half of the 1990s, Liberia suffered from a civil war and few students sat examinations of any kind. However, even when affairs were stable, few Liberian students sat regional examinations because, in line with dominant traditions in the USA, much assessment was continuous and school-based. Nevertheless, in the mid-1980s WAEC designed a Liberia Senior High School Certificate Examination. Although in 1989/90 just three candidates in Liberia sat WAEC-operated regional examinations, 26,263 candidates sat WAEC-operated national examinations.

Also worth noting in Table 14.3 is fluctuation in the total number of candidates. The figure rose from 1,170,477 in 1987/88 to 1,526,461 two years later, but then fell again to 1,011,133 in 1991/92 and rose again to 1,709,965 in 1994/95. These figures themselves compare with 1,553,000 in 1980/81, but 2,030,088 in 1981/82 (WAEC 1982, p.25). The fluctuations reflect a combination of domestic crises within member states, restructuring of education systems, and decisions by national governments to place certain examinations under domestic rather than regional control. Thus, one reason why the 1981/82 figure was high was that at that time WAEC administered Nigeria's National Common Entrance Examination for primary school graduates, which in 1981/82 had 707,000 candidates. The Council has usually endeavoured to assist national governments when they have declared a desire to take over their own examinations, but the fluctuations have created considerable administrative difficulties.

WAEC also operates some examinations in collaboration with other bodies. For example, in The Gambia and Sierra Leone, the Council works with the City & Guilds of London Institute, the Royal Society of Arts, and the Pitman Institute. The Council also administers the selection examinations for the primary teachers' course at The Gambia College, and for entrance to The Gambia Technical Training Institute and the School of

Nursing. In Sierra Leone, the Council administers the Civil Service Entrance Examination. The Council plays a role in shaping these examinations as well as in the mechanics of administration.

Finally, WAEC administers various examinations on behalf of other examining boards. Table 14.4 itemises the 'miscellaneous examinations' listed in the Council's 1995 Annual Report. Twenty one examining bodies are named on this list, with the largest number of candidates in Ghana.

Table 14.4: Examinations Administered by WAEC on Behalf of Other Examining Boards, 1993

	<u>Number of Candidates</u>			
	Nigeria	Ghana	Sierra Leone	The Gambia
Associated Board for the Royal School of Music	5	85	-	-
Associated Examining Board	-	-	-	1
Association of Accounting Technicians	-	-	144	-
Association of Business Executives	6	28	-	3
Association of Cost and Executive Accountants	-	-	-	8
Chartered Association of Certified Accountants	-	337	51	7
Chartered Institute of Management Accountants	-	324	3	-
Chartered Institute of Marketing	-	872	-	-
Chartered Insurance Institute	-	-	8	3
Engineering Council Examination	12	-	-	-
Institute of Building 5	2	1	-	-
Institute of Chartered Secretaries & Administrators	-	353	-	4
Institute of Data Processing Management	-	138	3	-
Institute of Fire Engineers	82	-	-	-
Institute of Purchasing and Supply	67	-	-	-
Institute of Shipbrokers	-	3	-	-
Open University of the United Kingdom	-	-	-	1
Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors	4	-	-	-
Society of Actuaries -	9	-	-	-
University of London	16	3	1	1
University of London Examinations Board	-	-	137	7
Others	2	1	-	22
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>199</i>	<i>2,155</i>	<i>348</i>	<i>57</i>

Source: West African Examinations Council (1995), pp.52-3.

Administration of the Council

The Council is headed by a Chairperson, who is not a full-time employee

but who has a Chief Executive called the Registrar. According to the Convention adopted in 1982, five members of the Council should be nominated by the Federal Government of Nigeria, four by the government of Ghana, three by the government of Sierra Leone, and two each by the governments of Liberia and The Gambia. Membership also includes a representative from each university or university college in the WAEC member states, plus 24 members elected by the National Committees. The 24 members in the latter category comprise 10 persons from Nigeria, seven from Ghana, three from Sierra Leone, and two each from Liberia and The Gambia. The majority of people elected by National Committees represent the interests of secondary schools.

Much of the Council's work is conducted through committees. At the Council level are the Examinations Committee, the Administrative & Finance Committee, the Appointments Committee, and the International Tenders Board. National Committees have their own committees for administration and finance, appointments, tenders, and particular types of examinations; and under the Nigeria National Committee is a set of State Committees.

The Council's Examinations Committee has a number of international Subject Panels, the membership of which is drawn from universities, technical colleges, and schools. Representation on the Subject Panels is generally on an equal basis for each country. However, membership of the other central committees reflects the size of each country. The Gambia, being the smallest member, has the smallest representation. The Council's Standing Orders have clearly-defined procedures on voting, but over the years the Council has developed an unwritten understanding that issues should be resolved by consensus. Because of this, the small size of The Gambia's representation has not created significant problems.

The 1982 WAEC Convention stipulated that the Chairman of Council would be permitted to hold office for a maximum of three years from the date of election. The Convention also stated that the nationality of the Chairman would rotate between member countries. The Standing Orders stipulated the following cycle: Nigeria, The Gambia, Liberia, Ghana, and Sierra Leone. The aim of rotation was to ensure that each member country is given a fair chance to take this leadership position. The system has its critics, particularly because the countries are of widely divergent sizes; but the Standing Orders reflect a principle of equity which takes countries as equivalent units for this aspect of decision-making.

Evolving Patterns of Education in The Gambia

As already mentioned, the education system in The Gambia has been

restructured to a 6+3+3+2 pattern. In 1988 the government stated that:

the first nine years will be conceived as a broad and basic education which in the long-term should be accessible to all Gambian children. For the short and medium-term this will not be possible and there will continue to be a selection procedure at the end of grade 6. At the end of grade 9 a further selection will take place to admit students to three years of [senior] secondary school. Students taking (GCE) 'A' level will continue into grades 13 and 14.

The Common Entrance Examination was replaced by a Primary School Leaving Examination at the end of Grade 6, which was followed by the Junior Secondary School Certificate Examination at the end of Grade 9. The first cohort of students from Grade 12 sat the West African Senior School Certificate Examination in 1998. However, the policy makers decided to retain the Sixth Form after that stage because many Gambian students require 'A' level certificates for entry to universities in Europe and elsewhere.

In 1995, the Gambian higher education picture began to change with launching of a University Extension Programme operated in conjunction with St. Mary's University in Nova Scotia, Canada. This programme gives Gambian students the opportunity to conduct undergraduate work within The Gambia itself. However, the programme offers only some arts, science and commercial courses. Plans have been announced for establishment of a national University of The Gambia; but even when this goes ahead, it will remain impossible for students to study locally for all courses. Some Gambian students can go for further studies in Nigeria and Ghana; but the authorities still wish them to have access to other countries.

Tables 14.5 and 14.6 show the numbers of candidates in The Gambia taking individual papers in the 'O' and 'A' level examinations in 1994. Particularly striking are the small numbers in some subjects. In the 'O' level examinations, the May/June sitting was for school candidates, and the November/December sitting for private candidates. Even in the May/June sitting, only five candidates took Arabic, 11 took Clothing & Textiles, and 15 took Auto-mechanics. Numbers were even smaller in the November/December sitting. Likewise, in the 'A' level examinations, only six candidates took Agricultural Science and nine took Biology. At the 'A' level, only the General Paper had more than 200 candidates.

These statistics underline one of the benefits of belonging to a regional body, for The Gambia would certainly not have been able to operate independent examinations for such small numbers. It should be added that

Table 14.5: Numbers of Candidates Taking Papers in GCE 'O' Level Examinations, The Gambia, 1994

Paper	May/ June	Nov./ Dec.	Paper	May/ June	Nov./ Dec.
Additional Mathematics	49	1	Geography	338	33
Agricultural Science	355	38	Government	356	47
Applied Electricity	28	-	Health Science	544	40
Arabic	5	-	History	17	-
Art	128	-	Home Management	604	-
Auto-mechanics	15	-	Intro. to Bus. Management	561	31
Bible Knowledge	89	2	Islamic Religious Studies	447	9
Biology	334	27	Literature in English	447	9
Business Methods	-	36	Mathematics	1,161	58
Chemistry	207	14	Metalwork	124	-
Clothing & Textiles	11	-	Physics	176	5
Commerce	690	53	Principles of Accounts	473	27
Economics	843	67	Statistics	589	40
English Language	1,561	168	Technical Drawing	276	1
Food & Nutrition	105	-	Woodwork	139	-
French	204	6			

Source: West African Examinations Council (1995), pp.117-21, 145-8.

Table 14.6: Numbers of Candidates Taking Papers in GCE 'A' Level Examinations, The Gambia, May/June 1994

Paper	Candidates	Paper	Candidates
Accounts	86	General Paper	233
Agricultural Science	6	Geography	13
Art	88	Government	48
Biology	9	History	92
Business Management	106	Islamic Religious Studies	21
Chemistry	14	Mathematics	36
Economics	191	Physics	34
English Literature	33	Statistics	62
French	18		

Source: West African Examinations Council (1995), pp.159-60.

during the period that Nigeria and Ghana were using their national secondary school certificate examinations, only The Gambia and Sierra Leone were using the regional examination for school candidates. The entries from Sierra Leone were not much more numerous than those from The Gambia. During this period, both countries were to some extent benefitting from the fact that WAEC was large enough still to be able to operate the 'O' and 'A' level examinations when candidature had fallen to a low level.

Staffing the Examination System

Each WAEC office is staffed by nationals of the country in which it is situated, with the exception of Headquarters where appointments are based on merit with no country quotas. Because of the scarcity of qualified applicants from the smaller countries, most Headquarters posts are filled by Nigerians and Ghanaians.

At the same time, the Council maintains a policy through which senior staff may be posted by the Registrar to any member country in which their expertise is urgently required. This policy particularly helps the smaller countries. The Gambia has benefitted through deployment of a Nigerian expert who has assisted in developing the computer installation in Banjul. Also, a Ghanaian Test Development specialist spent five years in Banjul, during which time he set up a Test Development Unit and trained local staff.

The advantage of this policy is that expertise can be shared much more cheaply than would be possible if hiring outside specialists or consultants. Also, working relationships between expert and local staff tend to be more congenial since they both belong to the same organisation. Further, since job performance in the countries of posting is assessed as if the experts were in their own countries, external postings do not adversely affect individuals' career advancement at home.

Despite its small size, the Banjul office conducts the same basic functions as other national offices. It employs 64 staff, who are grouped as shown in Table 14.7. However, because of the small size of the team, staff have more multiple roles compared with their counterparts in larger offices. The latter commonly work in specialist departments with labels such as Test Development, Test Administration, and Aptitude Testing. Such specialisation is not possible in The Gambia.

The Council has a system for staff development and training. Much of this is in-house, but study leave may be granted with or without salary to permit individuals to undertake relevant courses. In many cases, the Council has sponsored staff to pursue Masters and Doctoral degrees in measurement and evaluation.

Table 14.7: Specialisms of Staff in the Gambian National Office of WAEC, 1996

Department/Unit	No. of Staff
Examinations	18
Computer	6
Printing	4
Accounts	12
Secretarial	4
Administration	10
Security	10
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>64</i>

Note should also be taken of the roles of school and university teachers. The main aspects in which such people are involved are:

- syllabus development and review,
- item writing and moderation,
- coordination for marking,
- marking of scripts,
- subject awards, and
- continuous school-based assessment.

The last of these has become particularly important in recent years. During the early 1990s, however, policies to increase school-based continuous assessment did not take off in The Gambia as had been envisaged. In 1992, manuals were prepared for primary and junior secondary teachers with help from UCLES, and a core team of teachers was trained. The Ministry of Education did not follow up on these accomplishments, and soon after the manuals were printed and delivered, the Ministry announced that continuous assessment at the primary level would be suspended indefinitely. Only at the junior secondary level was a renewed thrust made.

At the higher levels, regional pooling of examiners limits the role for Gambian teachers. Table 14.8 shows the numbers of examiners employed for the written and external components of regional examinations in 1994/95. For the 'O' level only 19 persons were employed in The Gambia, and for the 'A' level the figure was just four persons. On the one hand it might seem as if the main benefits from being employed are accruing to nationals outside The Gambia. However, it also shows that The Gambia is gaining access to the expertise of other countries for grading scripts.

Table 14.8: Numbers of Examiners Employed for Regional Examinations, WAEC, 1994/95

	Ordinary Level		Advanced Level	
	May/June	Nov./Dec.	May/June	Nov./Dec.
Gambia	19	0	4	0
Ghana	3,575	2,483	762	927
Sierra Leone	355	40	33	0

Source: West African Examinations Council (1995), p.30.

Costs

Article 12 of the WAEC Convention states that "each member country shall make an annual contribution to the funds of the Council at a rate to be determined by the Council". The principal sources of funds for the Council are subventions from member governments and examination fees paid by candidates. In The Gambia, the subvention comprises the government's contribution to the Headquarters and an allocation for the cost of running the local office.

Annual contributions to the Headquarters are based on agreed ratios which are reviewed periodically. In 1996, The Gambia's share was 2.25 per cent, while Liberia's share was 1.75 per cent, Sierra Leone's was 6 per cent, Ghana's was 27 per cent and Nigeria's was 63 per cent. These ratios were based on:

- the cost of the statutory international meetings, which is shared according to level of representation of each country;
- the cost of preparation of examination papers, which is apportioned equally among members; and
- all other costs, divided according to ratios determined by the total number of subject entries for regional and national examinations in each country.

The subvention also includes personal emoluments for local staff and for operational charges. In addition, the government pays a subsidy to cover the shortfall in fees paid by candidates. The Council is not permitted to charge economic fees because most candidates would be unable to afford such fees.

The examination fees in The Gambia are higher than in Nigeria and Ghana, partly because of the lack of economies of scale. In addition, the low level of infrastructural development in The Gambia compared with those countries affects the general cost of the examination. Whereas the other

offices can take care of all aspects in the examination process, the Banjul office still has to seek outside assistance at one stage or another. This requires individuals and packages to cross borders, which raises costs.

The costs of printing question papers for national examinations in Nigeria and Ghana are also significantly lower than in The Gambia because those countries have local security printing houses. Because The Gambia lacks such facilities, all examination papers must be printed outside the country and paid for in hard currency.

At the same time, the Gambian government has found difficulty in paying all bills. In 1995/96, the government should have paid 8,793,600 Dalasis (US\$933,500) to the Council, but actually paid only 7,962,800 Dalasis. This type of shortfall has been a pattern for many years, and The Gambia and has run up a huge deficit with the WAEC Headquarters. This state of affairs is not a result of the Ministry of Education's unwillingness to meet its full obligations to the Council. Rather, it is one of the outcomes of overall national budgetary constraints. Even at the reduced level, in 1995/96 the subvention to WAEC represented 6.5 per cent of the government's total (recurrent plus capital) budget for education. This level of contribution prompted a 1995 World Bank/International Development Association visiting mission to question the benefits of the expenditure compared with the alternative uses to which the funds could be put. The mission recommended that the examination policy be reviewed with a view to reducing the number of examinations required and lowering their cost to both government and parents.

Conclusions

WAEC is the oldest of the regional examination bodies on which this book focuses. It had a major celebration for its 40th anniversary in 1992, and plans an even bigger celebration for its 50th anniversary in 2002. Originally founded to serve four countries, WAEC expanded in 1974 to embrace a fifth. The organisation has done much in its history to support and develop the education systems of its member states.

WAEC's history has not been entirely smooth, and its senior officers have always been conscious of the fragility of the organisation. At the time of the 40th anniversary, Emmanuel Evans-Anfom (1992, p.114) then Chairman of the Council, pointed out that WAEC was one of six regional bodies founded in West Africa during the period immediately after the second world war, and the only one still to survive. The bodies which had collapsed were the West African Court of Appeal, the West African Currency Board, the West African Airways Corporation, the West African Cocoa Research Institute, and the West Africa Institute of Oil Palm

Research. Viewed positively, this comparison emphasises the success of WAEC. But it also serves as a warning.

Among the achievements of WAEC has been the way in which it used the services of UCLES and ULSEMC to establish credibility and to develop its own expertise. WAEC grew from an organisation with just 35,000 candidates sitting its first examination in 1954 to a body with over two million candidates in the early 1980s. Since that time, however, the number of candidates sitting WAEC examinations has declined. The principal reason has been the desire by governments to control their own examinations. WAEC has put a brave face on this, and has endeavoured to assist governments in the processes. Nevertheless, the decline in examination candidates during the late 1980s and early 1990s was of considerable significance. Also of great significance was that the bulk of WAEC's work was in national rather than regional examinations. The balance will again shift markedly towards regional examinations when the WASSCE gets into full swing; but national examinations will remain a significant part of the Council's work.

From the Gambian perspective, membership of WAEC has brought some costs and some benefits. On the cost side, membership of WAEC demands considerable financial input. It also creates tensions from coordination with regional partners each of which has undergone political crises, and most of which, because of their greater size, have different perspectives on matters. However, The Gambia has benefitted from cross-fertilisation and technical expertise within the organisation, and from the international recognition of qualifications. The constitutional framework of WAEC has given The Gambia a fairly large voice within the organisation. This is most obvious in the arrangement to rotate the Chairpersonship among member countries on an equal basis according to a fixed pattern. In proportion to its population size, The Gambia also has a much more significant voice on various committees than is the case for the larger countries.

The final balance between these costs and benefits is a matter for professional judgement rather than mathematical calculation. One certainty, however, is that The Gambia has cause for pride at having been an original partner in WAEC in the early 1950s; and generations of beneficiaries can gain satisfaction from the many fruits that that partnership has brought.