

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

In 1948, the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate and the University of London School Examinations Matriculation Council discussed with the West African Departments of Education the future policy of school examinations as would be best suited to the needs of West Africa. Following this discussion, the late Dr. G. B. Jeffery, F.R.S., Director of the University of London's Institute of Education, was invited in October 1949 by the British Secretary of State for the Colonies to visit West Africa to study and advise on a "proposal that there should be instituted a WEST AFRICAN SCHOOL EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL".

After a three-month visit to West Africa, touring The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana (then called The Gold Coast) and Nigeria from December 1949 to March 1950, Dr. Jeffery submitted a report (since then known as the Jeffery Report) strongly supporting the proposal for a WEST AFRICAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL and making detailed recommendations on the composition and duties of the Council. The report, published in March 1950, was adopted without reservation by the four West African Governments and an ordinance establishing The West African Examinations Council as a corporate body was drafted by the West African Inter-Territorial Secretariat in consultation with the Governments. The ordinance was first passed by the Legislative Assembly of the Gold Coast in December 1951 as The West African Examinations Council Ordinance No. 40 of 1951 and was later made effective by similar enactments by the Governments of Nigeria, Sierra Leone and The Gambia.

The Ordinances charged the Council with determining the examinations required in the public interest in West Africa and empowered it to conduct such examinations and to award certificates, provided that the certificates did not represent a lower standard of attainment than equivalent certificates of examining authorities in the United Kingdom.

A temporary office with a small staff headed by the late Mr. Kenneth Humphreys, the first Registrar to the Council, was set up at the offices of the West African Inter-Territorial Secretariat in Accra. Early in 1953, the Accra Office moved to a building near the former Department of Education on Rowe Road which the Gold Coast Government made available, and a site for more permanent offices was secured at Achimota. Later in the year, the new office buildings at Achimota were occupied.

In Lagos, in the same year, the Government of Nigeria also made available a large block of offices at the Technical Institute, Yaba, which became the seat of the Deputy Registrar. In Sierra Leone and The Gambia, the Council, in the meantime, worked through the Departments of Education.

An office was opened in Freetown in 1958, the year in which the Council's London Office was also opened. The national office of the Council in The Gambia was opened in Banjul (then Bathurst) in January 1973.

The first meeting of the Council took place in Accra from the 24th to 27th March, 1953. It was attended by three nominees of the Secretary of State, namely the Chairman of the Council, Mr. A.N. Galsworthy; the Chief Secretary of the West African Inter-Territorial Secretariat, Dr. G.B. Jeffery (representing the University of London); and Mr. J.L. Brereton, Secretary of the Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (representing the University of Cambridge). There were, in addition, 13 members nominated by the Governments of The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria, and ten (10) observers. The Council received from the Registrar a brief report of work done since his arrival and proceeded to establish five committees, namely, the Administrative and Finance Committee (initially called the Executive Committee), the School Examinations Committee, the Public Service Examinations Committee, the Professional, Technical and Commercial Examinations Committee; and the Local Committees (replaced in 1956 by National Committees).

Since then, the names of the Committees have changed and new ones have been created. The Committees now include the Administrative and Finance Committee, the Appointments Committee, and the Examinations Committee at both the international and national levels. In each country, there is a National Committee to which all Local Committees report.

Liberia became the fifth member country when she was admitted into full membership of the Council at the 22nd Annual Meeting held in Lagos in March 1974. Two years later, in April 1976, an office of the Council was established in Liberia and in January 1977 the Council moved into its permanent office in Monrovia.

In March 1982, a new legal framework for the operations of the Council was adopted. After over five years of preparatory work, the Convention establishing The West African Examinations Council was signed at an impressive ceremony coinciding with the Council's 30th Anniversary celebrations and the Annual Council Meeting in Monrovia. The Convention, subsequently ratified by the member countries, came into force on August 24, 1984, with the depositing of the instruments of ratification of all member countries with the Government of Ghana. The Convention provides uniform legal backing to the operations of the Council in all the member countries and gives the Council legal personality as an international body. To take care of recent developments in the member countries, a process to revise the Convention was initiated at the turn of the century, and the Revised Convention was signed in June 2003.

In March 2002, the Council celebrated its 50th Anniversary in Abuja, Nigeria, with the theme, **“WAEC: 50 Years of Excellence”**. The highlight of the celebrations was the launching of the book on the history of the Council: **“The West African Examinations Council (1952 - 2002): Half a Century of Commitment to Excellence and Regional Cooperation”**.

THE COUNCIL'S EXAMINATIONS

The Council conducts three categories of examinations. These are national examinations, international examinations, and examinations administered on behalf of other Examining Boards.

National examinations are restricted to the specific member countries for which they are developed, and they reflect the local policies, needs and aspirations of the countries. That category of examinations includes the Basic Education Certificate Examination for The Gambia, National Primary School Examination, Basic Education Certificate Examination and Senior High School Certificate Examination for Sierra Leone, and the Basic Education Certificate Examination for Ghana. International examinations are those that are available to candidates in all the member countries. Currently, the Council offers only one international examination—the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), which replaced the SC/GCE Ordinary and GCE Advanced Level examinations.

WASSCE is conducted twice a year, May/June for school candidates and November/December for private candidates.

Detailed timetables are usually made available to candidates at least six months before the commencement of the examinations. Registration of candidates is done electronically for both the school and private candidates' examinations.

The WASSCE was introduced as part of the educational reform programmes of member countries. The maiden edition was conducted in The Gambia in 1998. The examination was later taken in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Liberia in 1999, 2000, 2006 and 2013 respectively.

One unique feature of WASSCE is that it combines school-based continuous assessment scores with the Council's own terminal assessment scores on a ratio of 30:70.

In its determination to improve the process of conducting examinations in the member countries, the Council deploys the latest technology in all areas of its operations. One area where the organisation has taken a major stride is in the acquisition of **RESULT HOSTING AND WEBSITE FACILITY** which makes it possible for the results of its examinations to be viewed on the internet. The National Office in each of the five member countries has successfully launched the facility. The websites are:

The Gambia	–	www.waecgambia.org
Ghana	–	www.waecgh.org
Liberia	–	www.liberiawaec.org
Nigeria	–	www.waecdirect.org
Sierra Leone	–	www.waecsierra-leone.org

The Council has also advanced its use of technology with the development and introduction of ONLINE REGISTRATION for its examinations. This system enables schools to register their candidates from their various locations through the internet. Private candidates can also register online. With this facility, candidates can verify their names and also obtain their examination numbers immediately after registration. Access to the facility in each member country is through the following address:

- The Gambia – www.waecgambia.org
- Ghana – www.waecgh.org
- Liberia – www.liberiawaec.org
- Nigeria – www.waeconline.org.ng
- Sierra Leone – www.waecsierra-leone.org

STRUCTURE OF THE COUNCIL

Part of the Council's strength is its well-developed committee structure. WAEC's committees, and Council itself, are made up of some of the best men and women in the various fields of human endeavour in the sub-region, particularly in education. There are about seventy committees working on various aspects of the Council's activities at the local and international levels. These are in addition to the over 100 subject panels that operate from time to time to review developments in the different subject examinations. All these ensure that the operations of the Council are meticulously performed and they make the Council an authority on educational issues.