

THIRTEEN YEARS AND ALMOST FORTY VISITS

REFLECTIONS OF A PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR WORKING IN ISRAEL

PART TWO

In 1995/6 the Education Faculty of the University of Liverpool responded to an approach by an Israeli bloke who had spotted an opportunity. Schoolteachers in Israel, irrespective of their cultural, racial, religious and political backgrounds, were not only entitled to a year long sabbatical every seven or so years but also to a wage increment and improved pension if they had a masters degree. There was a demand for such degrees. It could not be fulfilled within Israel. Universities in Israel had the power to prevent what in the UK we used to call Teacher Training Colleges awarding masters degrees. Demand exceeded supply and control of the supply was in the hands of the established universities of Israel.

A number of overseas universities, including Liverpool, obtained approval to set up extensions in Israel to satisfy that demand, bringing down on our heads annual inspections within Israel by a body controlled by the home universities. They were the kind of inspections that concentrated upon ensuring that you stuck to what you originally said you would be doing, including using the same texts. As it is impossible to teach creatively by sticking to the script we didn't; but we said we did.

At first the programme involved a summer school in Liverpool and a winter school in Israel. After a short while it was realised that it was far cheaper for the students if all the work was done in Israel. There was, however, a lovely Friday night in Liverpool's oldest synagogue when the place was full of locals and Muslims, Christians and Jews from Israel all together. This could have been the synagogue that Herbert Samuel, first Governor General of Palestine, went to when young. Liverpool being Liverpool, his family would have had to walk past a Welsh church to get there.

For the first six months my involvement was peripheral but after a while the programme was brought inside my area of responsibility. I realised that it required detailed costing and that cost had to be demonstrably linked to a plan to always work on the improvement of quality.

On arrival I found waiting for me in my hotel room some details of an extra programme I was there to validate. I noticed that the person I had gone there to train to become an associate tutor, as a preliminary to validating the programme, had already told his students, none of whom were registered with us, that they would get a qualification from the University. He had been teaching a programme that had not been approved. When we arrived for the meeting I was further disappointed to discover that, despite repeated messages about how I wanted to proceed, the table was groaning with food and there seemed to be no intention of doing any work. I felt that they believed that they had simply bought the right to use our name. The person I was supposed to train was a well-known professor in Israel who's CV was so long

you could have wall papered our house with it. Perhaps he thought he was above all this.

A few days later my deputy who did most of the heavy lifting on the programme in its early days had to meet a student we had decided to fail after he had re-submitted an earlier failing piece of work. He was an internationally famous football referee. When he said he should be allowed to continue she told him that his first fail was his yellow card and his second was his red card; the possibility that we might do this and require him to take the work seriously seemed not to have crossed his mind.

For me it was the response to such incidents that was most important. It was not simply a case of me/us insisting upon a high level of quality but the realisation by all involved that doing so was fulfilling. I don't wish to make extravagant claims but the programme brought together tutors and students with widely differing religious, ethnic, political and cultural backgrounds and provided the opportunity to create personal and professional fulfilment.

In Part Three a Palestinian gets an international prize.

Cliff Jones August 7th 2019