

Biography of George Turnbull – ‘the exams doctor’

George left school at 15 and spent a year in further education on a pre-apprenticeship course for the building industry. He served an apprenticeship in carpentry and joinery, for five years, and attended evening classes three nights per week and day release classes for one day a week.

By the end of that period he had an HNC in building and Full Tech Cert (City & Guilds). He trained as a teacher in Scotland and taught mostly at Bearsden Academy for 11 years. During that time he returned to part-time study to gain an HNC in Mechanical Engineering and a BSc (hons) in the same discipline from Strathclyde University - by entering directly into the third year of a four-year full-time course as a mature student.

George joined the Associated Examining Board (AEB) as a professional officer in 1977 to administer A and O levels. He was involved in the development of new examinations and modes of assessment there until 1986 when appointed Director of Public Relations. He is a member of the Institute of Public Relations (MIPR) and The Chartered Institute of Management (MCMI).

The new role at the AEB included press, publicity and liaison with employers. He was responsible for the concept, introduction, implementation and development of a high-profile Annual Seminar and Awards – now in its nineteenth year - sponsored by industry to recognise outstanding performance in A level examinations and the introduction, editing and circulation of three magazines: *Language Matters*, *Science Matters* and *Business Matters*, through sponsorship he arranged with Barclays Bank. That partnership led also to the introduction of a publication called *How to do better in exams*, of which he was the co-author. Hundreds of thousands were given away free each year to schools, on request, until the sponsorship came to an end.

George became recognised as an authoritative spokesperson on examinations and education generally throughout the late 1980s and the 1990s and had by far the lion’s share of being spokesperson, officially or otherwise, on behalf of examining boards. Media coverage was extensive and world-wide on many occasions through the broadcast and print media. He has appeared on most high profile programmes, from *The Big Breakfast* to *Newsnight* and the *Today Programme* on a regular basis and written extensively in national papers and journals on education both here and in the USA.

For a number of years he was responsible for writing and issuing the news release for the national A level results for all boards, in the days before the Joint Council for General Qualifications (JCGQ) and the use of public relations’ companies.

In 2000 he was appointed Head of Public Affairs for the AQA and the JCGQ for a two-year period, without the use of the PR company previously appointed by JCGQ, or any other, to cover the introduction of the new A levels and the transition of the AQA from an alliance to a unitary body.

In 2004 he left the AQA on an early-retirement package which had been agreed on his appointment to the dual Public Affairs’ roles. He is now self-employed and advising a number of bodies on public affairs’ issues. He continues to write for national papers and broadcasts on educational issues: in particular with reference to examinations and study skills.

His English teacher was Alastair MacLean, the author.

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