

INTRODUCTION

Following the wishes of Commonwealth Education Ministers, the Commonwealth Secretariat has given high priority to technical education and industrial training, and in 1966 organized a Commonwealth Conference on the Education and Training of Technicians which was held at the Huddersfield College of Education (Technical). Taking their lead from this Conference, and endorsing its recommendations, the Fourth and Fifth Commonwealth Education Conferences gave a more specific remit to the Secretariat to develop activities in support of technician education. The practical training of technicians in industry and the training of technical teachers are two areas in which the Secretariat has been investigating a generally inadequate provision of facilities.

In 1974 the Secretariat commissioned Mr A. MacLennan, former Principal of the Huddersfield College of Education (Technical) and host to the 1966 Conference, to write a book which would develop and update the thinking of that Conference. This was published under the title "Educating and Training Technicians" in December 1975. The Secretariat also saw the need to provide key personnel in this area with opportunities to exchange views, examine pressing needs and problems, and identify possible solutions. It was thought that this could best be done in the form of a seminar or workshop conducted on a regional basis.

The Hong Kong Government kindly offered to host such a seminar for the Commonwealth countries in the two great regions of Asia and the Pacific. Throughout 1976, planning of the seminar proceeded in conjunction with the Hong Kong Department of Education. In Hong Kong a working party was set up to carry preparations forward in greater detail. The Commonwealth Secretariat wishes to record its gratitude to the Department, to the Hong Kong Polytechnic and to the members of the working party for their meticulous and comprehensive preparations.

The objectives of the seminar were to consider the various ways in which the partnership between technical education and industry can be developed in order to make education and training more effective; to study information contributed by each participating country about its training legislation, organization and institutions; to exchange ideas about how industry can best provide practical training complementary to institutional courses; to discuss standards and content of technical education, as well as examinations and awards; to consider specifically the technician level of education and training, the level at which the closest partnership between institutions and industry is vitally needed; and finally to recommend follow-up measures and arrangements which will be helpful to developing countries in meeting their needs for technical manpower, whether on their own or in co-operation with other Commonwealth countries. Eleven Commonwealth and

associated countries in Asia and the Pacific, besides Hong Kong, accepted invitations to send delegates to the seminar: Bangladesh, Brunei, Fiji, India, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tonga, and Western Samoa. An observer from Nigeria also attended by invitation.

It was decided to organize the seminar in the form of three separate projects, and to sub-divide each of these projects into four constituent topics. The forty delegates and observers were divided into four separate groups to consider these topics, and each group was assigned to make an appraisal of present situations, both in national and general terms, and consider possible improvements or innovations in the relevant legislation, organizations, institutions, and arrangements for technician training.

OPENING CEREMONY

The seminar was held in the Lee Gardens Hotel, Hong Kong, between 28 September and 7 October, 1976 and was opened by Dr the Honourable S.Y. Chung, Senior Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council, leading industrialist, and Chairman of the Polytechnic Board of Governors, who was introduced by the Honourable Kenneth W.J. Topley, Director of Education. Dr Chung referred to the development gap between the advanced and the developing countries, which lay particularly in the disparity in levels of science and technology between these two groups. He pointed out that, in order to narrow the gap, the recipient country must have the capacity and capability to accept a transfer of technology. Hong Kong had to follow the footsteps of the industrially advanced countries so that it could be competitive world-wide, in terms of price, quality and technology. For this reason, Dr Chung saw the development of technical education and industrial training as being of vital importance to the future well-being of Hong Kong. He said that, by the end of the 1970s, Hong Kong should be able to provide sufficient technical education facilities for a total enrolment of 50,000 full-time, part-time day and evening students. The Government and industry were making joint efforts to provide facilities to this end.

In thanking Dr Chung for his opening remarks, and the Hong Kong Government for hosting the seminar and placing generous resources at its disposal, Mr B.F.C. Fong, Assistant Director, Education Division, Commonwealth Secretariat, mentioned, inter alia, that the report of the seminar would be placed before the Commonwealth Education Ministers at the Seventh Commonwealth Education Conference in Accra, Ghana, in March 1977; they would be interested especially in the practical actions which delegates recommended as a result of their deliberations. Mr Fong asked the seminar to place the emphasis of discussions and recommendations on the technician level. He recognised that the less developed countries were only now beginning to introduce education and training at this level, but they in particular might be able to benefit from measures of regional co-operation which he hoped would be among the recommendations of the seminar. He made it clear that the Commonwealth Secretariat, when sponsoring education seminars or conferences, aimed to ensure that practical action would result in some form or other, or preferably in several forms, which would help to solve or ease problematical situations faced by member countries.

On the proposal of Mr Fong, Mr Topley, leader of the Hong Kong delegation, was elected Chairman of the seminar by general acclaim.