

COMMONWEALTH CO-OPERATION IN EDUCATION
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SCIENCE EDUCATION

The paper presented on the above subject gave an overview of the activities of the Education Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat and its relationship to other bodies. Special emphasis was placed on co-operation in science education between member countries within the South Pacific area.

Collection and Dissemination of Information

Ways in which the Secretariat acts as a clearing-house for information about educational development were explained. Information is collected and disseminated (a) through staff liaison visits to, and attendance at conferences in, various countries; (b) from visitors to the Secretariat; (c) through correspondence, journals, periodicals, and conference reports; and (d) through special studies and surveys undertaken by the Secretariat. It was noted with pleasure that in each member country the Ministry of Education now has a "desk-officer" who works closely with the Secretariat in the collection and dissemination of educational information.

Attention was drawn to the fact that although Secretariat publications are copyrighted, permission to republish them locally is usually granted, if requested, at no charge.

Meetings

The scope of these activities range from triennial ministerial conferences, through pan-Commonwealth specialist conferences to smaller regional workshops, seminars and symposia on special topics in education. It was explained that the Secretariat is paying increasing attention to the seminars/workshops such as this one, where some measure of training is provided. It is envisaged that this type of meeting would lead to participants going home and training other people in the subjects covered by the workshop.

Training

The Commonwealth Secretariat, with the support of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) provides support for training of personnel in Third World countries in the following ways:

(a) Bursaries or scholarships enable personnel, particularly middle-level personnel, to train at existing courses in other Third World countries. The courses at the Regional Educational Centre for Science and Mathematics (RECSAM) in Malaysia, and the Colombo Plan Staff College for Technical Education in Singapore, were cited as examples.

(b) Provision of consultants to assist in training programmes.

(c) Organization of special regional courses such as the one held in Fiji from May to July 1978 for the Pacific Region on educational administration and supervision.

(d) Educational visits for personnel to examine special areas of interest in other developing countries. Emphasis is now being given to attachment to an institution rather than to brief visits.

The function and role of CFTC was explained. In particular, it was noted that CFTC funds are not available for capital projects, and the training generally supported is limited to Third World Commonwealth countries.

Teaching About the Commonwealth

As a result of strong support given by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1977, the Secretariat is mounting educational programmes to improve knowledge and understanding of the modern Commonwealth and the activities undertaken within its framework.

Commonwealth Associations

The Secretariat offers support to some non-governmental organizations such as the Commonwealth Association of Science and Mathematics Educators (CASME) and the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa.

Inter-Regional Co-operation

The presence of representatives from Guyana and Malaysia was used to illustrate how we can learn from experimentation, successes and failures in other regions.

Co-operation in Science Education in the Commonwealth Pacific Countries

From earlier discussions at the Workshop it was apparent that many problems of science teaching in the Pacific Region were similar to those in other parts of the Commonwealth. Accordingly, a number of recommendations for effective co-operation were made.