

Foreword

The Eighth Education Conference in Colombo from 5-13 August 1980 was significant not only for its splendid setting, magnificent opening ceremony and the cordiality of its proceedings but also for the important issues with which it was preoccupied. The Conference confirmed the continuing value of Commonwealth consultation, especially over issues which touch the heart of the Commonwealth association, and the importance of such dialogue in the appreciation of mutual problems.

Since 1974 when the Kingston Conference discussed "Managing Education - Innovation, Implementation and Consolidation", Education Ministers' Conferences have examined various educational themes. The Accra Conference (1977) considered the "Economics of Education" in the face of growing demands on and diminishing returns from national education budgets. At Colombo, Ministers discussed the theme "Education and the Development of Human Resources" against the stern backdrop of shrinking world economies. They welcomed with special pleasure the opportunity for consultation which their private session provided and agreed that the issues which they discussed, no less than the formal programme of the Conference, were a clear justification, if any were needed, for their meetings. With regard to the difficult question of overseas students' fees they agreed that a special process of consultation should be initiated and asked the Secretariat to set up a Commonwealth Consultative Group to examine ways by which student mobility between Commonwealth countries could be fostered and maintained. They also recognised the need for member countries to gear education more effectively to the major priorities of national development policies if education is to fulfil its essential contribution in the economic and social fields.

The Conference endorsed a programme of continuing educational co-operation in many areas such as science, mathematics, technical education, higher education, universal primary and teacher education, book development and educational media, as this Report sets out. In addition, it recommended initiatives in new areas such as non-formal and special education and the education of women and girls. As an essential strategy for determining priorities for action in such a broad spectrum, Ministers outlined criteria including programmes which break important new ground, activities designed to strengthen regional approaches, programmes in the dissemination of educational information, and activities in support of Commonwealth associations in the field of education. Recognising the importance of science, mathematics, technical and vocational education to the development of both the individual and our societies as well as the mutual affinity between these areas of education, the Conference recommended that the next pan-Commonwealth specialist conference should be devoted to the subject of science and technical education with a view to assisting young people in their personal development and in the preparation for the world of work.

The Conference was launched by the President of Sri Lanka and encouraged by the special honour of the presence of both the President and Prime Minister at the inaugural ceremony. The warm and spontaneous tributes which were paid to the host country for so successful a Conference were a reflection of the quality of the dialogue and a recognition of the valuable exchange of experiences which had taken place. These are central to Commonwealth cooperation in education.

In commending this Report to governments, I am delighted and privileged to record on behalf of the Secretariat and all my colleagues, my own appreciation of Sri Lanka's generosity, the excellence of the facilities provided and the warmth of her welcome. I am confident that the recommendations made by the Conference will constitute an essential step in furthering multilateral and bilateral cooperation in education, as well as contributing to the efforts of each member country in making education a stable basis from which to promote national development.

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