

# Summing Up

## *Sir Roy Marshall*

Chairman of the Commonwealth Education Liaison Committee

It has become the practice for the Chairman of the Commonwealth Education Liaison Committee to sum up the proceedings of Commonwealth Education Conferences, and this is the second occasion on which I have been charged with the responsibility of discharging that function. It is an honour and a privilege which I greatly appreciate.

Clearly the task of summarising the proceedings of a Conference that has occupied seven full working days out of the last ten presents difficult problems of choice, particularly when the area of choice is as large as it is. For during the first four working days of this Conference we had eight committees of officials and two meetings of Chief Professional Officers which examined in depth the programmes of the Education Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat, appraised their proposals for a further programme of work for the next three years, and made proposals of their own to the same end. And during the last three working days we have had Ministers not only reviewing these proposals but also playing leading roles in examining the general theme of the Conference, "Education and the Development of Human Resources", in all its aspects.

In exercising my choice I am very conscious of the perils of repetition. Let me therefore indicate some of the things that I shall not repeat. I shall not provide any account of past Commonwealth Education Conferences: the Commonwealth Secretary-General in his brilliant opening address referred to the themes and outcomes of some of them and you will find my effort at a summary in the Report of the Seventh Conference which took place in Accra in 1977. I shall not give any account of the role and functions of the Commonwealth Education Liaison Committee: I said something about that in my summing up of the Seventh Conference and you will have heard from the Secretary-General's address that the CELC celebrated its twentieth anniversary last year and the Commonwealth Secretariat marked the occasion by producing a little pamphlet about the origin and work of the Committee. Nor shall I burden you with an attempt to précis the admirably succinct Report of the Officials' Meeting and the discussions to which the lead papers on our general theme gave rise.

Instead I shall restrict myself to some general observations about the impact which the Conference has made upon me over the entire period of its duration. It has been a valuable and important Conference. The

subjects considered were relevant and challenging. The rate of participation in the discussions was high, and the quality of the contributions was good. The location could not have been bettered, and the facilities of the Conference Centre were some of the best that I have experienced. This made it easy for delegates to renew old friendships and to make new ones, and to use the Conference for the full and frank exchange of views which is so important to the success of meetings of this kind.

It seemed to me that during this Conference the Secretariat came of age in a very gratifying way. At one stage delegates rightly took exception to the fact that they were being asked to approve recommendations, the substance of which they had discussed, but the terms they had neither seen or considered. It will stand to the lasting credit of the Secretariat that they got the message and so rearranged the programme that delegates were given time to see, consider, and approve the recommendations which have been incorporated into the Report of the Officials' Meeting and endorsed with some modifications by this plenary session.

Undoubtedly the most important development at this Conference arose from the recognition by its members that areas of national concern can and do give rise to genuine Commonwealth issues which need to be discussed in a sensible and constructive way. I refer, of course, to the whole matter of the level of overseas students' tuition fees. That this was an issue of national domestic concern was not and could not be denied, for two-thirds of the 27 Commonwealth countries which provided information for an ACU survey have exercised their sovereign powers to charge overseas students higher tuition fees than home students. What was needed, therefore, was an effort to show that the situation had gone beyond the point of purely domestic concern and had entered the sphere of general Commonwealth interest. The Commonwealth Secretariat at the instance of High Commissioners of Commonwealth Governments, and the Association of Commonwealth Universities at the instance of its members, made such efforts which resulted in the issue being placed on the agenda for this Conference. Two factors made the matter one of Commonwealth concern: first, the value of the mobility of students (and for that matter of staff) in building up links between the citizens of Commonwealth countries and furthering co-operation between the countries themselves; and second, for developing countries, the importance of access to the higher education institutions of developed countries. This was one of the most valuable forms of aid, and it was feared that its abrupt curtailment would damage the development plans of developing countries, perhaps irretrievably.

It was against this background that officials recommended that the Secretariat should set up as soon as possible a consultative group to examine ways by which student mobility between Commonwealth countries could be fostered and maintained and to liaise with the Association of Commonwealth Universities for this purpose. It will take time for such a group to be established, to consider the matters referred to it, and to make recommendations. Accordingly the officials recommended some actions that governments should consider taking and which could be taken without undue delay. First was the fixing of fees for Commonwealth students at reasonable levels. No attempt was made to quantify what constituted a reasonable level. But I think it is true to say that the underlying assumption was that the level should fall below that of the full economic costs of their tuition for the courses which they are following. Second was the recommendation to treat three categories of

students as home students for tuition fees purposes. The categories in the form now approved are: scholars under the CSFP; students receiving national awards and those receiving awards from recognised international agencies; and an agreed number of other students from Commonwealth developing countries which do not have adequate educational facilities of their own.

It has to be recognised that there is further action to be taken in this area. What is needed is for discussions to take place as a matter of urgency with a view to finding a common framework (somewhat on the lines of the CSFP) within which Commonwealth governments can make bilateral arrangements to achieve their objectives. And what is important is that when we get back home we should not lose the momentum that has been gained at this Conference.

The other lasting impression that I shall take away from this Conference is that the Commonwealth has taken important steps to meet the challenges not merely of the next three years but of the next decade and beyond it.

The Conference has emphasised the importance of providing, in other ways and through other structures, education for those who have not had the advantage of formal education, and it has recommended the setting up of a variety of programmes to achieve this aim. It has stressed the need for special education for certain groups, particularly women and girls. I regard this as most important; for if in the years ahead job opportunities continue to decrease, special efforts will need to be made to preserve the advances that have occurred in many countries in anti-discrimination legislation.

The Conference paid particular attention to the advancement of mathematics and science education, and it is probably not going too far to say that some of the most innovative thinking arose out of the deliberations of the committee that dealt with this subject.

Not unnaturally the balance of expenditure between the different tiers of education was frequently mentioned in the discussion of our general theme. As a university man, I must confess a bias in their favour, but it did seem to me that we were perhaps overly disposed to reject the existence of any correlation between expenditure in higher education and growth in the modern economic sector. What is often overlooked is that supplies of cheap energy on a long-term basis are an essential precondition of the continuing expansion of the modern economic sector. The oil crises of the last decade provided a set-back; but if one takes the view that the most pressing need for mankind is the development of a cheap, abundant and safe source of energy, then I think at least the research side of universities must rank high in the order of priorities of educational expenditure, for that sort of advance is not going to be made in the primary and secondary schools.

There is much more that I could say, but time presses and I hope that I have said enough to provide an adequate snapshot of some of the highlights of this Conference.

There remain two things that I should like to say. The first is to associate myself and the Commonwealth Education Liaison Committee with the expressions of appreciation with which this Conference will end. And the second is to convey a message of hope that we shall go away from this Conference satisfied that some important things have been achieved but that much remains to be done. I am reminded of the story

of the inexperienced Minister of Agriculture who was addressing an audience of young farmers and having great difficulty in explaining to them why they should not expect his policies to have immediate results. At last in exasperation he said, "Look here, if I put a bull in a field with a lot of young heifers, you wouldn't expect to see a herd of calves next morning, would you?" "No", said a voice from the back of the hall, "but you would see a lot of contented faces". I hope, Mr. Chairman, that we shall go away contented but not complacent.