

The Future of INSET in the Commonwealth

The gap between
goals and
achievement

The Seventh Commonwealth Education Conference, held in Accra in 1977 recommended that initial training, induction and in-service training of teachers should be recognised as aspects of one on-going process of teacher education; and teacher education should be considered as inseparable from the process of curriculum change and development. It also saw co-ordination of all education and training resources to be vital if the piece-meal approach to teacher education was to be overcome. The importance of these recommendations has been confirmed by the present study. Sadly however the study has also recorded how limited has been the progress made towards implementing them even in the most advantaged Commonwealth countries.

It is apparent that, however desirable in principle such recommendations may be, there are very real problems to be overcome in seeking to systematise the planning and provision of teacher education programmes which differ widely in terms of their objectives, target groups, responsible agencies and methodologies. The task is further complicated by the need for training to be viewed in conjunction with such other concerns as administrative structures, supervisory and inspectorial procedures, provision of support services (resource and teachers' centres for instance), professional organisation, and career structures for education staff.

So complex is this task that it may indeed be inappropriate in principle to seek to examine in-service teacher education separately but it may be argued that in present circumstances the qualitative improvement in staff development which is sought can be most effectively approached from an INSET perspective. It is this perspective which in recent years has thrown most light on the multi-dimensional nature of the task and appears

to offer the most flexible range of tools to deal with it.

Systematic
thinking
about INSET

However, it must also be recognised that the systematisation of INSET may itself be immensely demanding, and that there may be some danger that the consequent strain upon designated co-ordinating agencies may be such as to impede efficient and prompt response to newly arising needs and to cast INSET in a mould as inflexible as much initial training. The benefits to be derived from involving a variety of agencies, of encouraging local and regional initiative of matching large scale programmes with a range of smaller activities, and of involving teachers and schools more directly with such activities, are not to be lightly discarded. What may be required therefore is not systematic provision in the sense that all activities are totally planned, co-ordinated and controlled by a single body but rather more systematic thinking about the provision of INSET.

Such systematic thinking would embrace a number of elements, all of which would be considered in the light of a country's own circumstances.

(a) Of the highest priority would be an overall definition of training purposes and priorities as a guide to the allocation of resources during a planning period, ensuring that official provision is in line with the guidelines thereby provided but not excluding the possibility of other activities being undertaken with or without official aid to meet local or unanticipated needs as they arise.

(b) In relation to each general purpose defined, there will need to be a clear analysis of the nature of the problem (context evaluation) and definition of the whole range of tasks which may need to be undertaken to meet the problem. These tasks will include training but also non-training activities such as are mentioned above, and will together constitute an overall and coherent strategy.

(c) The nature of the training to be provided would be determined in the light of the tasks to be performed and the existing competency profiles of the staff intended to perform them (input analysis). The proper phasing of related programmes for different categories of staff requiring training in order to achieve a particular purpose (for example, heads, inspectors, subject teachers in relation to a curriculum innovation) would be worked out, and consideration given to the procedures for selection and motivation of participants. Where a long term purpose is under consideration, it would be appropriate to consider to what extent the training needs might best be achieved through modification of initial training, or through appropriate induction or in-service training. Indeed without such a review it is unlikely in many countries that adequate resources could be released for the induction and in-service stages of training.

(d) Viewed in this way the appropriate processes of training to be offered by the most suitable agency might be defined and the most advantageous combinations and sequences of training developed. Whole group or individual programmes, courses, workshops, consultancy or supervisory activities, distance or residential provision, central, regional or local locations might be called into play as required.

It is by no means clear through what organisation forms at both central and local level this kind of systematic decision making may best be achieved. It is however certain that without a strong commitment on the part of central authorities, the forces of inertia including vested interests and hard administrative boundaries are likely to reduce seriously the effectiveness of whatever co-ordinating machinery is established. Any body set up to systematise training provision will itself require status and weight to operate effectively across current administrative frameworks, and close links with the highest level

policy making groups in the education sector. It will also require adequate time and resources in order to implement agreed policy and to prepare for impending policy changes. A number of different approaches is emerging in various Commonwealth countries and these should be monitored with interest.

Research and evaluation

Furthermore, it is clear that any rational decision making process will be dependent upon the availability of relevant data. The study has drawn particular attention to the importance of analysing the cost effectiveness of various forms and combinations of training in particular contexts, without which discussion of innovative strategies may be ill founded. Few Commonwealth countries can be happy about the present state of our knowledge. Indeed, in many, even the most basic data relating to INSET, such as the resources currently allocated, the number and kinds of programme mounted, the rates of participation among various categories of education staff, let alone the effective outcomes of training, is simply not available in an immediately utilisable form. If INSET is to be adequately implemented and improved, it must be the subject of research and development studies in its own right. At present the bulk of such research is being carried on in the older Commonwealth countries, but even there research is not sufficient. All countries need to review the extent to which research and development is carried on and what priorities for such study should be arrived at. Particularly, but not exclusively in countries preoccupied with the continuing presence of large numbers of unqualified and underqualified teachers, there is an urgent need to operationalise the concept of qualified teacher, for example to distinguish between formal academic criteria and criteria defining competence in the classroom, in order to reorientate training provision. Attention has also been drawn in this study to the particular need for more effective modes of evaluation and follow-up with closer attention to the means whereby feedback may be passed on to planning and providing agencies.

International co-operation

The study further shows that within the Commonwealth there are countries which face broadly similar problems. Whilst caution should be exercised in adopting techniques and strategies developed in one country as solutions for other countries, it is clearly desirable that there be substantial exchange of experience and information between countries. The number of international seminars and conferences held with this purpose is already impressive in some regions and the role of the Commonwealth Secretariat is clearly significant. But it must be noted that the process of sharing experience is seriously hindered by the inadequacy for practical purposes of most existing reports and surveys and particularly the dearth of useful case studies. If we are to learn from the experience of others, we need full understanding of the factors which in their situation were responsible for the degree of success or failure achieved by particular programmes. Case studies need to be analytical and not merely descriptive. More effective ways and means of informing practitioners about the most up to date thinking and experience of their counterparts in other countries and the exchange of information should not be limited to the higher levels of staff hierarchies.

International co-operation which has been noted particularly in respect of the smaller island states clearly has much to offer in terms both of the conduct of research and of provision of training. Substantial regional facilities extending to non-Commonwealth countries have been noted particularly in south-east Asia, but recent years have seen a fully understandable trend towards 'going it alone'. Consequently it may be that the potential of co-operative developments may not be fulfilled, and existing international ventures may be regarded as merely expedients. The large scale of need and the limited scale of available resources appears to demand that serious attention be paid to the sharing of undertakings.

International co-operation in INSET mainly takes the form of study programmes particularly

in the older Commonwealth countries offered under technical assistance programmes or, increasingly through national scholarship programmes. Whilst in the past a high proportion of such studies have been career focused, leading to recognised qualifications, but have often been criticised as being both increasingly expensive and as not meeting local system or precise job needs, there has been a strong move towards tailor made programmes, often of short duration and practical focus, to meet specified needs of sending governments. There is likely to be a continuing role for such programmes which have much to offer provided that they are utilised for purposive staff development. Attention is further drawn to a number of trends identified in the regional studies which may be of wider significance.

Decentralisation A number of countries which have previously operated a centralised education system are now beginning to adopt decentralised and, indeed, devolved administrative and decision making structures. In part, this trend has arisen from growing awareness that the more power-coercive approaches to educational reform have not been particularly effective in modifying practice at local and grass roots levels. It is widely held that the much needed qualitative improvement of education will depend upon the professionalism of staff at all levels of the system and that the high degree of professionalism which is thought necessary can best be achieved through enabling staff to participate in making the decisions which they will then be required to implement. Processes of consultation which may thus be regarded as a form of INSET may be complemented by other forms of training of a less formal kind than has commonly been the norm. It is anticipated that this broad and less formal conception of staff development will be increasingly influential, at least in those countries which have or will overcome the problem of large numbers of unqualified or underqualified teachers.

The regional studies have however underlined the fact that the achievement of professionalism must also depend on the quality of the socio-economic status of the teacher, his working and

living conditions, and the rewards/career structure within which he works. It should also be recognised that the strength of hierarchical structures which characterise most education systems is in large measure culturally determined, and that both the degree and modes of devolution and consultation in particular countries should reflect this fact.

School-focused
INSET

There is a second important trend in a number of countries towards making INSET more relevant to the practical working needs of teachers, heads, administrators and supervisors, in which respect possibly the most potent and challenging innovation has been the development of school-focused INSET. There is general agreement, particularly in the older Commonwealth countries, that school-focused approaches are flexible, popular and effective, and they have been greeted with widespread approval and interest because they tackle problems of relevance and significance to teachers, schools and communities alike. Moreover they promise to have a powerful motivating and energising effect without making excessive demands on resources. It is interesting to note that the one large scale development in INSET in the Caribbean (Grenada) places the emphasis on school-based training, replacing college-based training, in the clear expectation that the former will prove more efficient. Nonetheless, caution is in order. School-focused approaches are as yet relatively untried and few examples have been evaluated. Insofar as they are adopted as a means of ensuring the effective implementation of centrally developed policies and curricula, as in Canada, then they are compatible with the centralised system of control. However, if the Australian and British approach is adopted, whereby school-focused INSET is an integral feature of a school's development of its own policy, organisation, curriculum and staff, then they are more compatible with a decentralised system of control. In either case, they depend for their successful adoption on the availability of considerable and appropriate external support from the employing authority and INSET agencies.

Personal needs
of teachers

Underlying school-focused INSET is a concern of a similar kind about the extent to which system needs should be allowed to take precedence over the needs of individual teachers for professional development and renewal. If the teaching service is to be a socially aware and critical profession rather than a rather low level group of pedagogical civil servants paid to implement but not criticise or adapt, then an appropriate balance has to be struck which ensures that the legitimate aspirations of individual teachers for career development and further personal education are met. One practical expression of such a policy is to ensure that university courses in advanced educational studies, and the teachers who wish to attend them, are adequately funded.

A second and more significant expression would be to seek to reconcile individual and system needs within INSET provision generally, and it is widely being argued that this may best be achieved through participation by education staff in the identification of needs and the design, provision, evaluation and follow-up of INSET programmes. Thereby, it is suggested, not only will personal needs be adequately recognised, but programmes may achieve greater practical relevance, participants will be more highly motivated both to learn and to apply what they have learned, and a greater sense of professionalism will be created. Once again the arguments, though attractive, must be viewed with some caution. Much will depend upon the spirit in which the various partners enter into participation, the extent to which providing agencies are able and genuinely willing to share decision making, and the extent to which teachers and other clienteles are able to respond positively and constructively. Much will also depend upon the extent to which effective consultative machinery is already in use since the resource and logistic implications of consultative approaches are very considerable.

A third expression of such a policy would be to encourage INSET initiatives on the part of professional unions and associations. At this time such participation is very limited in most countries but where it has been significant as

in Sri Lanka, Canada and in the Caribbean, the provision has been largely directed to career development or to subject oriented courses relevant to the interests and aspirations of teachers. If a greater sense of professionalism is required in teachers, it seems appropriate that professional associations, both at national and local level, should be more highly developed, and INSET might afford opportunities for such development. The recommendations of the Caribbean regional workshop in 1977 that where teachers or subject associations did not exist, they should be created, and that teachers' unions should assume responsibility for providing advisory support services for their members and should not allow negotiating activities to outweigh other considerations, are of wider than Caribbean significance.

Institutional developments

A widely noted trend of great interest has been the recognition of the importance of more effective support services for teachers which has largely taken the place of the older concern for effective supervision and inspection. In some countries, the role of inspectorates is increasingly coming to be viewed as advisory and training. A more general interest has been shown, however, in the establishment of local or regional education, resource, or teachers' centres. Although differing in their structure and functions in various countries, these institutions share in common the intention that they serve an energising and vitalising function close to the grass roots of the education system, and that they should become major centres for INSET provision. The potential significance of such centres is great and merits a special comparative study as a means of informing decision makers of the range of alternatives available to them. Consideration would have to be given to the extent to which such centres should be organised as arms of the central authority and the degree of autonomy which might be allowed them, and to the manner in which regional or main centres may develop outreach to the schools. Malaysia's experience of its attempt to develop local centres in association with regional resource centres may be particularly worthy of close study.

A rather different trend in some countries is the development of specialised institutions for the training of educational administrators whether by regional centres as in Britain or by national centres as in India and Malaysia, and envisaged in Bangladesh. Whilst such provision may appear to run counter to the decentralisation trend described above, it is more properly to be viewed as a complementary development which will make decentralisation more possible through encouraging new perceptions of the tasks of administration at all levels of the education system.

Conclusion

This study of in-service teacher education in Commonwealth countries has sought to draw attention to a range of crucial issues in the vitally important field of staff development and to the considerable number of exciting developments which have been, often quietly, taking place in this field. Although brief, and largely confined to published material, it is hoped that the survey will provide further stimulus to the study of these problems and developments.