

COMMONWEALTH CO-OPERATION IN TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Paper Presented by the Education Division, Commonwealth Secretariat

This paper seeks to indicate areas in which the Commonwealth Secretariat can assist in promoting regional and Commonwealth Co-operation in the field of education, particularly technical education, and to identify the Secretariat's role.

The educational programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat can be described under two main heads: the collection and dissemination of information; and the organization of conferences, seminars, workshops and training courses.

Information

The Secretariat acts as a clearing house for information about educational developments in the Commonwealth. The collection of information is done in several ways; for example, through visits to Commonwealth countries, through correspondence, and through a large number of journals, periodicals, and documents which the Secretariat receives.

Whenever necessary, the Secretariat commissions specialists to obtain information in specialized fields. For instance, it was as a result of a commissioned study that A Survey of Technician Training in Commonwealth Countries in Asia was published.

The dissemination of information is achieved through reports of Secretariat seminars, workshops and conferences, as well as publications such as the Education in the Commonwealth series dealing with special areas of education e.g. correspondence education. Among other publications are titles such as Educating and Training Technicians and The Production of School Science Equipment.

Conferences, Seminars and Workshops

Commonwealth meetings dealing with Education are handled by the Education Division. They vary from triennial pan-Commonwealth conferences of Ministers of Education to specialist or study group conferences and smaller seminars and working committee meetings - all of which provide member nations of the Commonwealth with opportunities for the exchange of experience and information.

Training Activities

Training is provided and supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat in various ways. The following examples indicate the highlights:

- (a) Bursaries: The Secretariat encourages Commonwealth countries to send personnel to train at centres which are already in existence. Emphasis in training is mainly on middle-level personnel, and awards have been made for a wide variety of courses in technical and professional institutions. Training awards are also available for high-level personnel. The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan as well as the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-Operation are the main sources of such awards.
- (b) Regional Training: It is generally agreed that regional training is valuable for two main reasons. First, training takes place in the context of problems which are common to a particular region. Second, the cost of training can be reduced by avoiding the necessity of having a number of training centres for the training of a limited number of personnel. During the past two years the Secretariat has organized two regional courses, one in Africa on educational administration and supervision and the other in the Caribbean on book production. Later this month, a third course on educational administration and supervision for the South Pacific region is scheduled to begin in Suva, Fiji.
- (c) Educational Visits: The Secretariat has in the past provided a number of travel grants to enable personnel from developing countries to travel to other developing countries to examine special educational areas of interest. These visits have generally proved most useful. However, the emphasis is now shifting to training attachments which are seen as having a greater potential value than short-term visits.

Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa (CAPA)

Many polytechnics, and their principals or directors personally, are far from clear about the curricula, organization and administration needed to attain their objectives, and feel somewhat isolated, especially where they are unique in their countries. Several have suggested some form of association, especially in Africa.

The Seventh Commonwealth Education Conference held in Accra in 1977 recommended that the Secretariat should make arrangements to examine the establishment of an association of polytechnics in Commonwealth Africa. Accordingly, the Secretariat convened a meeting at the Kenya Polytechnic, Nairobi, in December, 1977. It was attended by directors and principals of polytechnics or comparable institutions, and senior Ministry of Education officials from nine Commonwealth African countries. The planning meeting unanimously endorsed the formation of a Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa. The report of the meeting has been published, and is available on request; arrangements are in hand to launch the Association in due course.

Commonwealth Industrial Training and Experience Programme (CITEP)

It has become clear to Commonwealth governments that one major source of weaknesses in technical education is a failure to complement polytechnic and college courses with appropriate practical training in industry. This is true at the level of professional technologists as well as that of technicians. Furthermore, when new technologies or new industries are introduced or about to be introduced into a country, the need for industrial training in another and probably more developed country arises. Existing international schemes for providing practical training and work experience in engineering and other areas involve movements mainly between developed countries or from developing to developed countries. Increased industrial-

isation in some of the developing Commonwealth countries has raised the problem of a new scope for more genuinely multi-lateral traffic.

The Seventh Commonwealth Conference recognized this problem and also recommended that "governments give their full support to a Commonwealth Exchange Scheme for Industrial Training and Experience". It recommended, however, that "the Secretariat should, in the first place, set up a working group to explore the feasibility and the modus operandi of this programme, on a basis analogous to that of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan."

The Secretariat has followed up the recommendation. It convened in London in February this year a meeting of ten persons with special knowledge of the subject drawn from Britain, Canada, Hong Kong, India, Kenya, Nigeria and Tanzania. A senior official of the International Labour Organization also attended the working group meeting. The report of the meeting is expected to be published shortly.

Teaching about the Commonwealth

There is a great deal of ignorance in Commonwealth countries about what the Commonwealth is and what it has to offer to member countries. Recognizing the importance of the matter, the Heads of Government meeting in June 1977 endorsed the recommendation of the Accra Ministers conference that teaching about the Commonwealth should be undertaken as a programme by the Secretariat. Action is in hand to implement this, beginning with the African and Caribbean regions.

Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC)

The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation of which I have already spoken is the major instrument of the Commonwealth Secretariat in the area of development. The Fund was set up in 1971 by a decision of Heads of Government to provide technical assistance to meet the priority needs of the developing member countries, associated states, dependent territories and inter-governmental organizations and agencies. It represents a major expression of the technical assistance role of the Secretariat. The Fund provides assistance and expert advice in specific fields. What distinguishes CFTC from many other aid agencies is that it is essentially a programme of mutual self-help in which the recipients are also donors. More than one-quarter of the resources used by the Fund are contributed by the developing countries. Nigeria is the third largest contributor today after Britain and Canada.

The operations of the CFTC are conducted through three main programmes. The one that is of immediate interest to us at this seminar is the Education and Training Programme. Its main thrust is aimed at the training of middle-level personnel from Commonwealth developing countries in other such countries, usually in the same region. The programme supplements national programmes and other schemes of co-operation by providing awards to enable developing countries to share their education and training facilities and assist in each others' development. A wide range of training activities is supported under the Programme, the institutions concerned varying from universities to trade schools. They include training attachments, study visits and participation in seminars and workshops which are developmentally oriented and have a substantial training element. Support is not generally given to participation in conferences which are merely intended for an exchange of information.

Conclusion

The Secretariat would be prepared to consider requests for support of national training programmes in the field of technical education, and in any of the fields of Education described so far, either through the provision of consultants to help in planning the programmes or supply of operational personnel to assist with the actual training. But more important, we will be pleased to consider provision of assistance to regional and pan-Commonwealth programmes relating to partnership between technical education and industry.