

Report of the Meeting of Chief Professional Officers

1. At the Sixth Commonwealth Education Conference, Chief Professional Officers greatly appreciated the opportunity of meeting together to exchange views from a professional standpoint, and expressed the wish that similar meetings would be arranged in the future. At this meeting in Accra, two issues arising out of the previous meeting in Kingston have been discussed, together with a number of topics of current interest.

Collection and Dissemination of Information

2. One function of the Commonwealth Secretariat is to serve as a clearing-house for information for member countries. The frequent requests the Secretariat receives for information on educational programmes and materials confirm that the Secretariat could play a very useful role in this regard if it received regularly from member countries important materials like annual reports on education, reports of commissions on education, journals, and other publications.

3. The meeting has considered ways by which the Commonwealth Secretariat can best collect the necessary information from member countries. It is noted that some of the information available to the Secretariat at the moment has been collected during visits by members of staff to member countries. These visits have been few and far between, with the staff having to take what advantage they can of their attendance at Commonwealth meetings held outside Britain to visit a few countries. The meeting is of the opinion that such visits are important and should be encouraged. *It therefore recommends that in addition to the occasional visits presently undertaken by the Secretariat staff, individual officers with special responsibilities for particular regions be enabled to pay regular visits to those regions to obtain first-hand information on developments in education.* To ensure that information collected by

a visiting Secretariat officer is retained in the Secretariat beyond his term of office, the meeting endorses the present system whereby reports of visits and other materials emanating from various countries are stored in "country boxes" in the Division's library. The Secretariat also receives reports on study visits undertaken by various individuals who are sponsored by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

4. Another way by which information is collected is through "country papers" submitted for Commonwealth meetings. Such papers are usually based on the theme of the meeting. Thus the country papers submitted in connection with the current conference are related to the theme of "the Economics of Education". It is recommended that the practice of preparing country papers for Commonwealth Education Conferences should continue, and that countries should be guided as to the kind of information required.

5. Related to the collection of information is the problem of ensuring that information from the Secretariat reaches the ministries, institutions and individuals who can best benefit from it. The present system whereby the Secretariat communicates with member countries through their respective High Commissions in London does not appear to be effective. It is suggested that in matters not relating to policy, the Secretariat could communicate directly with the relevant ministry or institution, and send information copies to the High Commission. In addition, attention is drawn to the need for the Secretariat's mailing list to be reviewed so as to ensure that individuals and organizations as well as ministries receive information materials.

6. It is our view that the number of copies per publication sent to ministries, particularly in federated states, should be increased. While the Education Division will do its best to increase the multiple copies it now sends to various countries, it is suggested that member countries

should assist the Secretariat to cut down its printing and mailing costs by:

- (a) furnishing the Secretariat with information on its present requirements;
- (b) continuing the present practice whereby the Secretariat mails additional copies of publications on request; and
- (c) taking advantage of the Secretariat's invitation to countries which wish to do so to reproduce its publications locally, in English or in a local language.

7. It is noted that in order to improve communication between the Secretariat and member countries, a few countries have appointed, within their Ministries of Education, officers with responsibility for Commonwealth Secretariat affairs. The meeting expresses its support for this arrangement and hopes that more countries will do something similar.

8. The Secretariat should take action, from time to time, to ensure satisfactory feedback from Commonwealth countries on the effectiveness of its dissemination of information. As for the dissemination of information within countries, this is best left to the countries themselves as they are in the best position to devise appropriate measures to overcome any bottlenecks that arise.

The Provision of Experts and Training Opportunities

9. In response to requests, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (C.F.T.C.) provides advisory and operational experts for key positions in member countries. There are at present about 200 to 300 experts on the C.F.T.C. list but the requests for experts in education has not been large. Other activities of the C.F.T.C. include awards for training attachments and study visits, and awards tenable at universities and professional, technical and vocational institutions. The meeting wishes to express its satisfaction with the C.F.T.C.'s emphasis on third country training and hopes it will continue.

Universal Primary Education

10. It is noted that in Nigeria (which submitted this topic for discussion) a number of problems

have arisen since universal primary education was launched in September 1976, and that some of them were unexpected. Among the problems have been delays in providing accurate information on children's age, practical difficulties in the recruitment and training of teachers, the logistics of providing learning materials for several million pupils, and the anticipated problem of finding employment for so many school leavers.

11. Nigeria is to be commended for the bold step it has taken in offering every child the opportunity to receive schooling. However, other countries planning to embark on a project of such magnitude should note the need to make realistic projections based on sufficient data. Experience shows that educational planners normally need at least five years to collect the relevant data before major country-wide projects can be successfully attempted. These countries should also seek answers to a number of fundamental issues; for example, what type of primary education should be offered? and should universal primary education be followed by free secondary schooling. It is suggested that though infrastructural differences need to be taken into account, educationists and policy makers in Nigeria might benefit from the conclusions arrived at by the Commission on universal primary education set up by the recent Conference of African Ministers of Education in Lagos. It is further suggested that the Commonwealth Secretariat might collect data on Canadian and other experiences on the subject with a view to helping countries that might need such information.

Training Facilities for Refugee Students from Southern Africa

12. The meeting notes that as part of the Special Commonwealth Programme, the Secretariat — through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation — administers the Commonwealth Rhodesia Scholarship Trust Fund. Under this Trust Fund, scholarships have been provided for 229 students from Zimbabwe in 15 Commonwealth developing countries. In addition, 100 Zimbabwean students living within Rhodesia are being assisted to pursue 'A' level and first degree courses by correspondence.

13. It is felt desirable that there should be a considerable expansion of Commonwealth assistance to Zimbabwe, including the provision of in-service training for persons designated for key positions in the public service, in the period leading up to the emergence of a legitimate Zimbabwe Government. It is encouraging to note that a number of governments have indicated willingness to offer more places in their institutes of learning to such students, and to provide, in due course, high-level in-service attachments. Stress is laid on the importance of increasing the financial resources and the number of training places available under the Programme, so that more assistance can be provided for the large number of well-qualified Zimbabwean applicants who currently lack opportunities to continue their studies.

14. There is a similar need for countries to offer financial support, and study and training opportunities, to Namibian refugee students under the Commonwealth Programme for Namibians. Since its establishment in 1975, the Programme has enabled 71 Namibians to pursue courses in five Commonwealth developing countries. It is noted, however, that the modest resources available to the Programme have been fully utilized for those students' support.

15. It is noted with appreciation that the United Kingdom Government has recently increased the number of its bilateral awards to

assist Namibians to pursue courses in technical education in the United Kingdom.

16. The meeting commends the Secretariat for the role it is playing in assisting students and trainees from Zimbabwe and Namibia, and asks the Secretariat to continue to keep governments informed of needs as they arise.

Specialist Conferences

17. Commonwealth Specialist Conferences in various educational fields have been held since 1961. They have been useful in that they study key educational issues in depth and make recommendations for action. Out of a number of proposed topics, the meeting recommends that the following themes be considered for future Specialist Conferences: (a) technical and science education with emphasis on technical education; and (b) non-formal education.

Future Meetings

18. The Secretariat appreciates the support given to this meeting and notes that Chief Professional Officers would like such meetings to be arranged at future Commonwealth Education Conferences.