

Preface

At their 1982 and 1983 meetings, Commonwealth Employment/Labour Ministers discussed how the diverse societies of Commonwealth countries might best realise the benefits of, and accommodate the changes from, applying new technologies, as well as learning from each other's experience in this field. They identified the management of technological change as being of critical importance in a context where rapid innovations in technology coincided with generally sluggish economic growth, so that technology seemed to threaten existing employment although offering the potential, at least, for economic revitalisation. They recommended to Commonwealth Heads of Government the establishment of a working group to examine member countries' experience in managing technological change to assist these countries in their planning, training and adjustment strategies. At New Delhi in November 1983, Heads of Government endorsed the Ministers' recommendation and confirmed the draft terms of reference submitted by the Commonwealth Secretary-General (see Appendix 2).

The Secretary-General constituted our Group in early 1984 and we met on four occasions before finalising this Report. At our third meeting we requested the Secretariat to report, on our behalf, to the June 1985 Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers of Employment/Labour, setting out the type of analysis we had been undertaking and the direction in which our thoughts were leading on those parts of our mandate which come within the purview of Ministers of Employment/Labour. In addition our Chairman addressed the Meeting. Ministers discussed his statement and the Secretariat's report, and made a number of comments which we found most useful. Our deliberations also benefited from papers drafted and presentations made by three consultants—Mr. John Evans of the European Trade Union Institute, Mr. Kurt Hoffman of the Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex, and Mr. N. P. Singh, Secretary, Technology Policy Implementation Committee, Government of India—to whom we would wish to express our thanks. Some of these papers will be published separately by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Our Report is in two volumes. In Volume I we first set out our general approach and summarise our recommendations. We then examine the evidence and consider the issues in more detail. Chapter 1 analyses the impact of new technologies on the economies and societies of countries, particularly developing countries, and concentrates on economic growth, employment and international trade. Chapter 2 spells out the policy implications of that analysis, and considers the principles and experiences of technology policies. Chapter 3 examines areas for international cooperation in technology and suggests a role for the Commonwealth in helping member countries to realise the economic and social benefits which new technologies can bring. In Volume II we annex some detailed technical material which complements the main body of the Report and which we felt will be useful for reference purposes.