

Introduction

Why a handbook for schools?

Commonwealth Day - the second Monday in March - falls on a school day in virtually every Commonwealth country. The date was chosen so that schools everywhere could take part in the observances and celebrations. Since 1977 schools all over the Commonwealth have organised special activities designed to enhance understanding of the Commonwealth and to provide shared enjoyment. The purpose of this handbook is to build on the initiatives of recent years and to propose further ideas which can extend the scope of schools' activities.

Who is the handbook for?

The handbook is intended for educators concerned with teaching about the Commonwealth: Commonwealth Desk Officers in Ministries of Education; those involved in curriculum development; and teachers in secondary, primary and infant schools.

What is it about?

The handbook offers ideas and projects focused on Commonwealth Day to stimulate interest in, and enhance study of, the Commonwealth. The handbook takes the approach that Commonwealth Day activities will have greater meaning and value if they form part of longer-term work or take place as the culmination of projects carried out over the previous weeks. Learning about the Commonwealth is clearly not something that can be done in one day, as former Secretary-General Shridath Ramphal once said: 'I would like every day to be Commonwealth Day so that we can talk more about it. I would like to reach more of the people, more of the young people of the Commonwealth so that they become part of our process of information.'

Information is not always easy to come by. The majority of schools in the Commonwealth have limited access to books and other media through which information about the rest of the world, including the Commonwealth, is transmitted. The handbook therefore seeks to provide some basic information on the activities of the Commonwealth. It indicates further sources of information, too, but also gives ideas for activities which can draw on more immediate local resources, namely the human and material resources of the school and the community. Communication and the sharing of information and skills are as essential at the local level as they are in international affairs; socially useful activities involving different members of the school and the community can therefore give practical expression to the principles of co-operation and sharing by which the Commonwealth is guided.

What kind of activities?

The projects outlined in the handbook are of four main kinds:

- 1 Country projects or topic work, which explore aspects of the Commonwealth's cultural diversity;

- 2 Activities to encourage students to think about Commonwealth principles, such as the right of people to live in peace or to be free from racial discrimination;
- 3 Learning about the evolution of the modern Commonwealth;
- 4 Learning about the way Commonwealth governments, organisations and peoples work together - linked to practical activities in the school and community, based on the same principle of co-operation.

On Commonwealth Day

In each case specific suggestions are made for exhibitions, performances and other activities to take place on Commonwealth Day itself. It is hoped that schools will make Commonwealth Day an Open Day to which parents and other members of the community are invited. The school may listen to the Queen's Commonwealth Day message and to messages from the Head of State or Minister of Education, as well as holding some kind of formal multi-faith observance; but equally important is the opportunity to mark the success or endeavour of projects in the school and the community, to enjoy exhibitions and performances, debates and games and to celebrate informally.

A checklist of activities

On pages x-xi there is a checklist of the activities contained in the handbook. It highlights the topics, the activities, and the school level for which the activity is suggested.