

Introduction

This book is about information technology in the classroom. Its purpose is to provide information to anyone who might be involved in the planning and implementation of a national programme for the introduction of computers into schools.

Computers have already made their mark in industry, commerce and education all over the world. In the early days, their size, cost and complexity meant that they were available only to large, rich corporations and well-endowed universities and research establishments. As they have become smaller, cheaper and more reliable, they have become available to small businesses, schools and colleges and, in richer countries, to individuals in their own homes.

Many countries, in spite of restricted education budgets, have found the resources to introduce sophisticated microcomputers into their schools and colleges. There are, however, many countries in the Commonwealth with scarce resources and other urgent priorities for development. Computers in schools may seem to many in these countries to be a self-indulgent luxury which rich countries can afford because they have no more urgent priorities. On the other hand, they may take the view that the introduction of computers into the curriculum of their schools and colleges is an essential step in the struggle to close the technological gap between rich and poor countries.

Until recently, there has only been limited information available on the experience of using microcomputers in education, their costs and effects; and most of this information has come from industrialised countries. To fill this information vacuum, educational planners often turn to computer specialists for help and advice about how to proceed. However, computer specialists are rarely in a position to take full account of a country's development priorities, and they usually have little experience of curriculum development at school level. They tend, as a result, to recommend courses of study which are abstract and theoretical, and to specify computer equipment and software which is more appropriate to commercial or scientific environments. This book builds upon the experience of *educators* in an attempt to support the formation of policy on the use of microcomputers in education in developing Commonwealth countries. It is based upon the advice of Commonwealth specialists who came together in May 1986 to pool their knowledge and experience.

This book is organised in two parts. We look first at the background against which policy decisions can be made, outlining the kinds of educational activities which can be supported by computers and some of the reasons normally given for introducing information technology into education. In the second part, we consider the kind of support structures which will facilitate the implementation of a national computer education project and examine the main cost items involved in such an implementation.