

Conference Communiqué

69. The Ninth Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers was held in Nicosia, Cyprus, from 23 to 26 July 1984. It was opened by His Excellency the President of Cyprus, Mr. Spyros Kyprianou, and chaired by the Minister of Education of Cyprus, Mr. Stelios Catsellis.

70. Thirty-five countries attended the Conference, including Brunei, Maldives and Vanuatu which had become members of the Commonwealth since the previous Conference, held in Sri Lanka in 1980. Twenty-seven delegations were led by Ministers. Ten Commonwealth and international organisations were represented by observers.

71. Ministers were gratified by the growth of educational co-operation, consultation and links, at both governmental and professional levels, in the 25 years since the first Commonwealth Education Conference was held in Oxford in July 1959. They reaffirmed the special value their governments placed on continuing educational co-operation and interchange within the Commonwealth and expressed their resolve to sustain them.

72. The Conference focused its attention on three subjects: resources for education and their cost-effective use; education and youth unemployment; and student mobility and the proposed Commonwealth Higher Education Programme. Ministers also considered the future work programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat in education.

73. High among the concerns of Ministers was the question of Commonwealth student mobility. In view of its importance, they issued a separate statement on it. (See pages 22-24).

Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan

74. Ministers received with appreciation and endorsed the report of the Second Ten-Year Review Committee headed by Mr. W.L. Renwick, Head of the New Zealand Delegation to the Conference, on the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP), which was marking its 25th anniversary in 1984. Britain's decision in 1983 to make a large increase in the awards it offers under the CSFP had taken the Commonwealth a considerable distance towards the target of 1,500 set by Ministers at previous Conferences. At a pledging session during the Conference, the institution of over 250 additional awards was announced, with several countries making new pledges. Outstanding among these was a generous offer on the part of Canada to raise the number of scholarships it offered from 300 so as to reach 500 in late 1985. Great appreciation was expressed by Ministers of the increase in awards which, in addition

to those by Britain and Canada, included offers from another 13 countries - The Bahamas, Cyprus, Ghana, Guyana, India, Kenya, Malta, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, and Zimbabwe. Several other delegations at the Conference indicated their intention to institute additional awards or to offer awards for the first time under the CSFP and promised to notify the Secretariat of the details within the next month. It was already clear by the end of the Conference that the number of awards under the Plan would be at least 1,650 in 1985, comfortably exceeding the target of 1,500. This was a great encouragement to Ministers as they looked to the future.

Commonwealth Higher Education Programme

75. Ministers recognised the necessity for complementing improved access to study opportunities abroad with efforts to strengthen college and university systems in member countries, and particularly in developing Commonwealth countries. Ministers endorsed proposals for a Commonwealth Higher Education Programme (CHEP) to strengthen higher education and research by promoting staff development schemes, inter-institutional links and increased use of distance education and the new technologies. CHEP will operate by building on existing linkages and programmes and will focus particularly on the development of institutional capacity and quality in less developed Commonwealth countries, the interchange of staff and students in support of such development, and the strengthening of higher technical education. It will be serviced by the Commonwealth Higher Education Unit in the Secretariat which will assist member countries in the mobilisation of resources for the promotion of links, the collection, analysis and dissemination of information on a systematic basis, the development and shared use of teaching materials, and training in appropriate skills.

76. Ministers welcomed the opportunity to discuss issues of pressing concern to the development of their national education systems, faced as they were with serious constraints at the present time. They devoted considerable attention to two particular problems: resources for education and their cost-effective use on the one hand, and education and youth unemployment on the other. The valuable exchange of views and the comparative approach to similar problems provided useful insights into national situations and gave pointers to possibilities of Commonwealth co-operation.

Resources for Education

77. Ministers noted that education authorities throughout the Commonwealth were under severe pressure as the recession cut into their budgets and faced acute difficulties in their efforts to raise standards and extend education to growing numbers. There were constraints on both capital and recurrent expenditure, adding to the concern to secure greater cost-effectiveness. Strategies to increase resources included the development of community support for schools, projects to generate income by schools, and, in some countries, taxes and lotteries earmarked for education. But the scope for increasing domestic resources was limited and Ministers recognised the urgent need for external funds and technical assistance. Strategies to make better use of resources included the use of alternative and non-traditional methods of education at all levels, the combined use of educational facilities for both children and adults, economies in building construction including the use of local materials,

as well as the careful monitoring of the use of both existing and new resources.

78. In view of the urgent need for additional resources for education, Ministers made recommendations for studies by the Secretariat to identify critical resource gaps in a sample of member countries and methods by which these gaps might be bridged. They also recommended a range of other activities designed to assist governments in their endeavours to make the most cost-effective use of available resources.

Youth Unemployment

79. Ministers expressed deep concern about the high level of youth unemployment in most countries. The recession had sharply eroded the chances for work, a trend which could be reversed only by sustained economic growth. But education remained an essential basis for entry to the workforce as well as for future citizenship. An education was needed which would endow young people with a capacity to respond flexibly to changing patterns of work. It had to meet the needs of those who would go into wage employment and those who would be self-employed or work in the traditional sector or in co-operatives and other semi-formal institutional environments. While education needed to reflect the world of work, a narrow vocational emphasis would not meet all these ends. Nor could such education be completed at school: a new emphasis was needed on continuing education, using non-traditional as well as conventional approaches. At school it was still necessary to teach basic skills in numeracy, literacy, science, and social and communication skills, while removing unnecessary barriers between school and work. New links between schools, employers, and the voluntary sector would be needed. Training opportunities beyond formal education should be rationalised.

80. Ministers recommended that the Secretariat should initiate a programme of practical activity to assist member states in their endeavours to develop national educational policies and programmes for the employment of young people. They proposed that work should commence over the next triennium in such areas as work experience programmes in schools and non-formal education programmes for primary and secondary school leavers, and should continue on the integration of science, technical, vocational and mathematics education in schools.

81. Ministers expressed appreciation of the Secretariat's work in education. Its training activities and publications had proved of benefit to member countries. Ministers expressed the view that the Education Programme should develop new thrusts involving work on the themes of the present Conference, greater prominence to activities in higher education, and the development of an operational role to provide advice and consultancy services to member governments on request.

82. Having regard to financial constraints, Ministers attached the highest priority to Secretariat activities in the fields of higher education, student mobility and the cost-effective use of resources (which would include the problem of youth unemployment). Specific projects within these areas would need to be carefully identified by the Secretariat, due regard being paid to the activities of other international organisations.

83. Ministers attached importance to the role of the Commonwealth Higher Education Unit in the promotion of the Commonwealth Higher Edu-

cation Programme. They agreed to establish national contact points to facilitate the information and monitoring roles of the Unit and to assist it in every way in the discharge of its responsibilities.

84. Ministers expressed their appreciation of the contribution made by the lead speakers and the consultants who had prepared working papers, and of the documentation prepared by the Secretariat.

85. They expressed their gratitude to the Government and people of the Republic of Cyprus for the excellent arrangements made for their Conference and for the warmth of the hospitality they had received.

86. Ministers accepted with pleasure an invitation from the Government of Kenya to hold their Tenth Conference in Nairobi in 1987.

Statement on Commonwealth Student Mobility

87. As Commonwealth Ministers of Education, meeting in Nicosia, we have reviewed the trends in Commonwealth student mobility since we last met in Colombo in 1980.

88. Educational interchange lies at the heart of the Commonwealth association. It is an important means through which relations between our nations are created and strengthened at the personal, institutional, and national political levels. Educational interchange has many forms, but the flow of students abroad is its supreme expression and is, indeed, the cornerstone of Commonwealth educational co-operation. Both sending and receiving countries benefit, and for some sending countries - especially the smallest - it is the only means of acquiring the educated manpower needed for economic and social development. Commonwealth student mobility has been truly a seedbed of the modern Commonwealth. Our predecessors recognised this when they held the first Commonwealth Education Conference 25 years ago this very month, and inaugurated the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. Looking ahead to the future it may be no exaggeration to say that those who have responsibility for present-day student mobility are custodians of the future of the Commonwealth.

89. The importance of the freest possible flow of students between our countries is thus clear. The channels of student interchange must not become choked and clogged either by unintentional neglect or by harmful policies. In this context, Commonwealth concern over policy trends and the introduction of new restrictions in some member countries has been deep. It was strongly expressed when Commonwealth Ministers of Education met in Colombo in 1980 and subsequently at the Heads of Government Meetings in Melbourne in 1981 and New Delhi in 1983. It led to the establishment of the Commonwealth Standing Committee on Student Mobility whose first and second reports and recommendations were endorsed by Heads of Government. These reports, and the third report, Commonwealth Student Mobility: a Time for Action, which was issued a few weeks before our meeting, have greatly increased our understanding of trends and developments both in national policies and in actual student flows. We express our appreciation to the Standing Committee for its valuable work and overwhelmingly express our endorsement of the recommendations of its third report.

90. Despite political commitment to Commonwealth educational interchange, the overall situation leaves us with a sense of disappointment

and unease. The bulk of student flows involves not the wide spectrum of countries we would wish to see but a selected few sending and receiving countries. Moreover, Commonwealth student mobility as a whole appears extremely modest in relation to the overall volume of international student exchange. Any impetus for expansion has disappeared and there is now a danger of a downward spiral developing. In 1980 the concern of Ministers was centred on the high fee policies of one member country, but now we face with alarm a situation where similar moves have been initiated or are contemplated in other countries in the Commonwealth. The effects of this would be serious as is apparent from the fact that Commonwealth student enrolment in Britain fell by roughly 40 per cent in the three years after our last Conference in Colombo. In particular we hope that in Australia the outcome of the present review will be the adoption of liberal policies and that the newly elected Government in New Zealand will move in the direction foreshadowed in its election programme.

91. We believe this rising tide of protectionism must and can be halted. We recognise that the policies of our governments - on immigration, access to education, charging of fees, and the right of overseas students to work, welfare and student services - crucially influence international student mobility.

92. Recognising our responsibilities for promoting Commonwealth student mobility, we therefore declare:

1. *Our belief in the value of student mobility within the Commonwealth and our determination to foster it.*

2. *Our recognition of the responsibility of Commonwealth governments, in both receiving and sending countries, to formulate policies - with regard to fees, awards, places, stability in access and other measures - on study abroad within the Commonwealth, which will contribute to this end.*

3. *Our intention to use our best endeavours to ensure that the Commonwealth collectively raises the level of intra-Commonwealth student exchanges above their 1983/84 levels to the greatest extent possible in the next triennium.*

4. *Our desire to promote a wider network of educational exchange among Commonwealth countries. More countries should participate actively in exchange so as to multiply the linkages between our individual member countries. In this regard efforts to promote South/South linkages in the Commonwealth deserve high priority.*

5. *Our overwhelming belief that, reflecting the benefit to the host country from receiving Commonwealth students and with a view to preserving Commonwealth links, fees or equivalent charges levied on students from other Commonwealth countries should be less than "full cost".*

6. *That we urge those of our members who charge higher fees to Commonwealth than non-Commonwealth students not to introduce any discrimination against Commonwealth countries in the matter of fees for students from abroad, and to review their current practices and report back to us within 15 months.*

7. *Our commitment to the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan as a means of promoting Commonwealth student mobility. We affirm our*

intention to seek ways to develop and strengthen it. We have pledged ourselves to reach a level of 1,650 awards in 1985 and to maintain awards at least at that level.

8. Our conviction that consultation between our governments in this area is essential. We pledge ourselves to promote consultations whenever major adjustments to policies affecting students from other Commonwealth countries are contemplated.

9. Our intention to meet again late in 1985 at the time of the Unesco General Conference for the purpose of assessing performance in the realisation of these goals, and in order to consider what practical and collaborative measures may be taken to further student exchange between our countries in pursuit of the above objectives.

10. Our concern that the Commonwealth Higher Education Unit in the Commonwealth Secretariat should have the necessary resources to support our common endeavours in this field and to service the Commonwealth Standing Committee on Student Mobility.